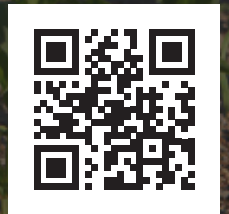


# Rural Prosperity Community Improvement Plan (RPCIP)

[brant.ca/RPCIP](http://brant.ca/RPCIP)



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# Introduction

The **Rural Prosperity Community Improvement Plan (RPCIP)** is a forward-looking initiative by the County of Brant, designed to strengthen and support the local rural economy. Building on the success of the County's Downtown Community Improvement Plans, the RPCIP focuses on creating opportunities in rural areas that align with environmental, social, and economic development goals. By supporting the key components of the Official Plan's Rural System, the RPCIP provides a set of incentives to complement and encourage private investment.

## 1. This plan offers targeted incentives to:

- ✓ Support On-Farm Diversified Uses (OFDUs) to expand farming operations.
- ✓ Promote the development of Additional Residential Units (ARUs) on agricultural properties to address housing needs and support multi-generational farm families.
- ✓ Foster commercial and community-benefiting uses in rural hamlets and villages, maintaining their character while driving economic growth.
- ✓ Enhancing existing tourism properties and offerings in the County of Brant's rural areas.

The RPCIP addresses key challenges faced by rural businesses, such as the high costs of converting agricultural buildings, diversifying farming operations, and restoring buildings in hamlets and villages. By alleviating these barriers, the plan contributes to achieving the County's broader economic development and land use objectives.

Agriculture remains a cornerstone of the County of Brant's economy, employing over 1,400 workers as of 2021 (*Source: Canadian Census of Agriculture 2021*). With diverse crops and predominantly small farms (10-129 acres), the region is uniquely positioned to pursue innovative agricultural practices and on-farm diversification. ARUs on farms not only provide additional income streams, but also support workforce needs, discourage property severances, and preserve agricultural lands.

From an economic development perspective, the RPCIP stimulates local food production, encourages tourism, and creates employment opportunities, contributing to a resilient rural economy. Furthermore, the plan supports succession planning and encourages the intergenerational transfer of farms through OFDUs and/or ARUs. Currently, 62.6% of farms in the County lack a succession plan<sup>1</sup>, with the average age of farm operators at 56.5 years (*2021 Census of Agriculture*).

Additionally, the RPCIP aligns with the County of Brant's focus on environmental sustainability and climate resiliency by prioritizing the preservation of agricultural land, repurposing and reusing existing buildings, and diversifying farm operations.

The RPCIP aims to ensure the continued vibrancy and sustainability of Brant's rural communities by empowering residents and businesses to innovate, diversify, and grow.



<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada. *Census of Agriculture, 2021*.

# Objectives

The Rural Prosperity Community Improvement Plan (RPCIP) is guided by the following objectives:

## 1. Support the Agricultural System

Encourage diversified uses and reduce the barriers to accessing new revenue streams on agricultural properties, promoting economic resilience.

## 2. Strengthen Tourism Offerings

Foster agri-tourism, on-farm education, and experiential activities that showcase rural life and agriculture as well support existing tourism operations in the rural areas.

## 3. Enhance the Agri-Food Network

Promote direct selling of locally produced agricultural goods through farm stands and other local outlets.

## 4. Sustain Hamlet and Village Vibrancy

Facilitate investment in commercial and mixed-use properties that preserve the unique character of the County's hamlets and villages.

## 5. Encourage Additional Residential Units (ARUs)

Support the development of ARUs on agricultural properties to address housing needs, enable multi-generational living, and create supplemental income opportunities.

## 6. Promote Sustainability/Climate Resiliency

Encourage the preservation of rural and agricultural land, helping existing landowners continue to operate a successful/viable on-farm business. As our climate continues to change and impact agricultural practices, diversifying revenue streams will support economic resilience.



# Policy and Legislative Context

The Rural Prosperity Community Improvement Plan (RPCIP) aligns with provincial legislation and County policies to promote rural economic development and land use objectives.

## The Planning Act

Under Section 28 of the Ontario Planning Act, municipalities are authorized to establish Community Improvement Plans (CIPs). This includes:

- Incorporating Community Improvement Policies into Official Plans.
- Designating Community Improvement Project Areas (CIPAs) through a by-law.
- Providing grants or loans to property owners and tenants within a CIPA for eligible improvements, such as environmental remediation, redevelopment, and rehabilitation.

These provisions enable municipalities to address economic, environmental, and social needs through strategic investment.

## The County of Brant Official Plan

*A Simply Grand Plan, 2023* – the County of Brant Official Plan, supports the implementation of CIPs in Agricultural and Rural Areas to encourage investment, innovation, and sustainability.

- Relevant policies are outlined in Part 5 – Policies and Development Criteria and Part 6 – The County Toolbox: Implementation and Administration.
- These policies align with the County's vision for thriving agricultural and rural systems.



To view County of Brant Projects, Plans, Reports, visit [brant.ca/Plans](https://brant.ca/Plans).

## The Economic Development Strategy

The RPCIP supports the County's Economic Development Strategy, which prioritizes the development of diversified business opportunities in rural and agricultural areas. Specifically, under **Theme 4: Develop a Diversified Business Community**, the following goals are addressed:

### Goal 1: Support the County's agricultural sector

- ✓ Action 1: Undertake the development of a Rural Community Improvement Plan.

By leveraging these legislative and policy frameworks, the RPCIP ensures alignment with provincial requirements and County priorities, fostering economic growth and long-term sustainability in rural areas.

Additionally, this strategy is supported under **Theme 2: Capitalize and build on the existing tourism, arts, and culture assets of the County of Brant**. Within this theme, the following goals are addressed;

### Goal 2: Enhance capacity and partnerships with local tourism businesses and regional tourism organizations.

- ✓ Action 2: Develop relationships with County of Brant tourism-related entrepreneurs and provide relevant training programs, support grants, and promote their programs.

### Goal 3: Improve Infrastructure needed to support tourism.

- ✓ Action 3: Support growth opportunities for investment for niche accommodations (for example, upscale camping, retreats, and/or farm stays).

### Goal 4: Develop the agri-tourism market to support rural economic development.

## County of Brant Strategic Plan

The RPCIP supports the County of Brant Strategic Plan. The following goals are addressed:

- **Priority 1** – Economic and Financial Resilience
- **Priority 2** – Focused Growth and Infrastructure. Encouraging new Additional Residential Units (ARUs) on properties tied to objective 2.3 Explore unique avenues to provide affordable housing solutions
- **Priority 5** – Environmental Sustainability and Climate Action.

# Eligible Properties and Uses

Projects related to the following land uses are eligible under the Rural Prosperity Community Improvement Plan (RPCIP). Where eligibility is unclear, the County of Brant Zoning By-Law may be referenced for clarification.



## 1. On-Farm Diversified Uses (OFDUs)

An OFDU refers to a use or 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. Examples include agri-tourism, on-farm markets, wineries, breweries, landscaping businesses, other home-based businesses and industries, retail uses, and research facilities.

**Eligibility Criteria:** Properties with an OFDU, as defined by the County's Official Plan. Uses that do not meet the intent of the County of Brant Official Plan policies or Provincial Planning Statement are not eligible. Additionally, eligible properties must have a registered Farm Business Registration (FBR) number. Examples of uses that would not qualify as an OFDU include those generating significant traffic, significant water or wastewater usage, or present negative impacts to surrounding agricultural operations in conformity with the County of Brant's Land Use policy (e.g., large food processors, full-scale banquet halls, trucking yards, golf courses etc.)

## 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. Examples of common ARUs include: basement apartments, in-law suites, garage apartments, tiny homes, and coach homes.

**Eligibility Criteria:** Properties proposing ARUs, as defined by the Province of Ontario, and in conformity with the policies of the County's Official Plan. For more information on ARUs, visit [brant.ca/ARU](http://brant.ca/ARU). Eligibility is restricted to Properties operating under a registered Farm Business Registration number in agricultural zones. The RPCIP is intended to support as-of-right ARU development and slight variations that may be appropriate in site-specific instances. Where relief from policies or standards is requested, eligibility will be determined only after it has been determined if the request conforms with the policies of the Official Plan. For example, a request to locate an ARU outside of a farm cluster or a further distance from the primary dwelling does not conform with the policies of the Plan and will not be eligible.



### 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.

**Eligibility Criteria:** Properties with a solely residential tax assessment, as determined by the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation, are not eligible under this category.



### 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.

**Eligibility Criteria:** Brick and Mortar businesses that are lawfully established per the County of Brant Zoning By Law outside of the County of Brant's three (3) urban boundaries that enhance tourism offerings as part of the normal daily operations of the business. Furthermore, a list of eligible tourism businesses can be found in Appendix A.



# General Eligibility Requirements

To qualify for financial incentives under the Rural Prosperity Community Improvement Plan (RPCIP), applications must meet the following general criteria:



## 1. Tax Arrears

The subject property must have no outstanding tax arrears.

## 2. Timing of Application

Grants are not available for projects that are already completed or underway. Construction or improvements may only begin after the application has been approved and a financial incentive agreement has been executed. Applications for permits (i.e. building permits) may be applied for concurrently with project approval. Please clarify with County of Brant staff to ensure alignment with eligibility requirements.

## 3. Location

The property must be situated within the designated Community Improvement Project Area (CIPA).

## 4. Authorization from Property Owner

Tenants applying for incentives must obtain written authorization and consent from the property owner.

## 5. Heritage Properties

Improvements to properties designated under the Ontario Heritage Act must be consistent with the designation by-law's reasons for heritage protection.

## 6. Quality and Aesthetic Standards

Projects must represent a noticeable improvement in quality, aesthetics, durability, or historical authenticity. Standard life cycle replacements without enhancements will not qualify.

## 7. Minimum Grant Amount

Applications resulting in a total calculated grant of less than \$500 may be declined at the sole discretion of the RPCIP Administrator.

## 8. Compliance with Applicable Regulations

Projects must conform to the County's Official Plan, Comprehensive Zoning By-Law, applicable Conservation Authority permits, and all provincial and federal regulations.



## 9. Combination of Grants

Applicants may apply for more than one grant. While multiple applications are allowed for multiple grant programs, applicants are encouraged to apply for multiple grants at the same time.

## 10. Disclosure of Additional Funding

Applicants must disclose any other funding or incentives received for the project. The RPCIP Administrator reserves the right to deduct other grants or incentives from the eligible RPCIP grant amount.

## 11. Additional Approvals


While applicants may apply for incentives prior to obtaining other required approvals (e.g., zoning or site plan approvals), disbursement of grants will be conditional on receiving all necessary approvals. Applications that require amendments to the County's Official Plan or Zoning By-Law to permit Additional Residential Units may not be eligible for funding under this plan where they do not meet the objectives of the Official Plan. The RPCIP is intended to support as-of-right ARU development and slight variations that may be appropriate in site-specific instances.

## 12. Regulatory Compliance

This plan does not exempt applicants from meeting other approval requirements. All development must comply with the County's Official Plan, Comprehensive Zoning By-Law, Provincial Policies, and Conservation Authority regulations.

## 13. Funding Limit

- The value of all grants combined shall not exceed 50% of the total eligible costs for the project.
- The Community Improvement Plan (CIP) is a council-funded initiative and can be decreased or canceled at the sole discretion of County of Brant council.



**Projects must represent a noticeable improvement in quality, aesthetics, durability, or historical authenticity.**

# Incentive Programs

The Rural Prosperity Community Improvement Plan (RPCIP) offers several financial incentive programs to support rural businesses, agriculture, and community development. Each program is designed to address specific needs, promote investment, and enhance the character and economic vitality of the County of Brant's rural areas. These programs collectively aim to foster rural prosperity, address economic and community needs, and support the County of Brant's overarching development goals.

## Façade Improvement Grant

### Purpose:

Encourages improvements to building exteriors to enhance durability, restore historic character, and attract businesses and visitors.

### Eligible Costs:

- Repair, replacement, or restoration of façade materials (e.g., masonry, brickwork, architectural detailing).
- Installation or replacement of awnings or canopies.
- Painting, cleaning, or treatments to improve façade durability (part of a larger improvement project).
- Window and door replacement, provided they enhance detailing or aesthetics.
- Accessibility improvements, such as automatic doors or barrier-free entrances.

### Grant Value:

- Corner properties: Up to 50% of eligible costs, to a maximum of \$12,500 (for improvements to both street-facing façades).
- Other properties: Up to 50% of eligible costs, to a maximum of \$10,000.

### Eligibility:

Open to OFDUs, Hamlet properties providing public services, operating retail or food businesses, or existing tourism properties identified in Appendix A that are operating in the Rural Areas of the County.

## Signage Improvement Grant

### Purpose:

Encourages aesthetically appealing signage to enhance visibility and property character.

### Eligible Costs:

- Repair, restoration, or improvement of existing historic signage.
- Installation or replacement of signage.
- Removal of non-compliant signage and installation of new signage in accordance with RPCIP design standards.

### Grant Value:

Up to 50% of eligible costs, to a maximum of \$3,000.

### Eligibility:

Open to On-Farm Diversified Uses, Farms that regularly host on-farm tours for the purposes of education, study, or the general promotion of agriculture to the general public, Hamlet properties providing public services, operating retail or food businesses, or existing tourism properties identified in Appendix A that are operating in the Rural Areas of the County.





## Property and Private Parking Area Improvement Grant

### Purpose:

Supports landscaping, parking improvements, and active transportation features to improve functionality and aesthetics.

### Eligible Costs:

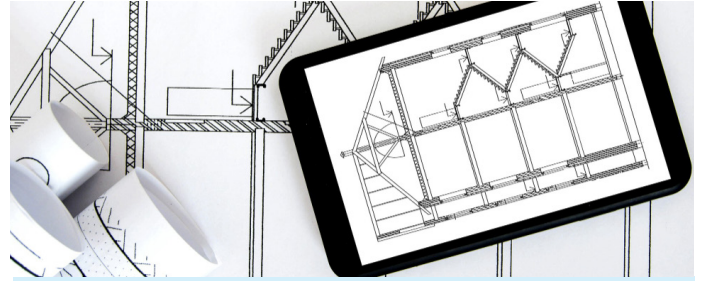
- Landscaping and private parking area improvements.
- Permanent outdoor seating areas and sidewalk cafés (including fencing and landscaping).
- Enhancements for active transportation (e.g., cycling infrastructure).
- Parking lot expansions to accommodate large vehicles, such as buses, for tourism or educational purposes.

### Grant Value:

Up to 50% of eligible costs, to a maximum of \$5,000.

### Eligibility:

Open to OFDUs, Hamlet properties providing public services, operating retail or food businesses, or existing tourism properties identified in Appendix A that are operating in the Rural Areas of the County.



## Application Fee Grants

### Purpose:

Helps offset fees for planning and building applications, reducing barriers to investment.

### Eligible Costs:

- Fees for Planning Act applications (e.g., Official Plan Amendments, Zoning By-law Amendments, Minor Variances) may only be eligible for uses other than ARUs. Applications for ARUs that require variation from the County's policies or standards will not be eligible for RPCIP funding, unless such a variation has been supported by the County of Brant.
- Building Permit fees, Development Charges, and engineering fees.
- Costs for professional services (e.g., architects, engineers, planners) related to eligible improvements.

### Grant Value:

- 100% of eligible fees charged by the County of Brant, to a maximum of \$10,000.
- Up to 50% of professional services costs, to a maximum of \$10,000.

### Eligibility:

Open to OFDUs, ARUs, Hamlet properties providing public services, operating retail or food businesses, or existing tourism properties identified in Appendix A that are operating in the Rural Areas of the County.

# Adaptive Commercial Reuse Grant

## Purpose:

Supports the conversion of non-commercial or underused buildings to commercial or industrial uses, or the adaptation of farm buildings for on-farm commercial purposes. While this program intends to convert existing buildings and structures, under certain circumstances, additions and new construction would be considered for approval under this grant program.

## Eligible Costs:

- Ontario Building Code compliance upgrades (e.g., fire protection, structural improvements) and requirements under the Ontario Fire Code as identified by County of Brant Fire Preventions Officers (e.g. Cistern, if identified as a requirement).
- Insulation, windows, doors, and walls to meet fire protection standards.
- Insulation, windows, and building envelope improvements for the purpose of enhanced sustainability and energy efficiency.
- Electrical upgrades and improvements.
- Construction or enhancement of stairs and railings.
- Installation of a septic system or improvements to enhance capacity of existing septic system.

## Grant Value:

Up to 50% of eligible costs, to a maximum of \$15,000.

## Eligibility:

Open to OFDUs, Hamlet properties providing public services, operating retail or food businesses, or existing tourism properties identified in Appendix A that are operating in the Rural Areas of the County.

# Housing/Residential Unit Improvement Grant

## Purpose:

Encourages the development of ARUs on agricultural properties and improvements to existing residential units within mixed-use buildings in rural hamlets and villages. While this program intends to convert existing buildings and structures, under certain circumstances, additions and new construction would be considered for approval under this grant program.

## Eligible Costs:

- Renovations to bring existing residential units into compliance with ARU building criteria.
- Development of new ARUs in line with County and Provincial Policies.
- Improvements to residential units within mixed-use buildings, provided the building includes an approved commercial use.
- Professional services costs for engineers or architects related to eligible improvements.

## Grant Value:

Up to 50% of eligible costs, to a maximum of \$10,000 per ARU on a property with a Farm Business Registration number.

Up to 50% of eligible costs to a maximum of \$10,000 per residential unit (up to 3 units) within mixed-use buildings, provided the building has an approved commercial use.

## Eligibility:

- Properties operating under a registered farm business number in agricultural zones.
- Mixed-use buildings with a portion designated for non-residential use.
- Any works in existing or new construction (where allowed) must bring the building into compliance with the Ontario Building Code. No aesthetic improvements (painting, fixtures, appliances, etc.) will be considered for funding.



COUNTY OF  
**Brant** Simply Grand

Glenridge Hazelnuts

# Application and Approval Process

The application and approval process ensures that all projects align with the goals of the Rural Prosperity Community Improvement Plan (RPCIP) and comply with applicable policies and regulations. The process involves the following steps:

## 1. Pre-Application Consultation

Applicants are encouraged to meet with the RPCIP Administrator to discuss their project. During this consultation, the Administrator will:

- Confirm application requirements and eligibility.
- Outline the process, timing, and any design considerations.

## 2. Submission of Application

Applicants must submit a completed application form along with the required supporting materials. These materials may include:

- Drawings, elevations, plans, or sketches of the proposed improvements.
- Current photos of the property.
- Historical photos or information about the property (if applicable).
- A minimum of two quotes for the work, unless the work is highly specialized or of low value (under \$1,000).
- Proof of compliance with the County's Zoning By-Law, Official Plan, or other applicable requirements.

## 3. Review for Completeness and Eligibility

The RPCIP Administrator will:

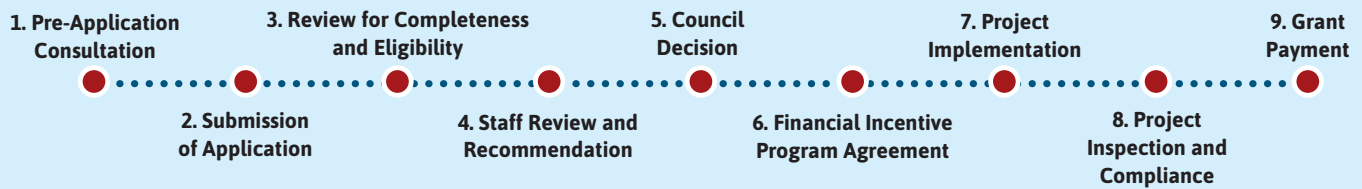
- Review the application to ensure it is complete and meets eligibility requirements.
- Notify the applicant if additional information or corrections are needed.

Once deemed complete, the application will be circulated internally for review by County staff. Departments include but are not limited to Development Services, Finance, Legal, By Law Enforcement, and Strategic Initiatives.

## 4. Staff Review and Recommendation

County staff will review the application to identify conditions or issues and provide a recommendation. This recommendation will be presented to County Council for consideration.





## 5. Council Decision

County Council will:

- Review the application and staff recommendation.
- Approve, approve with conditions, or refuse the application.

If refused, the applicant will be provided with the reasons for refusal and may resubmit their application after addressing the identified issues.

Council may delegate authority to staff for the approval of applications

## 6. Financial Incentive Program Agreement

If the application is approved, the RPCIP Administrator will prepare and execute a financial incentive program agreement. This agreement will outline:

- The terms and conditions of the grant.
- The payment schedule and requirements for disbursement.

The agreement ensures the project is completed in accordance with the approved application. It may be required of the applicant that the agreement be registered on the title of the property.



## 7. Project Implementation

After the agreement is executed:

- The applicant may begin construction or improvements.
- Upon completion, the applicant must inform the RPCIP Administrator.

## 8. Project Inspection and Compliance

The RPCIP Administrator may inspect the completed project or request photos to ensure compliance with the financial incentive program agreement. If the project does not meet the agreed terms, the RPCIP Administrator may withhold grant payment at their discretion.

## 9. Grant Payment

If the project complies with the agreement, the grant will be paid according to the terms outlined in the agreement.



# Plan Implementation and Monitoring

The success of the Rural Prosperity Community Improvement Plan (RPCIP) depends on effective implementation, continuous monitoring, and regular evaluation to ensure the programs achieve their intended outcomes.

## Implementation

### 1. Plan Duration

The RPCIP is designed for implementation over a 10-year period. However, the plan may continue beyond this timeframe at the discretion of County Council.

### 2. Dissolution of the Plan

Once County Council determines that the objectives of the RPCIP have been achieved, they may dissolve the Community Improvement Project Area (CIPA) by by-law, rendering the plan inoperative.

### 3. Community Improvement Project Area (CIPA)

- The CIPA is the area to which the RPCIP applies.
- Properties outside the designated CIPA are not eligible for financial incentives.
- County Council may modify the boundaries of the CIPA by passing a new by-law.
- A map of the current CIPA is included in the RPCIP as Appendix 1, but applicants should consult the County to ensure they are reviewing the latest CIPA by-law.



# Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy

## 1. Database Creation

Upon implementation, the RPCIP Administrator will establish a database to track and monitor applications, preferably within in the County's GIS. The database will record:

- Type of project and grant(s) applied for.
- Grant values and total construction costs.
- Applicant, property, and ownership details.
- Contractor and supplier information for reference.
- Specific improvements (e.g., façade length, signage, landscaping, parking spaces, bicycle facilities).
- Before-and-after photos of the property.
- Subjective feedback on whether the plan encouraged the project.

## 2. Annual Reporting

The RPCIP Administrator will provide an annual report to County Council summarizing:

- Total value of grants issued, and private investment leveraged.
- Total number of applications received and approved (by program).
- Visual documentation (before-and-after photos) of successful projects.
- Unintended outcomes and measures to address them.
- Recommendations for program adjustments, including changes to the CIP or CIPA.
- Suggestions for improving plan administration and application processing.
- Funding recommendations, including program priorities and potential additional funding needs.

The data stored within the County's GIS can also be leveraged to create a live dashboard for up-to-date monitoring of the RPCIP throughout its implementation.

## 3. Continuous Improvement/Adjustments

Based on the annual report, County Council may adjust the budget, maximum grant values, programs, or CIPA boundaries to address evolving needs and priorities.

# Marketing the Plan

The RPCIP will be promoted through various channels to maximize awareness and engagement:

- County of Brant Economic Development social media platforms.
- Collaboration with business associations and partnerships.
- Corporate communications, including newsletters and community outreach.



# Budget and Funding

The Rural Prosperity Community Improvement Plan (RPCIP) is funded by the County of Brant, with allocations determined annually by County Council. A flexible budget framework will ensure the RPCIP remains responsive to changing circumstances and continues to effectively support rural prosperity. The following outlines the budget and funding framework for the program:

## 1. Annual Budget Allocation

- County Council will establish an annual budget for the financial incentive programs during the budgeting process.
- The amount allocated may vary each year based on available funding and other Council priorities.

## 2. Carry-Forward of Unused Funds

- Any unused portion of the budget may be carried forward to the following year to maximize program impact.

## 3. Program-Specific Allocations

- Council may allocate specific portions of the budget to individual financial incentive programs based on recommendations from the RPCIP Administrator.
- Council also reserves the right to allocate no funding to certain programs if deemed necessary.

## 4. Budget Adjustment

- Council may adjust funding allocations at any time, based on the Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy's findings, to better align with community needs and program outcomes.

# Appendix A

## Eligible Tourism Businesses List

Further to the definition of a Rural Tourism Business previously stated, below is a list of examples of eligible businesses, lawfully operating, that would be considered eligible under this plan. In cases in which a use is not listed below, eligibility will be determined solely by County of Brant staff.

- Bicycle Rental Operations
- Boat Cruises
- Boat Rentals and Charters
- Campgrounds (Privately Owned and catering to the travelling public)
- Cultural Centres
- Destination Accommodation
- Farm-Based Tourist Attractions
- Farmers' Markets
- Fishing/Hunting Lodges and Outpost Camps
- Golf Courses (Buildings Open to public only, e.g. banquet facilities)
- Historical or Archaeological Sites and Structures (Provincial)
- Historical Sites (Federal)
- Interpretation Centres
- Interpretive/Craft Centres
- Museums
- Natural Sites and Trails
- Outfitters
- Performance Theatres
- Public Archives
- Public Art Galleries
- Riding Operations
- Restaurant (with indoor seating and public washrooms)
- Spas
- Sport Parks and Leisure Centres
- Themed Tourist Attractions and Themed Parks
- Transient Accommodation
- Zoos and Animal Displays



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