

Saskatchewan Municipal

Best Practice

CAMPAIGN NAME: Biggar Revitalization Project

CONTACT

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Project video: https://youtu.be/zrL_ZG-z4c8

THE PRACTICE

What was the issue?

A representative of a potential donor family with ties to the Town of Biggar reached out to the Town via a phone call in 2019 to see if the Town had a project worthy of a donation. A list of potential projects was supplied to the donor and the Town awaited a reply. The donor noted that the revitalization of infrastructure in Biggar was a project they would be interested in supporting. A meeting was set up with members of Council and it was mutually agreed by the donor and the Town to cost share a consulting firm to explore the potential for this project in more detail. Separately, the Town also needed to address the 100+ year old water mains that required service or replacement connections.

What was the project?

The Biggar Revitalization Project was divided into four phases:

Phase 1 - Business Core

Phase 2 - Transition Zone

Phase 3 – Gateway

Phase 4 - Grand Central Park.

Concept plans for the four phases are available here:

<https://townofbiggar.com/347/Concept-Plans>

Town Council also approved to have the water mains and service connections to the 100, 200 and 300 blocks of Main Street plus the side streets to the alleys on both the East and West sides on 1st Avenue, 2nd Avenue and 3rd Avenue. This project was

budgeted separately from the fundraising for the overall project but was done in conjunction with Phase 1 – Business Core. It was determined that watermain replacement and repair would be done at no cost to the property owners.

THE PROCESS

A group of 20 volunteer community leaders and stakeholders was established. This volunteer group consists of business owners, community group leaders, prominent volunteers, and Town leaders. The stakeholder group of volunteers recommended Main Street to revitalize because it is the one spot in all communities that most residents use daily.

The project included multiple open houses and chances for the community to be part of the process. The project began generating a buzz in 2019 and the Town was just about ready for the first open houses when the COVID-19 shutdowns started. After it being the number one discussion in the Town, consultations were put on hold until January 2021. Community input and comments throughout the planning and detailed design process were important to the success of the project. Many changes were made throughout the process and a consensus was met by the community regarding the design and construction.

Following the open houses and community engagement sessions changes were made to the concept plan based on the suggestions received. After multiple meetings, a vision statement, master plan and concept were recommended to Council for approval. In April 2021, Town Council formally adopted the revised Master Plan and Concept to revitalize Biggar's Main Street. Fundraising for the project began in April 2021 after Council's formal approval of the plan and the process of completing the detail design started.

The plan was projected to cost approx. 7.5 million dollars and the funding was proposed to be a 2.5-million-dollar fundraising campaign, 2.5 million of fund-raised dollars to be matched from the donor family and the remaining 2.5 million to be funding by government, ideally shared between the Federal, Provincial and Municipal Governments.

The Storefront Enhancement Incentive Policy was created for 2022 to encourage businesses to enhance their storefront. Any business located within the scope of the Biggar Revitalization Project would be reimbursed up to \$3,000 for any materials or labour costs related to the improvement of their storefront. The policy was later opened to any business in Biggar and there was an overwhelming demand for this incentive resulting in \$189,000 being budgeted towards this incentive.

A framework was created for the fundraising volunteers to work within. A detailed policy was developed, and weekly update meetings were held to ensure all individuals working on the project were on the same path. Senior Town management completed the Fundraising Policy, Storefront Enhancement Incentive Policy, and worked extensively

on the detailed design for Phase 1 – Business Core, Phase 2 - Transition Zone and on the concept for the Grand Central Park along with managing the largest fundraising campaign in the Town's history. This led required the utilization of all of the Town's avenues for marketing and administrative support for the Biggar Revitalization Leadership Committee and their fundraising, and to the creation of a new online payment method for the Town to better collect and track the fundraising dollars.

Town Council had the role of being the final approval for the developed Master Plan and Concept as well as the final approval of the policy, and the detailed design. The majority of the Community Development Officers (CDO) role was allocated to acting as the liaison on the newly formed Biggar Revitalization Leadership Committee which was the main volunteer group formed to complete the fundraising. Some members from the original stakeholder group were also on this Leadership Committee.

Once the volunteer stakeholder group identified the scope, the focus turned to how to properly complete this monumental project. The task was divided into groups with the Town's CAO overseeing all the groups. The groups are:

- Fundraising
- Council
- Communications
- Grants
- Government Consultations
- Business Core Design
- Transition Zone Design
- Grand Central Park Concept

Council was updated on a weekly basis with updated on fundraising and design. As milestones got closer community street dances were held to gain excitement and promote local businesses. There were several celebrity endorsements, special programs, and naming rights opportunities that supported the fundraising and community involvement for the project.

Community feedback was very important throughout the entire Biggar Revitalization Project. The public had many opportunities to view the concepts during the various open houses and weekly updates and articles were written in the local newspaper. The project planning and fundraising has been highlighted on many news outlets through, tv, radio and print. In April 2021, when the fundraising campaign began a counter board was placed at the Downtown Park so everyone could see the weekly update on the fundraising totals.

Once the design was completed and approved it went to tender in April 2022. It was awarded one large tender for Phase 1 - Business Core that also included the water mains and service connections. In the tender the Town requested separate prices on the

400, 500, 600 and 700 blocks of Main Street because the Town was actively fundraising for the Business Core portion of this project at the time of tender.

Well over 100 volunteers joined the fundraising campaign to work in conjunction with the Biggar Revitalization Leadership Committee. This large group of volunteers went to work on fundraising under the guidance of DCG Philanthropic Services Inc., which was provided at no charge as a personal favor to the donor. The fundraising was broken into many sectors with each sector having a leader with a group of volunteers under them. Each week, the Biggar Revitalization Leadership Committee would meet online to hear updates from the Town and to provide updates on the fundraising initiatives. The CAO of the Town acted as a liaison between Council and the Leadership Committee. To the best efforts of the Town, the fundraising was completely done by an outside group of volunteers except for the Town's CDO. All administration and tracking were done by the administrative staff at the Town of Biggar. The Biggar & District Community Foundation was the entity that was set up to receive securities and provide official tax receipts and allowed people to donate shares for the Biggar Revitalization Project. The foundation and the Town worked closely.

There were over 400 different donors for this project and some unique naming opportunities were offered in the process. The most popular idea was a block sign that can be placed on any block in Town for a donation. For a \$5,000 donation a "John Doe Family" Block Sign would be placed on a specific block within the Town. This was a large hit with 80 different families donating \$5,000 to honor their family or a family member at various locations around Town. That program generated \$400,000 in donations which was matched by the donor family for a total contribution of \$800,000 towards the project.

Biggar is a town of 2,133 people that, in addition to operating the Town during a pandemic, was working to plan, design and complete the biggest, most disruptive construction project in the Town's history, resulting in a governance battle from day one. This project stretched the limits of municipal governance and required:

- Multiple policy developments
- Management of a multi-million dollar fundraising campaign
- Tracking over a dozen different public consultations and open houses
- Designing, tendering, and awarding contracts
- Managing zoning issues, land purchases, and building demolitions
- Maintaining and reviewing project financials
- Creation of incentive programs
- Addressing threats of petitions
- Applications to the Saskatchewan Municipal Board
- Passing and adjusting bylaws
- Communications such as water advisories, press releases, and marketing
- Working with surrounding municipalities

- And more.

This project was different enough that the Town felt there were no samples to build from, leading to the Town creating a framework and project governance structure. One of the factors that was unique to the project was the funding model, 1/3 raised, 1/3 matched by private donor family, 1/3 from government. This was not a type of funding the Town had worked with before and fundraising policies and a framework were created to support the funding structure.

Policies from other communities were reworked to support storefront incentive policies in the Town of Biggar. The policy was popular and community businesses made upgrades, spending more on updating their storefronts than what was covered through the Storefront Incentive Policy.

The following resources were used to support the project:

- Crosby Hanna & Associates were used for the Master Plan and Concept Drawings and later landscaping design and consulting.
- Catterall & Wright Engineers were used for:
 - The detailed design of Phase 1 – Business
 - Core and Phase 2 - Transition Zone including the tendering for those Phases and more.
- Willms Engineering Ltd were used for all electrical planning and design.
- DCG Philanthropic Services Inc. donated their time to help frame and consult with the fundraising campaign.
- 13 Ways was used in providing additional outside feedback on our Master Plan and Concept.
- Great West Brewing Co for re-branding GW Lite with Biggar Theme Cans for fundraising.
- The RM of Biggar with their financial donation and ongoing support for the project.
- Support videos from Biggar, Scotland as our sister community from across the world.
- Jordan Eberle, Lane Lambert, Glen Suter, Kim Coates, Vic Rauter and Darci Lang support videos.
- Pandemic Friendly Open Houses in January 2021. (Hundreds in attendance for feedback and review)
- 50% detailed design review by the original stakeholder group, the Leadership Committee and Town Council.
- 66% detailed design open house in March of 2022. (150+ in attendance for feedback, review and design color votes)

Plus, all the volunteers for the fundraising campaigns, street dances and unconditional support for the Town of Biggar.

THE RESULTS

This project had a monumental effect on the Town of Biggar and its residents. People who had moved on from the town donated to the project and reunited with old friends, there were great conversations and gatherings to celebrate the past and future by uniting over the redesign of Biggar's Main Street. Residents had an increased sense of pride in their municipality. The Biggar Revitalization Project has been one of the greatest success stories for this small community. Over 2.3 million dollars has been raised for the project.

Phase 1 - Business Core as well as Phase 2 - Transition Zone (400, 500 & 600 Blocks) and the 700 blocks of Main Street were completed in 2022. Phase 3 – Gateway has not been planned yet as attention was focused on completing Phase 1. As part of the fundraising, naming rights in the Gateway have been sold out and the Town is prepared to plan and design that Phase in 2023. Phase 4 - Grand Central Park is being developed with CN. CN has committed additional land to the Town of Biggar and they are working together to restore the old CN grounds to their former glory. CN is conducting an environmental assessment on the additional land and the Town is awaiting those results. The concept has been updated and shared with CN and the subdivision is in the works.

The following improvements were made during Phase 1 and 2:

- Electric Vehicle charging stations were installed downtown;
- Automatic tree and flower irrigation was installed;
- Modernized led lighting was installed to look like New York 1910's;
- Personalized tree grates that represent the 100+ year history of the Town;
- and much more.

The project impacted the core of the community, by taking over and rebuilding Main Street. It changed the look of the Town, enabled many businesses to improve their storefronts with the incentive policy, and brought the community together during and after the pandemic. It also changed the way that the Town of Biggar is marketed.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. This project was completed because of the hard work of volunteers, community input, proper governance, and the common desire to make the community the best it can be. Due to the large scale of the project, there was a guarantee that throughout this process citizens and visitors were going to be aggravated, upset, or annoyed by the lack of access to Main Street. The Town included the public throughout this process as the planning stages progressed, and when engaging with the public, staff encountered both the best of people and the worst of people. Balancing the need for community support for the project, while also

recognizing the inconvenience that the project has caused was challenging, but manageable. It is important to have a great support system, and to work as a team.

2. CAO's and Town Council have the power and potential to do great things in their roles that can make a big difference in people's lives. Regardless of the challenges, some of the best and most rewarding moments of this project were during the open houses, when asking for citizens opinions. The past few years have been a drain on people through this pandemic and the municipality has come together to rise above the challenges and show pride in themselves, their identity, and ensures the survival of a small town. Community members proved that the will of the people can overcome any obstacle and the public was willing to support forward thinking.
3. Having a plan for future infrastructure was essential to ensuring that all parts of the project occurred at times that made sense and went along with other potential projects. For example, once the scope of the project was picked, the Town needed to adjust their current underground water line replacement schedules to change the attention to Main Street water mains and to the alleys on 1st, 2nd and 3rd to avoid disrupting Main Street again during future replacements. This was manageable because of the preparation already accessible in the 5-year infrastructure plan.
4. A lot of learning was needed around proper governance. Administration used experience from marketing, planning, accounting, etc. to support the governance framework needed for this project. Consistent education of Council occurred throughout this process as various obstacles were encountered such as debates, delegations, recorded votes, defeated resolutions, borrowing, new and amending bylaws, new policies, zoning changes, property purchases, sales, etc. Following proper governance led to effectively dealing with tough situations.
5. You can learn so much from talking to your community and by far the biggest lesson that I learned was that you need to listen to others and community engagement is vital to the success of your community. Without the volunteers and everyone who donated, this project would not be completed to the high standard that was achieved.

The project has been community led from the onset, and it would not be possible without the community's support. In 2022, Biggar pushed the limits of what is possible in a small town and this is why "New York is Big, but this is Biggar".