



A focus on green energy is a critical component of Ingersoll's economic development strategy.

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Generating Measurable Economic Development Outcomes: The Case of Ingersoll

BY BILL MATES, TOWN OF INGERSOLL

Named after its founder Major Thomas Ingersoll, the Village of Ingersoll (formerly known as 'Oxford on the Thames') was incorporated effective January 01, 1852. In 1861, it became the Town of Ingersoll. Major Ingersoll was an American from Massachusetts who took advantage of the times to begin a new life in what

would become Canada. Like many other communities in southwestern Ontario, the Town of Ingersoll developed into a very busy community with rich agricultural roots while evolving to include industry and commerce. Ingersoll was also known for being the north end of the Underground Railroad.

Currently, the Town of Ingersoll with a population of 12,400, has shown by example what can be achieved when the mandates and practices of economic and community development come together to produce some significant measurable outcomes. These results demonstrate that vision and action do in fact work together. This article will layout how Ingersoll, through its community strategic planning process and community action:

- redeveloped the downtown core area;
- created a Re-Discover and Shop Downtown Ingersoll marketing strategy and brand;
- revitalized a closed elementary school into a state of the art 10,000 sq ft. youth activity and technology centre;
- attracted and built a highly visible Community College centre/campus in six months;
- collaborated with the arts, culture, and tourism community to market and brand Ingersoll as “Festival Town Ontario; and
- developed an overall renewable and alternative energy strategy which involves a partnership between municipal government, education, and private business and industry.

I. ORIGINS

Today’s best practices story starts in the fall of 2002. The Town of Ingersoll is very much a bottom up, volunteer driven, and ‘grass roots’ community. There was a shared desire among Council, staff and community members to develop a Strategic Plan to give the town a road map to move ahead to create wealth and employment for the community. A consultant was hired and a plan was developed in November 2003. The Chamber of Commerce, BIA, and the Town’s Economic Development Department worked hand in hand to provide the leadership necessary to implement the plan.

For the first strategic plan from 2004 to 2009, the six Action Planning Groups were: Industrial, Commercial, Residential, and Transportation; Downtown Revitalization; Heritage and Tourism; Recreation, Trails, and Parks; Youth with two sub committees (twelve and under & over twelve); and Health and Community Well Being

Over the last few years, as a result of the Community Strategic Plan 2004-2009, a variety of studies, surveys, and reports were completed to provide the Town of Ingersoll a continued and more detailed road map to achieve sustainable prosperity. The key is that this information was not ignored but applied diligently. The recommendations were taken seriously and acted upon through the community committees. Furthermore, while each study, survey or result has its own imperative, they are all inter-connected by a common thread, i.e., the vision of the community. Some of these studies and survey include the Downtown Revitalization Plan 2004, First Impressions Reports 2005 with Alliston and Leamington, and the Ingersoll Business Retention and Expansion Survey 2009.

II. RESULTS

By 2009, well over 90 percent of the objectives in the 2004 plan had been achieved. In addition to accessing funding, a focus on implementation, the depth of volunteers in the community provided the much needed, support of skills, talents, and the entrepreneurial foundation.

When Committee Number 5: ‘Youth’, began to meet, it became apparent that a youth centre needed to be built. No one knew what that looked like but when an elementary school closed, the Town took a leap of faith and purchased the school. Today, the Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre includes a gymnasium, a lounge area, an internet café, a gaming centre, a radio broadcasting area, a state of the art recording studio, a community arts program, an alternative to education program and two community colleges running programs. Also included are other services and partners including the VON (who run an adult day program), a children’s mental health agency, county health services, and community police officers.

What has also transpired is the development of four youth social enterprises, run by youth for youth. These programs generate revenue which are put back into the youth centre. The Centre provides a productivity oriented venue for younger members of the community and also transforms them into contributing consumers.

As Committee Number 3: “Heritage and Tourism” embarked on its tasks, it decided that a more detailed road map was needed. Consequently, the Ingersoll Cultural Strategic Plan 2006 was completed. Now known as Arts Ingersoll, the group has combined all town events, festivals, and activities and branded Ingersoll as the “Festival Town Ontario.” Marketing and promotional material followed, including a Tourism Ingersoll Guide distributed all across Ontario. In two years, there has been a significant increase in attendance of visitors to Ingersoll and area.

After the inclusive success of the 2004 plan, the focus shifted to implementing the Ingersoll Community Strategic Plan (revisiting & realignment) 2009-2014 and the Ingersoll Business Retention and Expansion Survey 2009. These two initiatives were completed in just six months, providing further direction. The road map became much more streamlined and the focus narrowed. As a result of the economic recession, Ingersoll, as a major player in the manufacturing and auto sector, was now facing new challenges. With a few companies in layoff and closure mode, revisiting and realigning the Community Strategic Plan was a necessary step in ensuring that the momentum was maintained.

A second purpose of the revisited and realignment strategy was to provide the Town of Ingersoll Council, municipal managers, and community leaders with a clearer sense of direction, knowledge, and skills to initiate, or strengthen existing appropriate community development over the next four to five years. Based on paradigm shifts in local, regional, national, and global socio-economic conditions, this community strategy needed now to respond to both the opportunities and threats in six key linked themes or core areas. These core areas were similar to those of the 2004 strategy but were changed slightly to reflect emerging socio-economic shifts. The six core areas include: 1. Business Development-Retention and Expansion; 2. Community Image and Identity-Branding; 3. Arts/Culture/Heritage/Tourism; 4. Recreation/Leisure/Sports; 5. Youth; and, 6. Health and Environment

Promoting the Town of Ingersoll as a green economy intent on diversifying itself beyond the traditional manufacturing community is the mandate as more opportunity presents itself with other emerging sectors, for example the agro-food sector. The Town of Ingersoll is also pursuing a strategy of nurturing local entrepre-

neurs through small business support, training and labour force development.

III. POST-SECONDARY PRESENCE

Gradually, two objectives emerged: attracting Conestoga College (a brand new 12,000 sq ft building Ingersoll Skills Training Centre) and the development of the Town of Ingersoll Renewable and Alternative Energy Strategy. The Town was successful in attracting Conestoga College; part of the reason for that success was a growing industry demand for skills training in the power industry. The College researched gaps in the industry to determine which niche markets had the greatest economic potential. Following this research, the Power Line Technician Course rose to the top. With the Provincial Green Energy and Economy Act 2009 on the horizon, the town-college strategy became clearer. The Ingersoll Skills Training Centre will offer programming that will draw individuals from across Ontario. Full-time programs such as the Power Line Technician, Construction Techniques, Process Quality Engineering and Home Inspection will be offered. Part-time continuing education courses such as renewable energy, CNC programming, and AutoCAD will be offered evenings and weekends.

Another important piece is corporate training. For this reason, the Ingersoll Skills training Centre is located at the north end of CAMI in the centre of the Industrial Park. The local presence of Conestoga and its importance to economic development cannot be over-emphasized. Economic development is inextricably linked to community development. When successful with one, there is a synergistic effect on the other.

With Conestoga College now in Ingersoll, further economic prosperity for the region will occur. The Town's Business Retention and Expansion survey identified a need for post-secondary education to meet the advancing technology needs of both the current and future workforce. The Conestoga Skills Centre will fulfill this need. The local community will also directly benefit from the increased need for student housing, local accommodation for out of town visitors, restaurant meals and daily shopping within the downtown core.

IV. INGERSOLL RENEWABLE AND ALTERNATIVE ENERGY STRATEGY 2009 - 2014

ERTH Corporation staff and Town of Ingersoll staff started meeting in March 2009 to begin to put together a strategy which would mutually benefit everyone. After meetings with Education and the German Chamber Industry Chamber of Commerce, MEDT, and other private business and government officials, the strategy expanded to include Menova Energy Inc., Conestoga College, University of Toronto, Intech Clean Energy Inc. and others. Consequently, this has become very much a community driven steering committee. The primary objectives are to create renewable and alternative energy opportunities in Ingersoll, and to create jobs for rural and urban areas. Secondary objectives include:

1. Attract a renewable energy manufacturer(s) to Ingersoll. This includes feasibility of cluster development for the Clarke Road Industrial Park or other areas in Ingersoll.
2. Explore existing companies in Ingersoll who could provide expansion and diversifications opportunities.

3. Create opportunity to build dual use solar/agricultural farms in Oxford County.
4. Create opportunity for ground mount and roof top solar construction for Residential, Commercial and Industrial Properties.
5. Work with Conestoga College and the University of Toronto to develop curriculum around renewable energy and R&D which can be delivered at the 'Ingersoll Skills Training Centre' and other locations.
6. To develop partners who will bring a variety of options, opportunities, and investment. This will include opportunities for local power authorities for materials, servicing, and installation etc.
7. To develop opportunities for local farmers who wish to look at renewable and alternative energy options.

As a result of the Ingersoll Renewable Energy Strategy, outcomes already include:

1. Menova Energy Inc. and ERTH (CRU Solutions) have created a partnership to install tracking solar units in south western Ontario. This is creating jobs.
2. Conestoga College has opened the Ingersoll Skills Training Centre. This is shaping up to be a very busy facility "focused on the place to be in Ontario" for the power sector. This is creating jobs.
3. Conestoga College will be running a solar installation course starting January 2011 out of the Ingersoll Skills Training Centre. This is creating jobs.
4. ERTH in partnership with Conestoga College and the Town of Ingersoll hosted workshops early in 2010 on Renewable Energy at the Elm Hurst and the Fusion Youth Centre. This created awareness and visibility.
5. There has been a keen interest in Ingersoll with solar panel manufacturing, inverter production and silicon production in Ingersoll. This is still in preliminary discussion stage, but has only transpired because of the Ingersoll Renewable Strategy.

Over the last six years, the Town of Ingersoll as a community has moved ahead significantly through the Strategic Planning process with a grass roots, bottom up community approach. It has created wealth and jobs for the community, but more importantly, it has created a community in which people have been engaged and involved to attain that vision.

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