**City of Cambridge Core Areas Community Improvement Plan (CIP Grant Program)**

Vibrant healthy core areas are a fundamental element of prosperous cities. When people travel to cities for business or pleasure, they will undoubtedly visit the city’s downtown. Therefore, the downtown’s health is reflective of the city’s overall health.

The City of Cambridge created several different initiatives to improve the health of our cores since the pandemic, our most successful being the: City of Cambridge Core Areas Community Improvement Plan.

The purpose of the City of Cambridge Core Areas Community Improvement Plan is to;

* help stimulate growth, by attracting new business and property owners to our core areas
* support current business and property owners in the core areas
* improve the aesthetics of our core areas, buy assisting in upgrading the physical appearances of our core areas, and
* preserve core area heritage while revitalizing buildings

In June of 2021, the Core Areas Community Improvement Plan (CIP) was approved by our city council to help facilitate revitalization efforts and encourage in the three (3) core areas of Cambridge; Downtown Cambridge, Hespeler Village and Preston Town Centre. The CIP provides the basis for financial incentive programs within the three (3) relevant designated CIP Project Areas.

Creating a simple and easy to use program to encourage property owners to invest in their properties was essential for the revitalization and health of our core areas. By fostering a cooperative environment, we aimed to support property owners in understanding the benefits of maintaining and improving their buildings. This initiative was designed to enhance the overall aesthetic and economic vitality of our community, ensuring growth, diversification, talent attraction, and increased employment and promoting urban vitality in our core areas.

These financial initiatives have facilitated the planning and financing of development activities that effectively used, reused, and revitalized lands, buildings and infrastructure. They have prioritized municipal investment and stimulated private sector investment, property maintenance and revitalization within these project areas.

As part of this community improvement plan, the City of Cambridge created five (5) new programs to leverage private sector investment paired with public grants to revitalize core areas buildings. Many of these programs are matching grants of up to 50% of eligible project costs up to a maximum grant amount.

* Commercial Property Improvement Grant Program (CPIG)
* Commercial Building Restoration, Renovation and Improvement Grant Program (CBRRIG)
* Mixed Use Conversion and Restoration Grant Program (MUCRG)
* Tax Increase-based Equivalent Grant Program (TIEG)
* Core Area Fee Waivers Program (CAFWP)

Since June 1st of 2021, forty-one (41) properties have received grants participating in the above programs totaling in a public grant investment of $1,786,537.

In return, the City of Cambridge has seen $14,153,673 million dollars in private sector investment because of these properties. This makes the ratio of private sector spending for every public dollar granted roughly 7.9 to 1.

This ratio is so strong because several properties saw supplemental private sector investment, with a select few making investments that far exceeded their grant compensation. This is exactly what we hopped for when creating the program

Despite this program succeeding expectations staff did see some challenges with this program. This year saw the 50th anniversary of the 1974 Cambridge flood which devastated downtown Cambridge. Staff noticed a significant gap in support provided to properties and business that may be affected by flooding in our cores. To help address this issue, staff amended our current Commercial Property Improvement Grant Program (CPIG) to offer some additional funding for properties interested in taking on flood mitigation projects.

We are very proud of this project and the opportunities for recovery it has provided our communities with. In 2019 the Downtown Cores were sitting at a 10.83% vacancy rate with a total of 235 vacant units across the core areas. As of December 2023, staff performed a vacancy check, updating the status of our cores. After the implementation of the CIP program, we have seen a drop of 6.96% in our vacancy rate and are now sitting at a 3.87% vacancy rate across our cores with a total of 85 vacant units.

These achievements highlight the positive impact of our efforts on the community’s economic development. It is our belief that this CIP program model is a unique solution to revitalizing the core areas as it encompasses private and public stimulus and citizen led initiatives that create welcoming and authentic spaces replicable and adaptable to other communities.