

OBIAA 2024 AWARD SUBMISSION – STANDARD

Contact Name: Mark Renaud + Vanessa Fortner	Pillar & Category: Leadership + Management: Operations
BIA/Organization: Downtown Tillsonburg BIA	Time Period: 2020-Present
Entry Title: Creatively Building Your Budget	
Project Description: <i>Over the last three years, we've strategically harnessed non-levy revenue, fuelling significant improvements in beautification, public realm, inclusive events, and learning opportunities.</i>	

NEED OR OPPORTUNITY

As one of the oldest BIA's in Ontario (1978), we work collegially, constructively and cooperatively with the Town of Tillsonburg on continuing to build the central commercial area of the town as the premier destination for the tri-county area. The downtown core is more than just a place to visit, it is a place where residents and visitors alike can come to eat, shop, live and explore.

Downtown Tillsonburg BIA is a dynamic organization that is dedicated to enhancing the vitality and prosperity of our local community. Our BIA operates as a catalyst for positive change, fostering collaboration among businesses, stakeholders, residents and local authorities. DTTburg' prides itself for its forward thinking approach to change and economic development while prioritizing and recognizing our history. A reflection of our involvement in the community lies with the many events that we host; (including but not limited to) St. Patrick's Day Pub Shammy, The Halloween Spooky Trail, A Week to Remember, A Classic Christmas and TurtleFest - the signature event of the Town - all events are made to be barrier free meaning it is accessible for all to enjoy with no limitations.

Our BIA has a very comprehensive Memorandum of Understanding with the Town of Tillsonburg which allows us to take better care and pay more attention to detail to our downtown. The MOU coupled with our robust capital program, allows us to be able to actively invest in initiatives that contribute to the ongoing development and vibrancy of our core. This commitment is reflected not just in words but in our daily presence - operating 5+ days a week to ensure accessibility and responsiveness to the needs of our community. Additionally, we are situated prominently in the heart of the downtown core with a street-front location where our office serves as a dedicated hub for community engagement.

However, what truly sets us apart is our unwavering dedication to maintaining and building positive relationships. We understand the profound importance of nurturing these connections and we will always actively support those who reciprocate the same commitment to our community and BIA. This unique identity, embodying the spirit of collaboration and shared prosperity is what truly stands out to us on a daily basis, which is what ultimately led us down a path to figure out how we can serve our members and community better.

As many BIA's did/do, we have navigated challenges posed by Covid-19, rising inflation and safety within the downtown core. Throughout these challenges Downtown Tillsonburg has demonstrated resilience and adaptability. We successfully addressed internal matters, such as staffing shortages due to lack of grants or accessible funds, extra training needed for staff to constructively deal with handling social issues (ie. sharps training), and adjusting our communication strategy to the general public. We needed to address in a positive light why it was important for the BIA to show responsibility to care for these rising social issues. With a limited BIA budget, business owners working harder than ever, and community members wanting more to do locally, we knew we had to find a way to better serve everyone. When facing these challenges, we asked ourselves, "How can we do better? How can we elevate what we already do? How do we grow this organization?" The answer to this question was to start ***creatively building our budget.***

AUDIENCE

Downtown Tillsonburg's main goal will always be to serve our membership. Rather than increasing the levy, we took it upon ourselves to think outside the box. We started brainstorming ideas to figure out how to get started; The BIA truck - we would need to work backwards and figure out how much money it would cost annually to have the work truck fully funded, upgrading our office into a co-working space would off-set costs.

With our businesses being the main target in this project, the secondary target naturally became the residents and visitors that support our membership on a regular basis. We wanted to be able to host free activations and events in the downtown core that would ultimately have zero barriers, allowing anyone and everyone to come and partake. This allows our community to enjoy some fun in the downtown core as well as support the local businesses that make up the BIA membership.

GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

Downtown Tillsonburg's main goal in creatively building our budget was to enhance the overall business environment with as little weight being barred financially by the membership. This included beautification projects, infrastructure improvements, and promotional efforts. A more attractive and well-functioning downtown area can draw in more customers, boost foot traffic, and create a positive atmosphere for local businesses, ultimately contributing to their growth and success. We wanted to be able to create more value for the membership and provide more activations and events for the community by accomplishing more with less.

In order to achieve this we had the following measurable objectives:

1. Have 2 ambassadors fully funded through grant money for 3 months (June, July, August) saving \$8,000 dollars by 2021.

2. Establish partnerships with local businesses to secure at least three new sponsors for the downtown BIA truck renewing on an annual basis.
3. Increase participation in Tillsonburg's signature event by 10% from 2019. This was tracked by website visits, merchandise sales on the day of the event and beer garden attendees/sales.
- Due to Covid-19, the 2020 festival was postponed to 2023.

IMPLEMENTATION

From the beginning, we knew this would be a living breathing project that would take time to build up and this stands to be true today as our organization continues to grow. Below we have explained the process step by step.

Step 1: Beautification - you cannot market something that is not visually appealing. We began cleaning up the downtown on a weekly basis. This included but was not limited to; sweeping in front of storefronts, picking up cigarette butts (our nemesis), providing A-frame signs to businesses for marketing purposes, etc.

Step 2: Renegotiating the service agreement with the town through the MOU. This allowed the BIA to take the reins on the cleanliness and aesthetics of the downtown. We took over the responsibility of changing the garbage on a daily basis, shoveling curbsides in the winter months, and more. With the enhanced agreement, the town now supplies funds to our BIA capital expenses, further evolving our ability to do more.

Step 3: Using our resources.

- a. Using the Multi-Service Centre employment program (Youth Job Connect). This allowed us to hire staff that are downtown on a daily basis cleaning the streets, walkways, and alleyways which in return pleased the businesses owners, gave the community a sense of pride and acted as a driving force for population growth within the town of Tillsonburg.
- b. Applying for Canada Summer Job Services. Through CSJS we have been able to hire various positions such as administrative support, marketing assistants, event coordinators, etc. All positions provided positive support for the membership.
- c. Apply for various grants through different partners (County of Oxford, Community Futures Oxford). These sorts of grants have allowed us to take on beautification projects within the downtown core that have drastically changed the landscape and added new infrastructure ie) streetscape items such as new waste receptacles, benches, public art, landscaping, etc.

Step 4: Establish strong relationships with community partners (Tillsonburg Horticultural Society, Tillsonburg Station Arts Centre, Tillsonburg Garden Gate, Green Theory Design and many more). Partnering with community organizations allows our BIA to engage with a broader audience, increases visibility, allows for collaborations, supports local businesses, and ultimately saves a large portion of our budget being spent as items/costs are generally shared in collaborations and partnerships. This benefits and works well for all parties involved.

Step 5: Sponsorship (BIA truck, banner program, etc). After working through all of the steps listed above, we were able to implement our sponsorship program. This allows local businesses to donate \$1,000, \$2,500, \$3,500. In return they receive recognition on the BIA truck, on banners that are hung downtown, website, at events, etc. depending on the amount donated.

Note: The truck sponsorships have made our work vehicle completely self-funding.

How did members engage with this initiative and what were the benefits to them? Did you have to 'sell' the project to your board or other partners? If yes, how did you do it? What challenges, if any, did you encounter and how did you overcome them? What made it innovative? How did you ensure accessibility for your audience as applicable? Provide enough details so others can replicate your specific success.

RESULTS

Goal #1: *Have 2 ambassadors fully funded through grant money for 3 months (June, July, August) saving \$8,000 dollars by 2021.* This goal was achieved, and with better than expected results with consistent positive feedback from the residents, visitors and membership alike. Now we have 10 seasonal ambassadors fully funded through the entire funding envelope (MOU, MSC, CSJS) saving approximately +/- \$90,000 annually.

Goal #2: *Secure three new sponsors for downtown BIA truck before May 2020.* The first year we had a BIA truck we had 7 sponsors at \$1000/piece. We now have 11 at varying rates that renew annually and we are always adding more.

Goal #3: Increase participation in Tillsonburg's signature event by 10% from 2019. This was tracked by website visits, merchandise sales on the day of the event and beer garden attendees.

- Due to Covid-19, the 2020 festival was postponed to 2023.

The attendance skyrocketed from 2019, we also had the highest level of participation by BIA members to date than ever before. This festival has now turned into a regional event rather than Tillsonburg specifically. Merchandise alone had a 300% increase from 2019, website visits grew 58.65% from 2019 and the beer garden exceeded capacity with line ups stretching down the street throughout the evening (12% increase in sales).

In 2025 the levy is forecasted to decrease by 14% year after year. Approximately 50% of our annual budget is funded from external sources and not levy dollars.

In our relentless pursuit of excellence, Downtown Tillsonburg BIA remains committed to not only providing the best services and support we can, but continuing to creatively build on our budget for the membership and Tillsonburg community.

Downtown Tillsonburg Supplemental Material

PHOTOS OF DOWNTOWN TILLSONBURG'S SPONSORED CAPITAL

BIA Truck



DRAFT FINAL TRUCK GRAPHICS



DRAFT FINAL TRUCK GRAPHICS

Banners



2021 MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN TILLSONBURG BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT AREA AND THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF TILLSONBURG

[Click Here](#)

RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Please refer to page 23 Schedule “C” project description below. (If you require the entire document, we are happy to share. It is 24 pages so we did not feel it was appropriate to include the entire document straight away).

RED5-10161

**SCHEDULE “C”
PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

C.1 PROJECT NAME

Streetscape, public realm, lighting & street asset renewal program

C.2 PROJECT STREAM

Strategic Economic Infrastructure

C.3 PROJECT OBJECTIVE

Downtown Tillsonburg BIA was approved for up to \$40,698 towards the downtown core area of Tillsonburg which is in need of renewal of public realm assets and has opportunity to correct deficiencies with AODA compliance including the pop-up patio program.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES ELIGIBLE FOR FUNDING INCLUDE
Purchase and Install non-denominational LED for downtown Tillsonburg
Purchase and install planter boxes for patios for downtown Tillsonburg
Purchase and Install Bicycle Racks for downtown Tillsonburg
Purchase and install banner brackets/banding for downtown Tillsonburg
Purchase and Install 10 Waste Receptacles for downtown Tillsonburg
Purchase and install plants, trees & shrubs for landscaping for downtown Tillsonburg
Purchase banners - including veteran themed for downtown Tillsonburg
Purchase and Install AODA compliant patio infrastructure for downtown Tillsonburg

All activities identified above will be completed by the Project Completion Date identified under section B.1.3 of this Agreement.

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INFORMATION FOLLOWS]**