

*THAMESFORD Taking Action Group (T'TAG)
Volunteers Building Thamesford's Future*

Community Survey Results



INTRODUCTION

Thamesford Taking Action Group (T'TAG) is a group of area volunteers dedicated to improving and adding to the quality of life in Thamesford. T'TAG is incorporated as a not for profit organization, initially forming in 2007.

During the past 2 1/2 years, T'TAG, with the support of Oxford Small Business, Zorra Township, Thamesford Lions, and OMAFRA (Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Farming and Rural Affairs) has worked to identify the strengths in the Thamesford community as well as those areas that can be improved.

A three prong approach was taken.

T'TAG participated in a program developed by OMAFRA, the First Impressions Program. Thamesford was paired with Grand Valley by OMAFRA. Representatives from Thamesford visited Grand Valley and generated a report of "First Impressions". Representatives from Grand Valley did the same for Thamesford. The work done on this project was by volunteers with financial support from the organizations listed above.

At the same time as volunteers were working on the First Impressions report, T'TAG developed with the assistance of Oxford Small Business Support Centre Inc (OSB) and OMAFRA, a **Business Survey**. Volunteers visited all the businesses that could be identified in Thamesford and worked through individual surveys. These were compiled with staff support from OSB and OMAFRA.

The third prong was the Community Survey which was developed by T'TAG volunteers and included in the October 2009 Village Voice which goes out to all mail boxes in Thamesford and area. The Survey was also available online at Thamesford.org. Completed paper surveys were left at the Library, Thamesford Pharmacy, JC Graphics, or faxed to JC Graphics. Online surveys were accumulated through online reports. Volunteers then proceeded to analyze the data and combine the paper and online responses to produce the following report.

T'TAG would like to express its thanks to all in the Community who participated in the above projects. So many individuals and businesses have worked together to ensure that these projects were successfully completed. Financial thanks goes out to Oxford Small Business Support Centre Inc., Thamesford Lions, Zorra Township, and OMAFRA. The results of the First Impressions program, the Business Survey, and the Community Survey are critical to any further projects or actions that will benefit Thamesford and were extremely important in T'TAG being a recipient of a Trillium Foundation Grant in April 2010, as well as Thamesford being selected to participate in OMAFRA's Main Street Program. The objective of the Main Street Program is to analyze the needs of the Village from an economic standpoint, develop and implement a strategic plan to attract new businesses, assist existing ones, and continue with the current improvements on Dundas Street, with a particular emphasis on the future of the Mill.

This report will be posted to Thamesford.org. Many thanks to Thamesford Business Association (TBA) for their work in the Community, their support to T'TAG and for sponsoring Thamesford.org

REPORT OF 2009 COMMUNITY SURVEY RESPONSES

Kudos to Thamesford and area and all who responded to the Thamesford Taking Action Group's (TTAG) Community Survey. We received 82 paper submissions and 45 people completed the survey online. This is a response rate of 10%. This return rate is considered to be very good in the world of surveys where a 3-5% return rate is considered to be average and acceptable. As a result of the high response rate, the results can be seen to represent the attitudes of the community as a whole.

Congratulations Thamesford responders - you are above average!!!

This response shows that people care about their community and have willingly spent time to complete the survey and provide thoughtful responses to the questions. In addition, about 50% of the respondents said they would be willing to donate time, money, materials, trades work, expertise, contacts, references, and ideas to projects that would improve the community.



What do we like about Thamesford?

60% of the comments stated that the respondents liked the small town atmosphere, the friendly people, cleanliness of the village, and that it is quiet and a safe place to raise a family. In addition, 30% of the comments related to the Village's amenities: being close to major highways, centres and airports; the library/resource centre; the outdoor pool, the community centre/arena, ball diamonds, soccer pitches; dentist, dental clinic and pharmacy; river, parks and green spaces; new sidewalks, sewers, tree lined streets; hairdressers, restaurants, Tim Horton's, bank, post office, and churches. Other positive comments included the annual community events, such as Calithumpian and the parades.

What do we dislike about Thamesford?

There were 84 specific items submitted. Of those the highest number was the lack of a grocery store (24%); next was, excessive traffic/truck traffic/traffic noise (12%); then, too many gravel pits, poor condition of the mill/dam; and lack of doctor/medical facilities (8% each). People voiced their views about poor water quality, appearance of Main Street, cell phone reception, no indoor pool, vandalism, no public transportation, high water rates/taxes, insularity of village, odours, no car wash, barking dogs, ineffectual local government, no licenced daycare facility, and poorly enforced building codes.

Most of the survey participants are fairly to very satisfied with Thamesford as a place to live - a resounding 90%!

Only 2% were fairly dissatisfied and 7% had no opinion.

Who filled out the surveys?

More women than men identified themselves as the ones completing the survey and the most respondents were in the 45-64 age range (43%). 21% who identified their ages were in the 20-44 age group, with 36% being 65 and over. This shows that interest in the community is not restricted to any one age group or demographic.

Of those who indicated their work status and location of their work, 44 % were retired, 24% worked in London, 9% in Thamesford, 9% at home (this could be in or out of the Village but in the N0M 2M0 postal code area), 5% in Woodstock and 3% in Ingersoll. The remaining people who marked their surveys worked in other parts of South Western Ontario.

What do we do in the Village?

The Community events most attended by respondents were: Calithumpian Events (72%); Santa Claus Parade (62%), Wienerfest (27%); Trojans' games (16%), Minor Hockey games (16%); Minor Baseball games (17%); Minor Soccer games (10%). Lawn bowling and figure skating events were each attended by less than 10% of the respondents. A few people wrote in events, such as the Fire Fighters' Breakfast and yard sales, and they could be listed in a future survey.



Many of you (more than 60%) visit downtown Thamesford at least once a week, be it for public services like the library or post office, or for banking, health care, or hair salon, or for walking or going to the restaurants. And 50% go downtown for shopping. This is a good customer base to build on.

What does the Village need?

The strongest support for new businesses were food related: grocery store (70%), expanded farmers' market-including organic lines (43%), bakery (24%), restaurant/pub (25%). The next highest business that people wanted was a hardware store (41%). 31% would like to see more health services, 14% a clothing or discount clothing store, and 13% a full service liquor store. The remaining suggestions had 10% or less response rate but included: book store, gift shop, furniture/appliance store, shoe store, and electronics shop. Some other suggestions were: car wash, fitness centre, splash pad, dollar store, doctor, retirement centre, youth centre.

With respect to new types of activities or facilities, many of the those responding (47%) would like to see an new or expanded medical centre that would include a doctor who would take Thamesford patients. In reviewing the responses to the specific question about a medical facility being established in Thamesford, a resounding 99% of those responding, supported the idea. Additional comments noted that it would be a great benefit for seniors or anyone who does not have access to regular transportation and that a nurse practitioner and a walk in clinic would be advantageous to growth in Thamesford.

Other responses to new types of activities/facilities were: 32% would like to see a permanent farmers' market and 20% would like to see a skateboard park. An outdoor rink/arena was supported by 13% of the respondents and 16% checked off a theatre/concert venue. The remaining responses were under 10% for a downtown parkade and fair. Other submitted suggestions included splash pad or water park, teen centre, indoor pool, fitness centre, tennis courts, licensed day care, off leash area for dogs, and shared recreational path around the Village.

Most agreed that the shops are open when they want to shop (77%), but that the products and services desired are not available (56%). Most felt that the prices of products and services in Thamesford were reasonable (77%). The most cited reasons for not shopping in Thamesford was lack of availability and/or better selection (86%). The next 2 highest reasons were better price and better hours (31%).

95% liked the look and feel of Thamesford and 69% liked the look of downtown. People feel safe in Thamesford with 93% feeling safe, even at night.

Parking was found to be convenient and easy to use by 84% of the respondents and 77% shopped locally whenever possible.

Whether there were enough trees downtown was split - 51% said yes and 49% said no. However, in another section, the response was that trees on Dundas Street was fair to poor (57%) and 39% saying they were good to excellent.

The perception of the Mill as a central focus of the village was also split: 49% felt that it was and 51% indicated it was not. It needs to be recognized that the current state of the property is not good. Most people provided additional comments to the specific question “your thoughts about the Mill”. Of these 44% said to restore it and use it for the benefit of the Village; 4% said to restore the good parts; 21% said do something-restore or demolish; and 28% to demolish it entirely. The overall written response was that the Mill is an opportunity too long ignored and that development opportunities need to be considered carefully so as to attract appropriate businesses and money to the community. Many suggestions for uses were made including: fine dining restaurant, establish park and trails, gift and antique stores, medical centre, art gallery, artists’ studios, farmers’ market, offices, theatre, condos/apartments, and gym. Caution about the use of tax payers’ money was also raised.

Respondents agreed that they were satisfied with Thamesford’s recreation facilities and programs (73%) but 55% were not so satisfied with the entertainment options.

Only 24% felt that gravel pits were an asset to the community. 76% disagreed, with 53% strongly disagreeing.

A specific question that requested written comments was asked about gravel pits. There were 82 written comments. Of those comments 7% stated that they were okay with gravel pits and that they create jobs; and 12% indicated they were okay but had qualifiers attached to their comments, such as: gravel pits should not be on agricultural land; that it was important that they be properly restored; that they should be good for the economy and be well managed to minimize noise, dust, and speed of trucks.

The remaining comments, 81%, indicated that there were enough already, they are not needed, too close to the Village, too many, eyesores, destroy wild life habitat, were dirty, noisy, may affect the water table, should not be near houses or schools, and the companies should be asked to contribute financially for the betterment of the Village.

What can be improved?

The survey asked for people to indicate their top two (2) priorities and of those, the highest response was to improving the range of shops (41%) and health services (39%). The next issue that people would like to see improved is the speed of traffic going through the village. Additionally, there were a number of written concerns about the speed and volume of trucks through the Village and the need for a second traffic light. Job opportunities was another area that 10% thought could be improved.

Unfortunately, since Thamesford does not have a doctor, the rating for medical services/facilities was not high: 30% said they were fair and 46% said they were poor. Most people did not have enough knowledge to rate building code enforcement nor zoning regulations enforcement. Historical preservation was perceived to be weak with 56% saying it was fair to poor and 21% didn’t know. 43% of the respondents indicated the bike and/or hiking trails were fair to poor with 36% not knowing.

Priorities for Improving Thamesford

The Survey asked for up to three (3) suggestions per survey on how best to improve the Village. People were very generous with their suggestions.

The most stated one was to attract and retain a medical doctor. Following close on the heels of a doctor, the thing most often suggested was a small grocery store.

The next most submitted suggestions regarded the appearance of Main Street (Dundas Street). There were concerns about the appearance around Mac's and the property to the west of Mac's, as well as the area to the west of the Bank. There were concerns that the Main Street was becoming a used car lot, making it difficult to attract new businesses. Suggestions that empty buildings and lots be cleaned up were high on the list as well, which could help attract more businesses such as a gym, hardware store, upscale restaurant, or expanded farmers' market.

The fourth most cited need was to slow down the traffic on Dundas Street and the residential streets: suggestions included a pedestrian activated lighted crosswalk at the library, traffic signal lights at Dundas and Stanley Streets, and possibly changes in the road layouts.

The next suggestions for improvements revolved around providing something more for teens and younger residents such as a skateboard park, "Fusion" like space, a splash pad.

There were also suggestions to provide seniors' housing and more services to enable our seniors to stay in Thamesford.

There were many other suggestions such as: more biking/walking trails, more trees, and weekly blue box collection.

Overall, Thamesford is a pretty darn good place to live!

We have great fire protection - 92% of the respondents say so; terrific library services and facility - 94% ; great parks - 86%; good street lighting - 64%; good entrances to the Village - 72%; good recreational facilities - 72%; law enforcement fair to good - 76%; good downtown parking - 64%; good water - 53% and 56% liked the general appearance of the Village with an additional 38% saying it was fair.

***Thanks to all who contributed to the survey results.
Stay tuned for how we can all work together on the improvements suggested.***

AFTERWORD

Since this survey has been completed and analyzed, the area west of the Royal Bank (RBC) has been improved and additional parking has been provided. More trees have been planted on Dundas Street North, just east of George Street.

Watch for ongoing developments in the Village Voice and on the Website www.Thamesford.org.

An appendix of all written comments will be available with this report on the online version at www.Thamesford.org.

June 22, 2010.