



County of Brant Council Report

To: The Mayor and Members of County of Brant Council
From: Brandon Webb, Research and Marketing Economic Development Officer
Date: April 14, 2026
Report #: RPT-0139-26
Subject: Rural Prosperity Community Improvement Plan (RPCIP)
Purpose: For Approval

Recommendation

THAT the Rural Prosperity Community Improvement Plan (RPCIP) be approved;
THAT the General Manager of Strategic Initiatives be given delegated authority to approve applications up to and including \$5,000;
AND THAT the appropriate by-laws be prepared for signing by the Mayor and the Clerk.

Strategic Plan Priority

Strategic Priority 1 - Economic and Financial Resilience

Impacts and Mitigation

Social Impacts

Historically, the County of Brant has been a community that built its economy and identity in agriculture. The Rural Prosperity Community Improvement Plan (RPCIP) will allow the County of Brant's agriculture community to access funding to make improvements to property and buildings that can diversify incomes and maintain long-term viability of smaller family farms.

Additionally, as of the 2021 Census of Agriculture, the median age of a farmer in the County of Brant is 58 years. Elements of the RPCIP support succession planning for family farms by enabling multigenerational families to live on the same property and establish succession plans. This is an important consideration given that 62 percent of farmers in the County of Brant responded as to not having a succession plan in place.

Environmental Impacts

The RPCIP will allow farms to maintain their viability and stay in operation long term. Farms that remain viable are more likely to stay in production and less likely to be lost to consolidation by larger commercial farming operations or sold for development.

Additionally, renovations that could be considered through the RPCIP would allow for the rehabilitation of existing farm buildings that would otherwise become derelict.

Economic Impacts

Currently, there are no additional budget implications. Should the Rural Prosperity Community Improvement Plan be approved, the current balance of \$217,297 in the Community Improvement Plan capital account is expected to be sufficient to support applications received through the three downtown CIPs and RPCIP applications, based on anticipated application volumes.

Report

Background

A Community Improvement Plan (CIP) is a planning tool enabled by Section 28 of the Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990. This legislation authorizes municipalities to designate Community Improvement Project Areas (CIPAs) and to establish financial incentive programs such as grants or loans to stimulate economic and social improvements within those areas. Through this authority, CIPs provide municipalities with a formal mechanism to support and encourage physical improvement and investment across the entire County or within specifically defined areas.

On October 12, 2021, the Policy Development and Strategic Direction committee directed staff to develop a rural focused Community Improvement Plan. While this direction was received in 2021, the Rural Prosperity CIP could not be properly developed until the County of Brant's 2023 Official Plan received provincial approval. Following the approval of the Official Plan, staff were able to work on the RPCIP and develop the intentions and guidelines of this program in the context of the new Official Plan. The RPCIP was developed entirely in-house in collaboration between Economic Development and Policy Planning. Other departments were consulted during the initial development of the plan to ensure alignment with other County of Brant initiatives, and comments were incorporated in the first draft of the plan.

Once the first draft of the program was completed, presentations were given to various groups and committees to gather feedback throughout 2024 and 2025. This includes three (3) presentations to the Agriculture Advisory Committee. At the July 28, 2025 meeting a draft of the plan and presentation was shared with committee for feedback to assist in finalizing the plan before a series of public engagement activities. The plan was also presented to the board of the Brant County Federation of Agriculture in January of 2026. Following the collection of feedback from key stakeholders, the plan was sent to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for provincial feedback and draft finalization.

The RPCIP is consistent with the Provincial Planning Statement (PPS), 2024, which directs municipalities to create opportunities for economic development and job creation and to build a strong, competitive, and investment-ready rural economy. It also supports PPS policy direction to protect and strengthen the long-term viability of rural areas, local food production, and the agri-food network. In doing so, the Rural Prosperity CIP advances several provincial interests under Section 2 of the Planning Act, including economic development and competitiveness, the orderly development of healthy communities, and the protection of agricultural resources. This alignment ensures that local incentive programs contribute directly to broader provincial objectives for rural prosperity and sustainable community development.

In January 2026, public consultation began on the RPCIP through both an EngageBrant online survey and a series of in-person public engagement sessions throughout the County of

Brant in Onondaga, Oakland, and Glen Morris. Online engagement for the RPCIP concluded on February 17, 2026. The results of the survey and the in-person sessions have been included as Attachment 4. In total, 60 participants attended the three open houses, and 65 survey responses were received.

Following the completion of key stakeholder engagement and public engagement, the Rural Prosperity CIP was finalized by staff and has been included as Attachment 3.

Analysis

Currently, the County of Brant operates three (3) CIPs in downtown Paris (since 2015), St. George (since 2019), and Burford (since 2019). Since 2019, the County of Brant has approved \$677,321 in grants. These grants have been leveraged to complete an estimated \$7M in property improvements in these three downtown areas. Due to the popularity of this program, expansion of CIP grants outside of these urban boundary areas is a natural next step to allow business and property owners to make improvements to their buildings or properties.

The Rural Prosperity CIP will function as a strategic tool to guide targeted reinvestment, particularly across rural communities. It will enable the County to deliberately align financial incentives with key policy objectives, including agricultural diversification, rural housing supply, and support for local businesses. In this way, it translates broader planning goals into actionable programs, enhancing the feasibility of rural economic development and stimulating targeted investment that can help accelerate market activity and support strategic sector growth. The RPCIP will serve as a practical implementation tool for strengthening the rural economy and supporting complete, resilient, and sustainable communities.

The RPCIP was designed to support four (4) land/property uses that exist in the County of Brant that can generate positive economic impact, increased visitation to areas of Brant that may not be frequent destinations for tourists, and support other County of Brant initiatives. These four uses are outlined below.

1. On-Farm Diversified Uses (OFDUs) – An activity that is secondary to the primary agricultural operation and limited in scale. These uses enhance the agricultural economy while preserving farmland and minimizing land use conflicts. Applicants for funding for OFDUs must have a Farm Business Registration (FBR) number.
2. Additional Residential Units (ARUs) - ARUs are self-contained dwelling units located on the same property as a principal residence. These units may be connected to or detached from the primary home. Applicants for ARUs must have a FBR number to be eligible for grant funding.

A key benefit to reducing the barriers of Additional Residential Units on farm properties is allowing for multi-generational families to live on the same property. This can be a valuable asset to a farmer considering their options for succession planning and passing the farm down to another generation. According to the 2021 census of agriculture, of 669 census farms in the County of Brant, only 250 reported having some form of a succession plan, either written or verbal. Additionally, succession planning for Brant farmers will be a major issue as the median age of a farmer is 58 years old. Considering this data is now 5 years old, this number could be higher in the next census, making the need for succession to be more prevalent.

3. Hamlets and Villages – Commercial and Community Benefiting Uses - Properties designated as Rural Hamlets and Villages in the County's Official Plan are eligible for RPCIP incentives if used for commercial, institutional, or mixed-use purposes. These

uses support the vibrancy and economic vitality of rural communities while maintaining their unique character.

4. Rural Tourism Businesses - Existing businesses and properties that contribute to the overall tourism sector of the County of Brant. These properties are either in rural areas or contribute to the overall character of the County of Brant's Agri-Tourism and Agri-Business community. These businesses must be lawfully established and comply with the County of Brant's Zoning By Law. Additionally, these businesses must be outside of the County's three (3) urban boundaries.

These four property types will capture a major segment of the County of Brant's economy that previously would not have been covered by the existing Community Improvement Plans.

The RPCIP will offer six (6) grant programs to applicants to make improvements to buildings and properties. Most of these programs are 50% cost-matching to a maximum grant value.

These grant programs include the following:

Grant Program	Grant Description and Eligible Properties	Maximum Grant Value
Façade Improvement Grant	<p>Description: Encourages improvements to building exteriors to enhance durability, restore historic character, and attract businesses and visitors.</p> <p>Eligible Properties: OFDUs, Hamlets and Villages, Existing Tourism Destinations.</p>	<p>\$10,000 if one façade is addressed with the improvements.</p> <p>Or</p> <p>\$12,500 if the property is on a corner lot and the project addresses both facades.</p>
Signage Improvement Grant	<p>Description: Encourages aesthetically pleasing signage to enhance visibility and property character.</p> <p>Eligible Properties: OFDUs, Hamlets and Villages, Existing Tourism Destinations.</p>	\$3,000
Property and Private Parking Area Improvement Grant	<p>Description: Supports improvements to private parking lots and landscaping improvements.</p> <p>Eligible Properties: OFDUs, Hamlets and Villages, Existing Tourism Destinations.</p>	\$5,000
Application Fee Grant	<p>Description: This grant helps to offset fees for planning and building applications, and the work of professionals for required drawings and plans. Fees charged by the County of Brant can be reimbursed at 100%, while fees charged by</p>	\$10,000

	<p>professionals (engineers, architects, qualified designers) can be reimbursed at 50%.</p> <p>Eligible Properties: OFDUs, Hamlets and Villages, ARUs (with Farm Business Registration number), and Existing Tourism Destinations.</p>	
Adaptive Commercial Reuse Grant	<p>Description: This grant supports the conversion of non-commercial or underused space to a commercial or industrial use, or the adaptation of farm buildings for on-farm commercial uses. This grant can also support the conversion of a commercial building from one use (i.e. retail) to another use (i.e. restaurant).</p> <p>Eligible Properties: OFDUs, Hamlets and Villages, and Existing Tourism Destinations.</p>	\$15,000
Housing/Residential Unit Improvement Grant	<p>Description: This grant encourages the development of ARUs on agriculture properties and improvements to mixed-use buildings in rural hamlets and villages. For an ARU on agriculture property, the applicant will be required to have a registered Farm Business Registration Number.</p> <p>Eligible Properties: ARUs (with Farm Business Registration number), and Hamlets and Villages.</p>	<p>\$10,000 per ARU on a property with a Farm Business Registration number.</p> <p>Or</p> <p>\$10,000 per residential unit in a mixed-use building to a maximum of three (3) units.</p>

All applicants to the RPCIP must comply with the general eligibility guidelines and be in good standing with all relevant County of Brant by-laws, with property taxes up to date and all appropriate permits applied for or received.

Summary and Recommendations

Enabled by the 2023 Official Plan, the RPCIP supports the Official Plan’s vision for a strong and resilient rural system. It advances key Official Plan objectives of promoting agricultural viability, supporting on farm diversification, and encouraging the adaptive reuse and improvement of existing rural properties. The RPCIP will also foster small-scale economic development, including agri-tourism and local business activity. Through its targeted financial incentives, the Rural Prosperity CIP promotes investment in existing rural areas, supporting growth that aims to protect local farming character while translating broader Official Plan objectives for economic development and rural prosperity into tangible outcomes for rural residents, farmers, and other business owners.

Additionally, the RPCIP is supported by the County of Brant’s Economic Development Strategy, specifically Theme Four, “Develop a diversified business community to ensure a resilient and sustainable economy”; Goal 1, “Support the County of Brant’s agriculture sector”; and Action 1, “Undertake the development of a Rural Community Improvement Plan”. The strategy also speaks to other actions that can be supported by this Rural Prosperity CIP, such as assisting with the promotion of On-Farm Diversified Use policies, develop the agri-tourism market to support rural economic development, and support growth opportunities for investment for niche accommodations.

The RPCIP will be reviewed by County of Brant staff on a regular basis to ensure the program is meeting the needs of the agriculture community, and changes will be presented to Council as legislated under the planning act.

Attachments

- Attachment 1 – By-Law Number XX-26 – Rural Prosperity CIP Area and Rural Community Improvement Project Area Map
- Attachment 2 – By-Law Number XX-26 – Adoption of Rural Prosperity CIP
- Attachment 3 – Rural Prosperity Community Improvement Plan – Program Document
- Attachment 4 – Rural Prosperity Community Improvement Plan Engagement Summary

Reviewed By

Adam Crozier, General Manager of Strategic Initiatives

Copied To

Zach Gable, Director, Economic Development and Tourism
Brandon Kortleve, Manager of Policy Planning

By-law and/or Agreement

By-law Required	Yes
Agreement(s) or other documents to be signed by Mayor and /or Clerk	No