

Beautification as part of community development plan of action

“When you look good, you feel good, and when you feel good, you do good.”

This old saying has its place in the life of a community.

With the benefit of many years of affection for Cornwall, this home which we share, and a passionate interest in its progress, we wish to propose a plan of action for the beautification of Cornwall as a means of achieving our full potential.



RECOMMENDATION: that Council request the input of staff of the City of Cornwall in order to develop an implementation plan with appropriate community consultation and investment supports.

A. Why is beautification important:

For some, the word “beautification” will call to mind something along the lines of an unnecessary frill, an afterthought which we might get around to someday, maybe.

And yet, as it set out in the attached recent article by Andrew Cohen,

“in 2020, cities without beauty are undesirable, unsuccessful and unsustainable too.”

To beautify, actually means “to make more attractive by adding something that is beautiful or becoming”. (Merriam-Webster).

Why is this important? Let us count the many ways.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Becoming more attractive in this era of ever increasing competition for business investment is first of all an essential ingredient of good business practice for a municipality. When we invite investors and hope to have them link their future with our community, we first have to show that we love this place enough ourselves to make it as good as we possibly can.

Economic development, as we know so well, is essential for strengthening our tax base, and reducing the burden on taxpaying residents and businesses.

POPULATION GROWTH

Achieving population growth in order to surpass the 50,000 level is a valid economic and social objective. This can have significant benefits. In order to attract new residents, it will help greatly to be attractive as a community of choice. Beautification, besides being attractive to business investment, can help draw persons who seek a pleasant place to live.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Helping a community to “feel good” by “looking good” can do tremendous good in terms of social development. This modern urban concept has been the subject of numerous sociological studies. Beautification has been linked to lower crime rates and an increased sense of community well-being.

DEALING WITH THE CLIMATE CRISIS

The sound proposals recently presented to Council directed towards protecting and enhancing Cornwall’s tree canopy are also linked to the beautification of our community, especially in parts of the city where the absence of trees is most notable. Both strategies go hand in hand.

TOURISM

Tourism, namely the attracting of visitors to our community, creates and maintains jobs in the extended tourism industry. Making Cornwall a more inviting place to visit is good business. Working to make people want to visit us is good social policy.

B. Some parts of a beautification plan

1. Tree canopy nurturing

Tree planting and tree protection are essential ingredients of beautification but trees require some ongoing care. This involves pruning and watering, tasks which can be taken up without necessarily involving significant additional cost.

2. Community involvement and summer students

Many citizens would welcome the opportunity to be involved in helping out as needed, and with modest training can be effective supports to a beautification plan. Strategic use of summer students can also be part of an affordable approach.

3. Property standards incentives and enforcement

As may be recalled, it was effectively presented many years ago by Dr. Avi Friedman who contributed to the remarkable Renaissance project which helped move our community forward, that the strategic use of property standards would go a very long way towards improving the appearance of our community as well as bettering the lives of so many of our fellow citizens. He was addressing the dilapidated condition of a number of dwellings. He advocated an approach that would combine both the “carrot and the stick”, namely a blend of incentives and penalties through active enforcement. It is time to hear from and listen to Dr. Friedman again.

4. Protection and enhancement of historic sites

Cornwall has a rich history. While much of this history has been lost over the years, much remains. Working with private interests to maintain and enhance the appearance of this presence would benefit us all. One illustration of this is the wrought iron fence on Montreal Road which dates from the close to 100 years ago, and bordered the former Courtauld’s property. Taking steps to preserve and conserve it would be very cost effective.

5. Action on former industrial lands East and West

The very large tracts of land both in the East and in the West which have been vacant for decades have a significantly negative effect on the appearance of our community. Taking steps to encourage the wise development of these lands would be an effective contribution to the beautification of Cornwall.

6. Creating parklets

Particularly in the Downtown and Le Village/Cotton Mill areas the creation of attractive parklets could be considered.

7. Municipal and private floral presence

Ensuring that a modest budget is available for our Parks department to maintain a floral presence in key locations would complement the work of many devoted citizens whose gardens make Cornwall look nicer. Steps could be taken to encourage such endeavours.

8. Signage

Attractive signage to better direct visitors to key sites would help us put our best foot forward.

9. Enhancement of strategic locations

Both the Civic Complex and City Hall, our prime municipal presences, could use some modest sprucing up.

10. Roadways

A better quality of road markings to make them more weather resistant would improve appearance as well as providing for better driving safety.

The use of cobblestoned roadways could also be considered to enhance the appearance of parts of the Cotton Mill area.



C. Next steps:

As Pink might say, “Let’s get the party started”. With the vision and leadership of City Council, with the careful planning of City administrative staff, and with the productive input of other ideas from citizens, we can pursue together our ongoing collective responsibility to cherish, protect and enhance our own community.

Respectfully submitted,

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