



# Stirling-Rawdon Township Community Strategic Plan

Final Report - July 31, 2005

Stirling-Rawdon Economic Development Committee

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**8020Info Inc.**  
**Ideas, Advice and Information in Action**

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## Introduction

### **Developing a Community Strategic Plan for Stirling-Rawdon**

Stirling-Rawdon has enjoyed a proud history over the past 147 years. What will it be in 2008, its anniversary year, and beyond?

Early in 2005, to ensure that it is continually adapting to new challenges and new ideas, the Township of Stirling-Rawdon identified the need for a Community Strategic Plan. Broader than an economic development agenda or mainstreet revitalization project, a community strategic plan aims to establish community priorities and make choices that will guide future initiatives, set goals and action plans, and ensure that the needs of the community are being addressed in a comprehensive and objective way.

The development of this document (carried out by consulting firm 8020Info Inc. based in Kingston) involved extensive networking with different municipal departments and community groups, charting priorities, ideas, initiatives and directions. It involved discussions of where the community is now, where it wants to be in the future and how it might attain these goals. The work included:

- an examination of internal strengths and weaknesses as well external opportunities, threats, and barriers;
- a review of existing planning and strategy work within the community;
- development of a common long-term vision with community input and validation;
- identification of strategic goals and priorities for the next 10 years or more; and
- specific action plans, consistent with the intentions of the public and private sectors, key individuals and community organizations.

The strategic plan process for the Township of Stirling-Rawdon not only helps develop a collective vision for the future and action plans that build on community strengths and resources, but it also establishes a framework for other plans and partnerships, and communicates Stirling-Rawdon priorities.

The process involved input from the project team and more than 40 residents through one-on-one phone and personal interviews and a well-attended town-hall breakfast meeting at the Festival Theatre. Planning workshops were also held with the Economic Development Committee (plus community volunteers), and care was taken to co-ordinate with the Rue Principale program known locally as Community-In-Action (CIA).

**Thanks to our contributors:**

In addition to those whose names might have been missed at the town hall sessions, we extend heartfelt thanks to those insightful and committed participants who contributed ideas, critiques and background material for this project:

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Mark Leahy	Plus the helpful staff at the Stirling-Rawdon Township office

The pages that follow outline 10 main strategies and 28 action projects to help bring those strategies to life, plus recommended processes, timelines and appendices with additional information.

Further information on this project is available from:

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## Executive Summary

### **A Strategic Vision for the Township of Stirling-Rawdon**

The one-on-one interviews, townhall breakfast meeting and Economic Development Committee working session confirmed a general vision for Stirling-Rawdon over the next decade, describing its identity, approach to community and economic development, and processes for bringing that vision to life. It also produced a set of 10 key strategies and 28 action projects or objectives in each area to guide future community development.

#### **Vision Statement for Stirling-Rawdon:**

Our vision for the Stirling-Rawdon community is to provide *interesting* and *worthwhile* experiences for those who live here and for those who visit.

#### **Elaboration of the Vision for 2008 and Beyond:**

The Township of Stirling-Rawdon is a unique, self-contained community known for its friendly and welcoming people, its natural beauty and vintage village, its rural heritage and family values. It has strong community spirit supported by a tradition of self-sufficiency, volunteerism and personal generosity. It is a little town with a big heart.

Stirling-Rawdon seeks to grow in a balanced way, building on its various strengths and assets while preserving its special character. It has promising cultural assets and a central business district serving both local residents and visitors, as well as ample sports, recreation/non-sport, social and educational facilities. It offers a variety of job opportunities, especially for those just beginning their working careers. It is environmentally friendly, and an attractive community for families, youth, seniors, and those of all ages who love a rural lifestyle with convenient local amenities and easy access to larger urban centres.

## **Summary of Recommendations:**

**1. DESIGN: Develop a co-ordinated, long-term plan to enhance Stirling-Rawdon's urban design, general beautification and infrastructure.**

Establish a village square as Stirling-Rawdon's focal gathering place.  
Support Rotary's initiative to develop the train station complex.  
Develop the mill pond as a natural attraction.

**2. COMMUNITY LIFE: Preserve Stirling-Rawdon as a place for people actively engaged in community life, with family-oriented features such as sports, recreation/non-sport and social facilities, community safety, active church life, cultural activities, schools/education programs, affordable lifestyle and tax rates.**

Effectively manage traffic and parking, beginning with an analysis of how best to calm traffic on village streets and accommodate parking needs.  
Pursue earth-friendly policies that mediate human impact on the environment.  
Maintain strong local policing.

**3. YOUTH: Make Stirling-Rawdon a place where youth are engaged and integrated in community life -- a great place where they can live, grow up, find jobs, put down roots, and stay or return as citizens and community leaders.**

Link youth into community life by connecting with them directly, giving them a voice and "place at the table."  
Support the providers of youth activities, such as schools, sports groups, the theatre, 4H programs and churches, and build partnerships among them.  
Initiate a mentoring program for youth.

**4. ACTIVITIES: Enrich community life with a variety of vibrant programs and activities.**

Pursue the skateboard park initiative and improvements to local playgrounds.  
Develop a Summer Music-in-the-Park Concert Series.  
Support and grow festivals, tournaments and other special events

**5. ENTREPRENEURSHIP: Market (rather than sell) the community: Create an appealing environment to support entrepreneurs and attract visitors ... and promote it!**

Promote entrepreneurial opportunities.  
Invest in marketing "as a village."  
Partner to overcome barriers to business start-up or relocation

**6. CAPACITY FOR GROWTH: Expand capacity to enable growth through residential and economic development in Stirling-Rawdon, and create conditions conducive to a sustainable, economically viable future.**

Improve the community's sewage/waste water capacity to permit growth.  
Begin planning now to anticipate and meet future land fill requirements.  
Create cost-effective, environmentally sensitive conditions conducive to a sustainable, economically viable future.

**7. TOURISM CLUSTER: Build Stirling-Rawdon's tourism cluster, within the township and with Comfort Country partners.**

Build out the spectrum of what Stirling-Rawdon has to offer visitors, beginning with the needs of current traffic generated by the Theatre and other attractions. Work together with Stirling-Rawdon's Comfort Country partners to "bundle" heritage and cultural attractions, programs and events.  
Encourage authenticity in what Stirling-Rawdon offers visitors and promote what makes the township different, better and special.

**8. LOCAL BUSINESS: Support initiatives that strengthen Stirling-Rawdon's commercial and service business sector as it serves the needs of the local community and special niche markets.**

Improve marketing as a group, both in terms of product (e.g. Sunday shopping) as well as co-operative promotion.  
Develop a plan to provide for future downtown expansion  
Improve the business district as a pleasant pedestrian area.

**9. AGRICULTURE: Through dialogue with agricultural groups, explore ways to support farm organizations as they seek new markets and help farmers adapt to emerging industry challenges.**

Develop and promote agri-tourism opportunities involving local farms.  
Improve and promote the farmers' market and a local "brand."  
Celebrate farms, farming and farmers with special events, and help farm businesses overcome barriers in marketing and value-added production.

**10. DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS: Partner with other communities and levels of government to attract, sustain and retain small industry, service and government operations, and emerging sectors such as cabinet-making.**

Be an active partner and participant in the County's economic development initiatives, working closely with the new economic development department.

**11. BALANCE IN THE PROCESS: Seek balance between what the community wants and what it can pay for, between short-term pain and long-term gain, between business-oriented approaches and community-oriented values.**

**Strategies to promote COMMUNITY Development**

**1. DESIGN:  
Develop a co-ordinated, long-term plan to enhance Stirling-Rawdon’s urban design, general beautification and infrastructure.**

Action Project #1.1: Village Square

**Establish a village square as Stirling-Rawdon’s focal gathering place.**

Some of the best villages, towns and cities create a “sacred space” that gives their residents a sense of identity with the community. A “sacred place” can be a signature building or a distinctive neighbourhood -- something that makes the community special and binds people together.

In that spirit, it is recommended that initial steps be taken to develop Mill Square, a village square in Stirling including part of Mill Street, the covered bridge and land on both sides of the creek. Those steps might include:

- o Developing a long-term design concept
- o Investigating interest and potential support among neighbouring property owners
- o Establishing municipal policies to encourage such development over time
- o Investigating potential funding sources to support development of the village square.
- o Identifying the phasing or stages of development that could be pursued in manageable steps.

This project should be co-ordinated with the Community-In-Action program to enhance the downtown streetscape, improve signage, as well as support building improvements and restoration of heritage buildings.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Economic Dev’t. Committee w/  
Township, Stirling-Rawdon BIA  
Timeline ..... 2006-2008

### Action Project #1.2: Train Station

#### **Support Rotary's initiative to develop the train station complex.**

The Rotary Club of Stirling, in co-operation with the Historical Society and the Township, has shown great initiative with the Stirling Train Station Relocation project, establishing an asset with great potential for future development.

This railway station saw Stirling-Rawdon boys go off to war, cattle shipped to markets in Toronto, and a visit from one of Canada's prime ministers, a whistle-stopping John Diefenbacher campaigning for election to parliament, which was captured on a home movie.

The historic railway station, located near Highway 14, just north of Bird's IGA parking lot, can be brought back to life as a first-class railway museum focused on the early 1900s. It will also be used for a variety of community uses.

The building has a 75 x 25-foot footprint, services extended to the site, and enough space to create a park. This first phase of the project involved three years of fund-raising and investment of more than \$75,000 in cash and in-kind services.

Inside, the facility will be dressed with artifacts now in storage -- items ranging from the five-foot-tall pot-bellied stove that warmed the waiting room, to old photos and historical materials that tell the story of the local station through the years.

In summer, the railway station could function as an tourist information booth staffed by students. The train station's 30 x 40-foot platform area (passenger platform and freight dock) could be used for concerts and other performing arts, and a landscape architect has suggested the land might be shaped to form an amphitheatre. The lower level features a windowed basement that could be extended with an equal-sized patio outside, complemented with gardens, to create a community gathering area for wedding receptions or other special events.

In future phases, a static display could be put together featuring a steam engine, cars and caboose presented on 200 yards (or so) of track. One day it might be extended in a manner similar to the Prince Edward railway group with its rolling stock and five miles of track. Another model is the South Simcoe Railway. From its Tottenham station/museum, visitors depart for an hour trip in restored 1920's coaches, hauled by a steam engine over the rails of a century-old branch line that once connected Hamilton with Barrie and Collingwood.

The current long-term budget requirement for the train station project has been estimated at \$200,000, of which \$75,000 has been raised and committed to the work thus far. Future progress will depend on local fundraising and successful applications to foundations (such as the Ontario Trillium Foundation) and other grant programs.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Rotary Club of Stirling

Timeline ..... 2005-2008

Action Project #1.3: Mill Pond

**Develop the mill pond as a natural attraction.**

Over the next few years, an action project is needed to develop the mill pond as a natural attraction. The accumulation of silt since work was completed on the dam fifteen years ago, the massing of weeds choking the waterway and cattails along the shoreline have all served to reduce the mill pond’s appeal as a visual attraction and recreation area for swimming, canoeing and fishing. The boat ramp might be tidied up, a bench or two installed and signage posted to encourage quiet enjoyment of the area.

Clearly consultation with the Lower Trent Conservation Authority would be required before any work such as sand sucking or dredging could be undertaken, seeking a balance between site improvement and concern for the natural environment. But local citizens see the mill pond as an asset that might be cleaned up so that the Rawson mill pond is no longer described as a “dirty old creek.”

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Economic Development  
Committee and Service Clubs

Timeline ..... 2006-2008

Other Design and Beautification ideas:

- o Hold planning and design sessions/workshops with professional guidance.
- o Enhance trails and parks for walking tours, building on the Green Routes effort.

**2. COMMUNITY LIFE:  
 Preserve Stirling-Rawdon as a place for people actively engaged in community life, with family-oriented features such as sports, recreation/non-sport and social facilities, community safety, active church life, cultural activities, schools/education programs, affordable lifestyle and tax rates.**

Action Project #2.1: Traffic/Parking

**Effectively manage traffic and parking in the village of Stirling, beginning with an analysis of how best to calm traffic and accommodate parking needs.**

Traffic flow and parking policy are complex on-going issues that require a balance among economic benefits, convenience, cost and the sometimes conflicting interests of individual organizations and businesses.

Many residents are concerned about traffic from logging trucks and other large vehicles, particularly those travelling on village streets at high speeds. There are no obvious solutions, although calming measures such as installing more stop signs (which may discourage logging trucks from travelling through) might be considered. Speed bumps, one-way streets, photo radar and closer policing have also been proposed. At the same time, the community must be careful not to discourage drivers generally to such an extent that they bypass the village and stop visiting, shopping and enjoying downtown.

Parking supply also involves balancing a variety of interests. A downtown with parking spaces full goes hand in hand with a vibrant and active core. Although a tour bus might occupy two or three regular spaces, it eliminates the need for 25-50 spaces if visitors came by car. Problems related to insufficient parking might be met with additional off-street parking lots or expansion of existing facilities. Angle parking could be investigated. Co-operative arrangements for parking (such as the one between the Theatre and the United Church) or sensitive procedures (such as tour buses dropping patrons off at the theatre and then parking off street) can do much to improve parking and traffic conditions. Co-ordinating activities to offset peak parking demands could also help. And at times, we all simply have to walk a little further.

It is recommended that the township’s Transportation Committee should take the lead on this project, beginning with an analysis of the options, costs and best solutions for calming traffic and managing the availability and use of parking.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Township of Stirling-Rawdon  
 Timeline ..... Ongoing

### Action Project #2.2: Environment

#### **Pursue earth-friendly policies that mediate human impact on the environment.**

A wide variety of initiatives might be considered to pursue the “greening of Stirling-Rawdon” in areas such as:

- o municipal and community recycling
- o solar panels to light streets
- o pesticide bans or restrictions (like Hudson, PQ, which is “toxin free”)
- o emphasis on local markets for locally produced goods and services as well as pedestrian and bicycle routes to minimize the impacts of transportation
- o hybrid vehicles
- o use of wetlands
- o source water protection, and water conservation measures
- o protection for trees (Swedish model of preservation) and tree planting
- o preserving green spaces, parks and trails
- o waste minimization and composting
- o municipal policies that reflect an environmentally sensitive mindset.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Township of Stirling-Rawdon

Timeline ..... Ongoing

### Action Project #2.3: Local Policing

#### **Maintain strong local policing.**

Stirling-Rawdon’s commitment to maintaining its own police force is a notable feature of the community’s priorities. While other towns and villages appear to pay less to have their policing done by regional law enforcement agencies, some subsequent costs have driven up their policing budgets. It may well be that Stirling-Rawdon obtains better policing and at a better cost.

It is recommended that the community maintain and support strong local policing. The department helps make the community what it is. Police officers are close to residents and should continually work to improve those relationships -- through foot patrols, drop-ins at area farms to get to know farm families, through their work in schools and interaction with youth on the street. The township should continue to give wise oversight and support to enable the police department to exercise its positive influence on community life.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Township of Stirling-Rawdon

Timeline ..... Ongoing

**3. YOUTH:**  
**Make Stirling-Rawdon a place where youth are engaged and integrated in community life -- a great place where they can live, grow up, find jobs, put down roots, and stay or return as citizens and community leaders.**

Action Project #3.1: Connecting with Youth

**Link youth into community life by connecting with them directly, giving them a voice and “place at the table.”**

Youth tend to be ignored if not excluded from general community life, decisions and initiatives. Some residents make the case that young people don't have to be entertained -- they need to be taken seriously. They are not the “leaders of tomorrow” but the leaders of today. They need to be given roles of real responsibility and challenged as citizens. We need to create experiences to prepare them for life. In this way young people forge their values and mature as leaders.

It is recommended that community officials, organizational leaders and leading citizens be mindful of ways to engage youth directly, such as by:

- o Establishing a Youth Advisory Committee that meets periodically to give input to the Mayor and Township Council.
- o Engaging youth leaders in community projects, such as the proposed skateboard park, peer mentoring programs, church youth outreach, concept development for a youth centre, and/or the organization of music festivals, conferences and sports events.
- o Holding discussion sessions or focus groups with youth to give their input to this strategic planning process and the Community-In-Action (Rue Principale) program.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Township of Stirling-Rawdon  
Timeline ..... Begin in Sept. 2005

### Action Project #3.2: Partnering on Youth Activities

#### **Support the providers of youth activities, such as schools, sports groups, the theatre, 4H programs and churches, and build partnerships among them.**

Several local organizations are active in providing programs and activities for youth. It is recommended that a small team be established to share ideas, co-ordinate thinking and serve as advocates for the community's youth. This group might include a significant number of young people, as well as one representative each from such areas as church youth outreach, sports, the arts, service clubs, police, and local employers.

Support should also be extended to local organizations such as the Lions club, which plans to launch a Leo's Club for 12-to-19-year-olds in September. The Pentecostal Church and Grace Chapel, among others, are planning youth outreach. Minor sports associations have long had a close relationship with youth. The theatre involves youth as ushers and might consider ways to create more opportunities for local youth to perform.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Township of Stirling-Rawdon  
Timeline ..... Ongoing

### Action Project #3.3: Mentoring for Youth

#### **Initiate a mentoring program for youth.**

Young people are at perhaps their most impressionable ages from 12 to 15 years. At any age young people are testing their values, navigating social interactions, exploring career options, expressing their creativity, developing confidence and skills, and making life choices. They are looking for meaningful relationships.

While they respond best to mentoring from those close in age, young people can benefit from multi-generational interaction and mentoring in many facets of life, from the workplace to spiritual life, from finding themselves to discovering their gifts as athletes, performers and citizens.

The four steps of mentoring have been described as:

- o You watch, I do.
- o You help, I do.
- o You do, I help.
- o You do, I watch.

It is recommended that a mentoring team be established to advocate for and initiate mentoring activities in all these areas. A quick start could be achieved in the fall of 2005, when church groups plan to bring in speakers for a workshop on how to do mentoring. This group could also lead brainstorming on ways to create mentoring experiences for youth.

Particular attention might be given to peer-mentoring programs. While training would be required, and protocols (such as a Plan to Protect document) needed for reporting abuse, work in this area might yield the most powerful results for our developing teens and young adults.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Pentecostal Church (Paul Kearn)

Timeline ..... Begin in Sept. 2005

Other ideas in support of youth:

- o Skateboard park (or transportation to the one in Madoc)
- o Jobs for those newly entering the workforce
- o Creating opportunities to reverse the “brain drain” and bring back graduates

**4. ACTIVITIES:**  
**Enrich community life with a variety of vibrant programs and activities.**

Action Project #4.1: Playgrounds

**Pursue the skateboard park initiative and improvements to local playgrounds.**

The proposed skateboard park to be located on donated land at the former site of the railroad station is viewed as an important facility to serve youth who do not find a place in traditional sports like hockey, baseball and soccer. It is anticipated that the scale and cost of the skateboard park would be significantly lower than the one built in Madoc for approximately \$250,000, and a committee of young people, parents and community leaders is now working to raise funds and resolve potential issues related to safety, fencing, noise, and hours of operation.

A second recreation initiative involves improvements to the township's five playgrounds, replacing or upgrading the aging playground equipment and revamping them to better meet the needs of younger children.

The equipment was CSA-approved when it was installed several years ago, but replacing it all could involve costs of \$200,000 or more. Revamping the equipment to meet CSA standards might be accomplished for something in the range of \$50,000. This work would include tasks like lowering monkey bars, shortening steps and trimming the overhang at the top of slides so younger children can use the equipment. Steps could be taken to improve the framing around sand piles at the bottom of slides to ensure greater safety.

In addition to local fundraising efforts, the community must actively pursue applications for grants from government programs and funding agencies (such as the recent \$75,000 Ontario Trillium Foundation application) to fund these recreation initiatives.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Township Recreation Committee

Timeline ..... 2006-2008

Action Project #4.2: Summer Concert Series

**Develop a Summer Music-in-the-Park Concert Series.**

The Lions Park offers an attractive venue and opportunity to launch a summer series of concerts, especially for the enjoyment of local residents but also for visitors to the community. At the moment, there are no summer activities of that type undertaken by the Lions Club.

The format for such a program might be modeled on the weekly series that is presented in Marmora, where local talent performs on Tuesday evenings and “Show and Shine” -- an array of polished antique cars from the ‘30s through the early ‘70s -- is presented on Thursday evenings. It may also be possible to partner with Marmora, Madoc and Tweed (which also have Lions Clubs) to exchange and co-ordinate talent by scheduling the performances on alternate evenings.

Some challenges may be involved. The site is serviced with hydro, but it would be necessary to build an outdoor stage and perhaps something of an amphitheatre. While bleachers may not be available, at least during the first year or two, members of the audience could bring lawn chairs. If big name artists were to be brought in, the cost could be prohibitive, but local talent could be featured to start the program.

It is recommended that the Stirling Lions Club be approached to consider taking on this project to enrich community life and take enjoyment of their park to a new level.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Stirling Lions Club

Timeline ..... 2006 and ongoing

### Action Project #4.3: Festivals and Events

#### **Support and grow festivals, tournaments and other special events**

The life of a community is often built around its special celebrations. At the same time, tourists as well as visiting family and friends often are attracted to arts events, festivals, shows, sports tournaments and a variety of other special events.

Stirling-Rawdon has an opportunity to support and grow programs related to its culture and recreation assets such as the theatre, museum, train station, library, covered bridge, mill pond, Lion's park, farmer's market, arena and fairgrounds, the Springbrook ballpark complex, golf courses and many other venues. The township would make a good site for bicycle races, marathons, and similar sports/recreation events. Nature walks and recreational fun days, such as canoeing the Rawdon, have a place in a rich spectrum of activities. Opportunities are limited only by the imagination when it comes to performing arts events/festivals, street theatre, busking, concerts, art shows and film screenings.

It is recommended that the community's event co-ordinators be convened at least quarterly to co-ordinate activities, share resources, plan an annual schedule of events, brainstorm ideas for improving current events and development of new ones, and provide a connection for local business, economic development and community organizations.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Economic Development  
Committee, Stirling-Rawdon  
BIA and Comfort Country

Timeline ..... Ongoing

## **Strategies for ECONOMIC Development**

### **5. ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

**Market (rather than sell) the community: Create an appealing environment to support entrepreneurs and attract visitors ... and promote it!**

#### Action Project #5.1: Opportunities for Entrepreneurs

**Promote entrepreneurial opportunities, including gaps identified in the mix of businesses and services as well as external markets for local enterprises.**

Being a bedroom community and a small market by itself, Stirling-Rawdon presents a challenging environment for small businesses operating here. Many of them have trouble surviving on sales to the local population with competition from big box stores in nearby urban centres like Belleville and Trenton where people commute to work (and often shop). Residents may also find it hard to “shop local” when the cost of merchandise and services are driven up by high overheads and small volumes. At the same time, shops and stores are not positioned or fully integrated to serve the existing tourism trade, driven mainly by the Festival Theatre and periodic special events.

That is not to say that there are no opportunities for entrepreneurship. Various opportunities might be found in:

- o Gaps in the spectrum of products and services required by the local market.
- o Niche markets with both local and external customers (examples range from the theatre to the lavender farm to specialized retail product lines).
- o Tourism opportunities built around events, tournaments, shows (like the Musical Ride or Car Show), local attractions or agri-tourism.
- o More active promotion of existing, underutilized assets (one example might be the Agricultural Museum) or effective promotion of the township as a whole.

In general, it is recommended that economic development efforts should reflect a balance across several sectors at once -- tourism, industry, reasonably-priced shops and small businesses. A natural evolution built on community strengths is preferred over accelerated development.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Economic Development Committee

Timeline ..... Ongoing

### Action Project #5.2: Marketing the Whole Village

#### **Invest in marketing “as a village.”**

Increasingly it has become apparent that businesses in the village of Stirling might compete in external markets more effectively if it did so as a group.

From a customer’s point of view, shopping for merchandise or business services is influenced by many factors -- from the appearance of the streetscape to the availability of parking, from the mix of products and services to how they are promoted in advertising and public relations. It appears that current efforts to create travel experiences are not fully supported by the current mix of stores, hours of operation, lack of promotion or a “critical mass” that attracts tourists to a vintage village.

As a result, it is recommended that businesses and other enterprises, with support from the Township, consider investing more in marketing “as a village” by:

- o Continuing efforts to improve the streetscape through the Community-In-Action (Rue Principale) program.
- o Improving signage through a co-ordinated design program
- o Investing more in promoting Stirling-Rawdon’s charms to outside markets
- o Embracing co-operative advertising programs that promote Stirling-Rawdon as a shopping and tourism destination, featuring the high-level benefits and what makes the community different, better and special.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Stirling-Rawdon BIA  
and Comfort Country

Timeline ..... Ongoing

Action Project #5.3: Overcome Barriers for Start-ups

**Partner to overcome barriers to business start-up or relocation.**

Investors wishing to relocate a business or industry, or entrepreneurs looking to start up a new venture, face a variety of competing options and many barriers to success. Business attraction activities would best be pursued in conjunction with the new Hastings County Economic Development Department (see Strategy #10). Other local activities that might assist entrepreneurs include:

- o Building a Business Incubation Centre
- o Developing an entrepreneurship trust fund or community “angel” network to provide early-stage financial support new ventures.
- o Connecting local entrepreneurs with external networks such as Comfort Country, Hastings County Planning and Economic Development, Community Futures Development Corporations, government departments supporting tourism and agricultural/rural development, research labs, colleges, universities and so on.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Economic Development Committee

Timeline ..... Ongoing

**6. CAPACITY FOR GROWTH:  
Expand capacity to enable growth through residential and economic development in Stirling-Rawdon, and create conditions conducive to a sustainable, economically viable future.**

Action Project #6.1: Sewage/Waste Water Capacity

**Improve the community’s sewage/waste water capacity to permit growth.**

One of the most heartfelt issues identified in the strategic planning process was the freeze placed on Stirling’s growth because of its limited capacity to handle sewage/waste water. The solution to this critical problem will take some time.

The existing sewage lagoon system in Stirling has been at or slightly above its rated operating capacity for some time. In an effort to upgrade the system, the Township commissioned a Schedule “C” Class Environmental Assessment which identified the preferred solution to be an Engineered Wetland system for polishing the effluent from the existing lagoons. The ultimate plan is to run the lagoons in series, feeding into the wetland system. The effluent from the wetland would be discharged continuously during most of the year, using storage capacity in the lagoons as a buffer to hold back flow during dry periods when there is reduced assimilative capacity in the receiving stream.

After numerous meetings and discussions with Ministry of the Environment, the Township has launched a five-year pilot project to prove that the system will work. It is believed that the system can be operated to meet discharge criteria at a flow rate of 1,500 cubic metres per day (almost double current capacity). During the five-year pilot study no discharges of effluent will be made from the wetland to the receiving stream.

The Certificate of Approval for this pilot project was issued in May, 2005 and construction is expected to be complete by November 2005 at which time the monitoring of the system can begin. The University of Guelph along with the Township’s engineers, The Greer Galloway Group, will conduct the monitoring.

In the meantime, the Township might pursue whatever residential growth opportunities exist now in the rural part of the community.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Township of Stirling-Rawdon  
Timeline ..... Ongoing

Action Project #6.2: Long-term Plan for Landfill

**Begin planning now to anticipate and meet future land fill requirements.**

Advocates note that the prevailing approach to waste management in North America is changing as cities and towns run out of capacity in their own dumps and treatment plants and rural communities confront ever-expanding landfills and conflicts arising over urban sewage sludge and manure from large intensive farms spread on farm fields. (Source: <http://quintewatershedcleanup.org/>)

According to an article on [www.environmental-expert.com](http://www.environmental-expert.com), municipalities across Canada are looking for economical and environmental methods to improve their waste management diversion methods. Some are scrambling to assess and extend landfill disposal capacity and others are trying to dramatically increase their diversion rates. Many are initiating a combination of strategies.

The Ontario Waste Management Association (OWMA) has commissioned an independent study to obtain an objective picture of the waste management situation in this province today and in the years to come. The study demonstrates that the lack of landfill capacity in Ontario is reaching crisis proportions and will become much worse over the next five years. (Source: [www.mississauga.com](http://www.mississauga.com))

Rather than wait until Stirling-Rawdon confronts a crisis, it is recommended that the Township take steps at an early date to anticipate the community’s land fill requirements and options to meet those needs.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Township of Stirling-Rawdon  
Timeline ..... 2006

Action Project #6.3: Conducive Economic Conditions

**Create cost-effective, environmentally sensitive conditions conducive to a sustainable, economically viable future.**

Economic development today is typically driven by many factors that interact to create an environment that either encourages or discourages a range of enterprises.

Rural communities are recognizing the need to make a fundamental shift in their approach to economic development to meet an equally challenging environment. In places like the rural Lake Tillery area of North Carolina, economic developers have adopted the view that traditional efforts -- such as a concentration on recruiting industry and businesses from outside the community to relocate on serviced land -- are outmoded.

A more holistic approach recognizes the need to address infrastructure, environmental/ health issues, workforce preparedness and public-private investment in the community. These innovations require a special kind of leadership and core group of “change masters” and effective partnerships with other jurisdictions and agencies.

In Stirling-Rawdon, it is particularly recommended that the community:

- o Maintain competitive tax rates
- o Investigate and secure available government support for economic, tourism and community development projects
- o Follow community improvement principles and design guidelines

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Township of Stirling-Rawdon

Timeline ..... Ongoing

**7. TOURISM CLUSTER:  
Build Stirling-Rawdon’s tourism cluster, within the township and with Comfort Country partners.**

Action Project #7.1: Spectrum of Visitor Services

**Build out the spectrum of what Stirling-Rawdon has to offer visitors (from public washrooms to gift stores and special events), beginning with the needs of current traffic generated by the Festival Theatre and other attractions.**

Visitors coming to Stirling-Rawdon to see a performance at the Festival Theatre, attend a special event at the arena/fairgrounds, or tour the Agricultural Museum seek a spectrum of activities and services, including:

- o Wining and Dining
- o Accommodation
- o Retail shopping
- o Gift shops
- o Public washrooms
- o Visitor information stations
- o Activities to complement the primary object of the visit
- o Activities to appreciate the community’s natural resources
- o Activities to appreciate the community’s culture and heritage
- o Activities to appreciate the community’s sports and recreation

It is recommended that a tourism project team identify needs in these areas that might be addressed by partners in their own area of responsibility, such as the Stirling-Rawdon BIA, local entrepreneurs, Comfort Country partners, tourism and attraction operators, and the municipality.

The tourism project team would also develop a long-term plan to improve the mix and location of tourism-oriented businesses to support and capitalize on visitors coming to local tourism anchors. Over time, Stirling-Rawdon needs to develop its overnight accommodation capacity (perhaps with a small hotel or more B&Bs). Until then, tourism marketing will have to focus on the day-trip and “visiting friends and relatives” markets.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Township of Stirling-Rawdon

Timeline ..... Ongoing

Action Project #7.2: Bundle/Package Heritage and Culture Product

**Work together with Stirling-Rawdon’s Comfort Country partners to “bundle” heritage and cultural attractions, programs and events.**

The Comfort Country destination marketing brand is designed for tourists looking to experience the charm of affordable small town Ontario. It produces business directories and destination maps distributed through Chambers of Commerce and Tourist Information Operators.

The brand promotes country village communities that have that easy feeling of days gone by, that special feeling you get when you really feel at home. It has something to do with small town country charm, people who say hello on the street, quaint shops and smiling faces and the unrushed pace of lifestyles based on lakefront living and farm values. In Comfort Country you have antique and knick knock shops instead of crowded box stores, and there are bed and breakfast accommodations and country inns instead of high-rise hotels.

Within that brand, Stirling-Rawdon can be an active partner, working with Tweed, Madoc and Marmora to:

- o Bundle attractions and activities for particular tourism markets (cultural tourists, outdoor enthusiasts, scenic tour seekers, and so on).
- o Support packaging for day trips, self-directed tours and trail hiking.
- o Co-ordinate and promote full seasons of special events, cultural festivals and sports tourism events.
- o Undertake co-operative marketing, advertising and promotion programs.
- o Co-ordinate available overnight accommodation in the Comfort Country area.
- o Identify ways to build mid-week and shoulder season business.
- o Identify appeals to special interest groups (like genealogists) and other niches.
- o Cross-promote other Comfort Country towns to visitors coming to the township.
- o Provide an information centre for visitors (as well as residents and potential relocating businesses).
- o Present workshops for tourism-oriented businesses and operators.
- o Identify ways to partner with the BRAVO initiative in the Bancroft area

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Township of Stirling-Rawdon

Timeline ..... Ongoing

Action Project #7.3: Authenticity and Unique Strengths

**Encourage authenticity in what Stirling-Rawdon offers visitors and promote what makes the township different, better and special.**

Stirling-Rawdon’s reputation is of interest to many different audiences -- visitors/tourists, talented people looking to move to the community, and investors or entrepreneurs considering business opportunities here. In all cases, development and promotion should focus on those unique and authentic qualities Stirling-Rawdon has to offer. For instance, the community has perhaps the best agricultural museum in all of Eastern Ontario. The Stirling Festival has an outstanding reputation in the performing arts. These types of assets can anchor the local tourism product and promotion.

In terms of building the township’s tourism cluster, this becomes important in such areas as:

- o The type of advice and encouragement provided by the County and the Stirling-Rawdon BIA to those interested in becoming tourism operators
- o The type of profile promoted by Comfort Country
- o The message that local residents tell visiting family and friends

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Township of Stirling-Rawdon  
Timeline ..... Ongoing

Other ideas to support the tourism cluster:

- o Develop walking tours and maps for self-guided tours.
- o Develop an Arboretum for native and exotic trees, or specialty greenhouses.
- o Develop events and promotional techniques to get visitors to “try Stirling-Rawdon,” serve them well, and make it easy for them to come back.

**8. LOCAL BUSINESS:  
Support initiatives that strengthen Stirling-Rawdon’s commercial and service business sector as it serves the needs of the local community and special niche markets.**

Action Project #8.1: Marketing as a Group

**Improve marketing of village businesses as a group, both in terms of product (e.g. Sunday shopping) as well as co-operative promotion.**

As discussed in Recommendation #5-2 (Marketing the Whole Village), the long-term economic health and progress of the downtown business district will depend in some measure on its ability to sell its strengths as a group. Issues such as common store hours and Sunday shopping are continuing issues in most business districts with independent operators (i.e. outside of malls).

The best approach is often to break large projects down into many smaller steps pursued week after week and season after season in a program of continuous improvement. Some ideas include:

- o Engaging a staff “floater” who could work for various downtown businesses on a rotating schedule to ease the burden of extra staffing for Sunday shopping or extended shopping hours
- o Promote co-operative marketing/packaging/advertising efforts
- o Promote “buy local” initiatives based on competitive value
- o Partner with other nearby communities to achieve “critical mass” in marketing to external consumer niches (e.g. seniors who might take tours from Belleville or Napanee to visit Stirling, Madoc, Marmora and Tweed)
- o Integrate business offerings with special events and tourism attractions
- o Support anchor stores and operations that attract customers downtown.
- o Encourage existing businesses and newcomers to each play their part in working towards a common vision. That might involve starting new services to fill gaps in meeting customer needs, making storefront improvements, or improving the network and integration with the rest of the community.
- o Pursue government funding and support for downtown improvements.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Stirling-Rawdon BIA

Timeline ..... Ongoing

Action Project #8.2: Planning for Downtown Expansion

**Develop a plan to provide for future downtown expansion**

Having a long-term view, the Stirling-Rawdon Community Strategic Plan necessarily looks well beyond the present circumstances for perspectives on residential growth, market development, streetscapes and urban design, building a tourism cluster and a healthy downtown business area. It anticipates a time when the downtown must establish more traffic generators to help local businesses compete with “big box” stores, especially those in other communities where commuters work. Long-term solutions for parking and traffic management are required. The commercial district will require space, facilities and design guidelines to grow into an expanded role, and should be guided by a vision for that future.

Some of that vision will come from the current work being conducted under the Community-In-Action (Rue Principale) program. Building and design briefs should also be prepared as a next step towards downtown renewal.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Stirling-Rawdon BIA  
 Township of Stirling-Rawdon  
 Timeline ..... 2006-2007

Action Project #8.3: Pedestrian Area Improvements

**Improve the business district as a pleasant pedestrian area.**

Pleasant shopping areas and living communities depend on pedestrian-friendly spaces. It is recommended that work be continued to improve trails, parks, green spaces, streetscapes, traffic calming, benches and other pedestrian amenities.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Township of Stirling-Rawdon  
 BIA/Service Clubs/Others/All  
 Timeline ..... Ongoing

**9. AGRICULTURE:**

**Through dialogue with agricultural groups, explore ways to support farm organizations as they seek new markets and help farmers adapt to emerging industry challenges.**

Action Project #9.1: Agri-tourism**Develop and promote agri-tourism opportunities involving local farms.**

An agri-tourism attraction or activity combines the main elements of both agriculture and tourism, providing experiences for visitors that stimulate economic benefits for farms, local businesses and the community generally.

Attractions that often meet this definition include agriculture-related museums, festivals and fairs; Century farms; corn-maze enterprises; petting zoos and horseback riding; on-farm tours, vacations and overnight accommodation (B&Bs); farmers' markets; farm-gate and pick-your-own retail; and wineries/visitor centres.

For example, Stirling-Rawdon has a unique farm in Lavender Hills, the only lavender farm from here to B.C. and Washington State. If appropriate financing were available, a visitor centre might be established there much as wineries have tasting rooms, barrel cellars and other interesting features. Visitors could learn about growing lavender, distilling the product and producing cosmetics like lotions and creams. (Some product, of course, could be available for sale.) The largest lavender farm in England attracts approximately 150,000 visitors a year!

Another option might be to pair promotion of the Agricultural Museum with on-farm getaways/education weekends -- what farming *used* to be like, and what it is today. Milk producers might give paying visitors a dairy farm experience, viewing the milking and participating in farm-related activities. A sheep farm might give sheep dog demonstrations or teach visitors about the production process that begins with shearing the wool. Cross promotion of the farmers' market and development of on-farm B&Bs are also possibilities in the agri-tourism sector.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Economic Development Committee

Timeline ..... 2006-2008

Action Project #9.2: Support for Farmers' Market

**Improve and promote the farmers' market and a local "brand"**

Recent improvements in the farmers' market at the covered bridge should be followed up with more active promotion of what's available for sale there. The range of product might be broadened, and include organic or naturally grown potatoes, strawberries and beef, or baking, honey and jams, or farm fresh eggs. At the same time, the impact of outside (non-taxpaying) producers coming in and undercutting local producers and businesses must also be taken into account.

Could there be a Hastings or Comfort Country brand? Some other communities (e.g. Kawartha and Manitoulin) have had some success in developing brands to promote their agricultural products. The Kawartha Choice marketing initiative, for instance, was developed to build brand awareness for locally grown and produced agricultural products. There are discussions about a Native Beef Brand, as well as a Bruce County marketing model, called "Beef Connections," that makes it easy for consumers to order slaughtered beef directly from farmers.

In the Manitoulin area, the certification logo "Made on Manitoulin Official Brand" ensures that people can clearly see that the products are made on the island. Their consumer survey showed that 85% of people liked to know that a product was made locally, and 80% found that the logo made a product more appealing.

To become certified to join the Manitoulin Branding Association, the following criteria must be met:

- o The product must be created on Manitoulin.
- o The business must be located on Manitoulin.
- o At least 50% of the workers used in production must be Manitoulin residents.
- o Production must meet all safety standards and labour regulations.
- o The producer must have a primary residence on Manitoulin Island.

Producers of original Manitoulin products enjoy improved marketability, more product exposure through mass marketing, identification with a recognizable group of uniquely Manitoulin producers, better prices for original products and sharing of travel and registration for trade fairs and off-island promotion.

It is recommended that research be conducted to discover the lessons learned in other communities that have implemented local brands and propose appropriate actions that might be taken in Stirling-Rawdon.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Township of Stirling-Rawdon

Timeline ..... 2006

Action Project #9.3: Support for Farmers

**Celebrate farms, farming and farmers with special events, and help farm businesses overcome barriers in marketing and value-added production.**

Many options might be explored to support and promote both new and traditional forms of agriculture as viable businesses and lifestyles.

Special events such as Dairy Days, the Holstein Club's farm day, Pumpkinfest and country fairs can help remind or educate people on where their food comes from. So can promotion of organic farming or fresh local produce at farmers' markets. These activities celebrate farmers and their contribution to our society. Projects in this area might be pursued by existing event organizers and by tourism promoters like the Stirling-Rawdon BIA representatives serving with the Comfort Country non-profit corporation.

As farm operators enter new markets or expand their operations, they sometimes find they must expand their range of skills or cope with tasks that go beyond their previous experience and training. In addition to expertise in agriculture, for example, a farmer might need to learn how to promote and market produce to wholesale distributors, or how to manage retailing at the farm-gate, or how to add value with processing or manufacturing operations on the farm instead of shipping produce or animals to food processors, meat packers or those who use agricultural produce to make other products.

It is recommended that a community task force initiate a dialogue with farmers to identify those skills, success models and knowledge of best practices that are needed and how best to provide access to them.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Township of Stirling-Rawdon

Timeline ..... 2006 and Ongoing

Other ideas to support farm organizations:

- o Investigate growth and community development opportunities related to urban market gardening (new agricultural market, employment for youth etc.)
- o Investigate options for establishing a food co-operative

**10. DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS:  
Partner with other communities and levels of government to attract, sustain and retain small industry, service and government operations, and emerging sectors such as cabinet-making.**

Action Project #10.1: Partner with County Economic Development

**Be an active partner and participant in the County’s economic development initiatives, working closely with the new economic development department.**

In May 2005, the County of Hastings agreed to hire an Economic Development Coordinator, attached to the Planning Department, to help it build healthy communities through increased assessment, by promoting existing assets in the County; and to form a voluntary Steering Committee composed of members of the local municipalities within Hastings County, representatives of Comfort Country and similar groups. The committee would work with the Economic Development Coordinator to develop goals and objectives for the economic development initiative.

The budget for the initiative -- initially estimated to be a requirement in the range of \$250,000 to cover hiring the co-ordinator, support staff and related costs -- would be approved as part of the 2006 County Budget. As a result, hiring would begin no sooner than Spring 2006, depending on when the budget is approved.

With staffing in place, the new department is likely to turn to information gathering as its first task -- collecting local details on land availability, infrastructure, business services, and so on -- in order to provide “one-stop shopping” for potential investors, entrepreneurs and relocating businesses or industries. In contrast with large automotive plants, which may not be a prime recruitment target, it is expected the new department will pursue opportunities in tourism (including trails and eco-tourism) as well as efforts to attract, retain and grow smaller 2-3 person businesses.

Stirling-Rawdon has an opportunity to be an active partner in this initiative by serving on the Steering Committee, providing information to help the County market various opportunities in the township, and working with the Economic Development Co-ordinator to welcome prospects when they visit to tour sites.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Township of Stirling-Rawdon  
and Comfort Country leaders

Timeline ..... 2006 and ongoing

Other economic development partnering ideas:

- o Partner with the region to market Stirling-Rawdon to small industry prospects
- o Explore the possibility of developing a green energy niche

**PROCESS Strategies**

**11. BALANCE IN THE PROCESS:  
 Seek balance between what the community wants and what it can pay for, between short-term pain and long-term gain, between business-oriented approaches and community-oriented values.**

Other ideas:

- Promote a unified vision and definitive plan for the future, supported by Council, Stirling-Rawdon BIA, Comfort Country, service clubs and community groups.
- Engage full-time project management to co-ordinate and champion activities to implement the Community Strategic Plan.
- Invite ideas for action projects from across the community.
- Move from talking to action as soon as possible, co-ordinating efforts with existing groups rather than new committees.
- Partner with neighbouring communities.
- Build local leadership and capacity.

Responsibility/Most-Interested-Party to Lead ..... Township of Stirling-Rawdon  
 Timeline ..... Ongoing

## Appendix "A"

### **TOPICS/QUESTIONS FOR COMMUNITY LEADER INTERVIEWS - PHASE I**

Interviews were conducted with more than 15 community leaders to help Stirling-Rawdon develop the initial key elements of a Community Strategic Plan to guide its evolution in the future. This first round of interviews to develop a master list of issues and strategic choices facing the community followed the interview guide below:

- 1) Thinking about Stirling-Rawdon over the next few years, and from your own point of view, what would you say are Stirling-Rawdon's ...
  - o Top 3 Strengths
  - o Top 3 Weaknesses
  - o Top 3 Opportunities
  - o Top 3 Threats or Barriers
- 2) >From your perspective, what are the top 3 issues that must be resolved or choices that must be made for Stirling-Rawdon to become the community you would like it to be in the future?
- 3) There are many potential priorities and areas where the community could put its effort into becoming the best it can be. I'm going to walk you through a checklist of various areas such as economic vitality, quality of life, quality of place -- I'd like you to comment on what you feel should be a priority for future efforts in those areas. Let's start with:

#### Economic Vitality:

- o Tourism
- o Current small businesses (Stirling-Rawdon BIA)
- o To grow or not
- o Agriculture

#### Quality of Place:

- o Community Appearance (historic character, public spaces, streets)
- o Land Use (development, range of housing, natural resources)
- o Parks and Recreation (facilities)
- o Infrastructure

#### Quality of Life:

- o Community Services (fire, health, safety, water, sewer, street lights)
- o Arts and Culture
- o Sports and Recreation (programs)
- o Education and Learning

- 4) Planning for the future has to fit with community values and beliefs. I would be interested in your views about Stirling-Rawdon community values: in other words: "How Do We Do Things Around Here?"
- 5) Before we go, I was wondering if any other communities come to mind as model communities. Are there any places that really appeal to you as an example of what Stirling-Rawdon could become ... that could be models for a future vision for the community?

## Appendix “B”

# **Early Findings: Phase 1 Interview Results Stirling-Rawdon Community Strategic Plan**

8020Info has conducted initial in-depth interviews with 15 community members (in addition to three members of the project steering committee) and has identified a number of important themes and findings to guide the Community Strategic Plan. Some highlights are included below. More complete details will be included in the final report.

The Township of Stirling-Rawdon has some wonderful strengths based on its people, lifestyle, facilities, natural beauty and built heritage. It also faces some challenges and choices for the future.

### **Highlights: Some Stirling-Rawdon Strengths/Opportunities**

- The residents of Stirling-Rawdon take great pride in their community, and show it through active volunteerism, generous support of local fundraising efforts and pride in the community’s unique qualities. The village and township have a friendly and vibrant community spirit, and offer residents a beautiful, desirable place in which to live.
- The community offers both a rural lifestyle as well as amenities, while at the same time being close to several larger urban centres such as Belleville, Kingston, Peterborough and Toronto.
- Stirling-Rawdon has several important assets such as the downtown business district, Festival Theatre, Agricultural Museum, the train station, covered bridge, farmers’ market, soccer and baseball fields, arena and fairgrounds. These assets offer a platform for future growth, prosperity and quality of life.
- The township has outstanding sports, recreation and educational programs. Cultural life is driven by the Festival Theatre, art shows, and many special events. Although the community does not have its own hospital (residents must drive to Belleville), it has family doctors, a dentist, chiropractor and local pharmacy -- unlike so many communities of its size.
- Stirling-Rawdon is an attractive community for families. It offers low costs, active recreation programs, strong educational facilities, and is a safe place to raise a family.
- Service clubs are extremely active in Stirling-Rawdon and accomplish a lot, even if they aren’t always co-ordinated in their efforts.

### **Highlights: Some Stirling-Rawdon Weaknesses/Threats/Barriers**

- While recent steps have been taken to start addressing this problem, limited capacity to handle sewage/waste water is clearly an issue. The freeze on residential development and constraints on industry pose severe limitations on Stirling-Rawdon's ability to grow.
- Being a bedroom community, and a small market at that, Stirling-Rawdon presents a challenging environment for small businesses operating here. They must compete with big box stores in Belleville and Trenton, where many people work and therefore shop. At the same time, shops and stores are not positioned or fully integrated to serve the existing tourism trade, driven mainly by the Festival Theatre and periodic special events.
- There are a number of storefront vacancies in the Mill Street area, which would benefit from renewal.
- While Stirling-Rawdon has a long and strong agricultural tradition, the farming industry today is significantly challenged by high costs and low prices, world events like BSE, sale of land for development, and by young people leaving family farms to pursue other economic opportunities.
- The closing of Brown's Shoes pretty much marked the end of industry in Stirling-Rawdon. To attract new industry, it would have to actively compete with dozens of other communities that can offer better services, larger workforces and other incentives to investors and relocating businesses.
- Stirling-Rawdon faces a "brain drain" as many young people leave the community to pursue education or find jobs not available locally. They also need activities to grow roots here, which is especially difficult for those who are not inclined to participate in the sports programs like hockey, baseball and soccer.
- Parking

### **Highlights: Stirling-Rawdon Ideals and Philosophies**

Interviewees were asked to identify values, beliefs and philosophies by answering the question: "How do we do things around here?"

The responses described Stirling-Rawdon as a little village with a big heart, and as an extremely friendly, welcoming place where people like to socialize. Here the rule is "dialogue first" -- people speak up when they have problems with their neighbours or their community. Sometimes residents "decide with their hearts rather than their brains" (avoiding the unpopular or conflicting course of action even when it might be the best thing to do).

Comments also indicated that new initiatives must “start with the grassroots.” And if you are new to town, you have to be accepted first, making friends over time.

People care about their community, and everyone pitches in. Churches are involved and committed, and community service groups like Lions, Rotary, and the Stirling-Rawdon BIA are active. When the community takes on a project, no one likes to spin their wheels -- they don't want to just keep talking.

The pace of life in Stirling-Rawdon was described as “very slow” and “laid back.” One person noted that nothing is urgent: “If you want something right away, it will still take a week.” Another person described the village as very traditional (like Mayberry). At the very least, Stirling-Rawdon is a law-abiding community that shares traditional values -- family and community are important.

At the same time, it must get past a natural resistance to change and a mindset that “it's not going to work.” Some of this tug-of-war about change involves different values, expectations and goals between long-time residents and new “urban refugees” who have moved to the community in recent years from large cities. There also seems to be different assessments of how the community is doing at this point. Those closer to the action felt progress was being made on substantial problems. Others felt community leadership and past councils had misplaced priorities, a lack of vision, and a limited amount of business experience needed to achieve any vision.

Comments generally espoused a need for balance in economic development. As one person noted: “We need to train more people in the trades -- not everyone will be a computer whiz or government worker.” Similarly, many respondents urged that a natural evolution built on community strengths was preferable to accelerated development. Others emphasized the need to balance growth across several sectors at once -- tourism, industry, reasonably-priced shops and small businesses. Several comments reflected a philosophy that the best approach is to attract people, give them the best service possible, present a clean and friendly community, and look for them to come back to spend more.

### **Highlights: Models for Stirling-Rawdon**

Interestingly, respondents found it difficult if not impossible to identify other communities that might serve as a model or inspiration for Stirling-Rawdon, helping it become all that it can be in the future. Some appreciated the gift shops in Bloomfield, the tourism approach of Niagara-on-the-Lake and Stratford, or the unique culture of St. Jacob's, but for the most part interviewees felt Stirling-Rawdon is a unique, self-contained little town without comparison.

## **Highlights: Some Stirling-Rawdon Choices**

### **Bedroom Community or Tourism Destination? Or Both?**

Those interviewed appreciated both the small business and tourism sectors, even though both sectors currently face significant economic development challenges. Most felt industrial pursuits would be a waste of time. Some said Stirling-Rawdon's future will depend on its development as a superb bedroom community. Others are counting on tourism to bring in revenue from outside, now that industry no longer fulfills that function. Another suggested that the township should become a "green" environmentally friendly community.

Small businesses have trouble surviving with a small local population and competition from big box stores in nearby urban centres where people commute to work. Residents find it hard to "shop local" when the cost of merchandise and services are driven up by high overheads and small volumes. On the other hand, current efforts to create travel experiences are not fully supported by the current mix of stores, hours of operation, lack of promotion or a "critical mass" that attracts tourists to a vintage village.

As one person said: "What do we want to market Stirling as -- a mecca of arts and culture or a bedroom community?" We need to have a unique appeal and can't mimic St. Jacob's, for example, which has its own authentic Amish/Mennonite community.

Some say we have to face reality: We need more than just the theatre and museum as a reason to visit and stay -- otherwise we become nothing more than a "drive-through". The transition will take time. Others noted we need stores other than charity shops (on Mill Street?) that would add to the tourism business. The clean-up day made a start on improving the appearance and facades for tourists. The Main Street program is expected to help. One person suggested we need to do a better job of co-ordinating the operations of existing attractions -- the arena with the theatre with the museum with the train station. Others pointed to the value of special events that can attract thousands to Stirling for first-time and repeat visits.

On the local business side, growth has been limited by the development freeze imposed by the lack of sewage/waste water capacity. This was one of the top issues raised in the first round of consultations. It is hoped that expanded sewage/waste water capacity will lead to Stirling-Rawdon's growth as a bedroom community, generating more taxes and an upward economic spiral. And some respondents also noted that real opportunities exist for unique, specialized or customer-service-oriented businesses or where local services are lacking.

### **How to Build Product and Markets?**

Several respondents noted we should start building on what we have rather than what we recruit/bring in (i.e. community clean up; improving the appearance of the Mill Street area and other storefronts; parks; building on the theatre, museum, train station etc.).

Finding a use for the Brown's Shoes facility was also frequently noted.

One person noted that the community will have to work its way from idea to action. People are resistant to change -- change is scary. Is that a constraint or a challenge? We need to know exactly where we're going; people want to have a say and reach a consensus.

Some recommended "planting the seed and letting it evolve naturally with subtle changes." In other words, don't accelerate growth and development and disrupt the close-knit friendly community. Maintain the quality of life Stirling-Rawdon is known for. Don't spoil the character of the village -- it has taken years to build it.

### **Building a Community for Youth, Families or Seniors? Or All?**

Several ideas were mentioned to build the community as a great place for particular demographic groups -- a skateboard park for youth, for instance, or infrastructure to attract and support an upscale retirement community. Others noted that Stirling-Rawdon's three schools, excellent sports/recreation facilities and programs, arts and culture activities, medical facilities and low-cost lifestyle make the community ideal for families. (The development freeze is seen as a major barrier to this option.) Others see a major need to address the migration of youth to other communities by creating suitable local job opportunities, experiences and incentives that help them put down roots and/or return to their home community.

### **Vision and Leadership?**

Several respondents noted the community needs a unified vision for the future and a definitive plan to focus the community's efforts (both financial and volunteer efforts).

They called for leadership, described as being "progressive thinkers who do something." And not everyone was complementary about past municipal councils, suggesting a different mindset and leadership was needed to move forward. (They worry about spending 15 cents on major initiatives but gave the tsunami effort \$2,400, one interviewee commented dryly.)

Others noted that community commitment, effort and energy will be needed from everyone -- residents, businesses, service clubs, youth and seniors -- to make the transition happen. (One referenced JFK: It's not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.)

Appendix “C” -- Discussion Notes: June 2, 2005

## Community Strategic Planning Notes

### Overview of Phase 1 Interviews:

- 15 hours interviewing 16 residents plus the project steering group; 74 pages of notes
- SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats/Barriers)
- Areas of Effort: Economic Vitality; Quality of Place; Quality of Life
- Values and beliefs / Examples and models from other towns
- “Top Three” Strategic Choices

### Stirling-Rawdon Strengths and Opportunities

- Community spirit, volunteerism, generosity, pride in beautiful community
- Rural lifestyle, but with amenities and proximity to larger centres; role as a hub
- Assets: downtown; Festival Theatre; Agricultural Museum, train, bridge, market
- Quality of Life: sports, rec, education, facilities, health services, local police
- Attractive community for families

### Stirling-Rawdon Weaknesses/Threats/Barriers

- Sewage/waste water -- freeze on development
- Challenging environment for small business -- size; big box stores; commuters
- Challenging environment for tourism -- great assets but not an integrated cluster
- Great agricultural traditions, but an embattled economic sector
- The end of industry with Brown’s Shoes closing? -- stiff competition to recruit
- Vacant stores
- Provincial government decisions that seem to “write off” rural Ontario
- Parking / transport traffic through town
- Brain drain and migration of youth

### Stirling-Rawdon Ideals/Philosophies/Models

- A unique, self-contained small town without comparison
- Friendly, welcoming, traditional, laid-back, prefer to avoid conflict
- Start with the grassroots -- they are willing to pitch in and want action.
- Resistance to change; leadership challenges; multiple rather than one unified vision
- Long-time residents and “urban refugees” -- different values and expectations
- Strategic mindset: attract people, treat them well, and they will come back to visit/live
- Balance growth across sectors -- natural evolution vs. accelerated development
- Don’t spoil the character of the community.

## Stirling-Rawdon -- STRATEGIC CHOICES

- Community vision:  
Bedroom community, cultural tourism town or “green” community? (Or all/both?)
- Pursue residential growth or not? Target Families? Affluent seniors? Entrepreneurs?
  
- Market or sell? Build on current assets/create environment, or recruit to a plan?
- Pursue industrial development, partner with the region to recruit, or give it up as a waste of time and money?
- Build downtown as a centre of services primarily for the local market or recruit traffic generators? Leave it to entrepreneurs or support it as a community (shop local)?
- Build a competitive cultural tourism cluster or position assets for mainly local use?
- Apply more business-oriented thinking to municipal decisions, or not? Design a multi-year (10-20 year) plan to guide development of infrastructure/services?
  
- Quality of life -- but at what cost (e.g. taxes)?
- Make beautification (streetscapes/signage/parks/ponds/trails) a community priority or leave it to individual volunteers, business groups, service clubs and governments?
- Invest in community infrastructure development (rather than economic development) -- housing for seniors, development of the Mill Pond area and local trails, invest in equipment for the library, restore heritage buildings etc.
- Invest in non-sports facilities and programs for youth, or not? (e.g. youth centre, skateboard park, cultural programs for youth)
- Pursue strategies to create job opportunities for local youth, or repatriate them?
  
- Pursue a unified vision and definitive plan for the future, or let it emerge from individual initiative? Where should the leadership come from? How can we attract the necessary experience and expertise?

## Next Steps

- Working session to develop action objectives to bring confirmed strategies to life
- Volunteers? (Let Kathy Reid know.) Dates? (June 10, 13-15, 17, 23?)