



Municipality of Port Hope

Staff Report

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Report Title: Digital Main Street Program 2022-2024

Report to: Committee of the Whole

Date of meeting: August 6, 2024

Report Author:

Meg Ronson, Economic Development Coordinator

Department responsible:

Planning & Development

Report Number: PD-17-24

Recommended Action:

That Report PD-17-24 be received for information.

Highlights:

- Municipality received over \$60,000 of combined federal and provincial funding between 2022 and 2024 to deliver essential digital services, skills training, and access to funding to all eligible small businesses in Port Hope.
- Over 200 businesses were offered valuable resources and information on available funding and programming, while over 80 businesses were given direct one-on-one support by a Municipality of Port Hope Digital Service Squad member.
- 90 businesses declined support.

Background:

Over the course of 2020-2021, the Ontario government in partnership with the federal government announced a nearly combined \$100 million investment into Digital Main Street programming to help Ontario businesses create and enhance their online presence and generate jobs for students. This program was delivered through a partnership with the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas and the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association. In spring of 2022, the Municipality of Port Hope joined the program and secured \$79,050.00, distributable over two years to deliver its program to all Port Hope businesses.

Discussion:

Over the two years of the program's duration, the Municipality of Port Hope was able to connect with an estimated 235 businesses about the variety of free services, resources, and training, as well as government funding, available through the Digital Main Street platform. In total, 85 separate businesses in Port Hope received some kind of one-on-one support from a trained Digital Service Squad Member, which could include:

- Assessing digital wellness and generating a digital to-do list on steps to improve that wellness
- Creating and setting up a digital storefront
- Improving web presence and Search Engine Optimization (SEO)
- Taking and uploading 360-degree photos of their retail space to their Google listing
- Accessing how-to guides, resources, and general support on a variety of topics related to running a business and leveraging digital tools to run and market a business, especially
 - Funding opportunities
 - Google My Business and Analytics
 - Search engine optimization
 - Facebook, Instagram, and other social media platforms
 - Canva
 - Website development
 - Email marketing

There were 90 businesses approached by the Digital Service Squad that declined the opportunity for assistance.

Financial Considerations:

The Municipality of Port Hope ultimately received \$62,197.33 of Digital Main Street funding between July 2022 and March 2024 to serve the business community with essential training, resources, and support. Due to delays and gaps in staffing the Service Squad Member position, the Municipality did not spend the full \$79,050 originally allocated and returned the unspent funds at the conclusion of the project in 2024.

Communication and Public Engagement:

The Municipality of Port Hope leveraged the following communication methods to generate awareness of this program and deliver its messaging:

- Digital Service Squad members were tasked with going door-to-door to meet with businesses and offer their support.
- The Municipality provided regular updates and communications on how to reach the Digital Service Squad member through email, through the Business Community Update, and over social media.

- The Municipality organized, marketed and held two in-person events/workshops featuring Digital Main Street, one in 2023 and one in 2024, the latter of which was promoted with a news release.

Conclusion:

Participating in the Digital Main Street program is an example of the many ways that the Economic Development Division delivers essential business services to its business community, as outlined in the Economic Development Strategic Plan's Goal 4 of providing Business-Focused Systems and Services. It's one of many programs that the Municipality leverages to ensure its business community has access to everything they need to remain competitive and prosperous through any disruption.

Attachments:

None.