

Prosperity Corridors Response Paper

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Background:

As part of the strategic planning process adopted by the current city council for St. Catharines, a series of discussion papers have been released to the public for comment including: *Creating a Vibrant Downtown*, *Enhancing Communications*, *Providing Value for Tax Dollars* and *Developing Prosperity Corridors*. The final discussion paper will be on *Consolidating Long-Term Planning Processes*. With the release of each paper, Chamber staff has reviewed the document and provided verbal input based on priorities established by the Chamber to city council. The following document on Prosperity Corridors is the Chamber's position on the development of prosperity corridors in the city.

The City of St. Catharines Prosperity Corridors Discussion Paper defines a prosperity corridor as *a strategic path or artery that enhances the relationship between community and regional assets. Prosperity corridors are commonly cited where partnerships have formed amongst like-minded institutions or organizations. These will create clusters that will result in economic benefits over a region. Thus, there is a need for focused planning with economic growth as the ultimate goal without losing the aforementioned spill over effects.*¹

Although several assets vital to the success of a prosperity corridor are outside the direct control of the city, it has considerable influence over the physical and geographic connections among various community anchors. *It is these strategically chosen paths, whether urban streets, sidewalks, trails or waterways that would be considered for development of strategic prosperity clusters.*²

The discussion paper identifies St. Paul/Queenston (potential wine route), Port Dalhousie/Downtown/Oakdale Moffat, Downtown to Brock, Downtown to West St. Catharines, Welland Canals Parkway and Lakeshore/Waterfront Trail as areas for the development of enhanced prosperity corridors. In each case, a link was made to an anchor that could stimulate clustered economic growth.

A key to future economic growth in the city will depend on its ability to connect anchors in a way that stimulates economic and community development. The connection of anchors will enhance economic opportunities, and generate a web of integration with neighbourhoods, communities and business. This type of integration will encourage cluster zones of economic activity creating workable and liveable communities throughout the city.

In its discussion paper, city staff focused on anchors like Brock, the wine route, Port Dalhousie and the Seymour Hannah Complex as a means to demonstrate a need to move beyond the idea of creating "roads to nowhere." Yet, the concept of a corridor spins off the idea of a path, passage or road through something. Although, the term prosperity corridor captures the notion a passage

¹ http://www.brookings.edu/metro/mei/20060727_clusters.htm

² St. Catharines City Staff, Prosperity Corridors, "Discussion Paper for St. Catharines City Council."
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through an area of prosperity, the integration of a more web-based term could focus the intent of the idea of bring together groups of business, institutions and organizations.

It is the opinion of the Chamber, based on a review of the material in the discussion paper, and through research of similarly designed concepts, that a more applicable term would be 'Prosperity Clusters'. According to a report from Simon Fraser University, clusters are geographic concentrations of interconnected specialized service providers, facilities and associated institutions in a particular field that are present in a region or city. Cluster development initiatives are an important new direction in economic policy, building on earlier efforts in macroeconomic stabilization, privatization, and market opening, and reducing some of the costs of doing business.³

Based on a model presented by Clifford Bekar and Richard G. Lipsey in their paper *Clusters and Economic Policy*, clustering around community anchors can benefit St. Catharines in the following ways:⁴

- Community/recreational and business facilities will be able to form better synergy and develop economic prosperity.
- There will be greater proximity for residents at the neighbourhood level to access facilities and services associated with the community anchors.
- Community anchors will develop a more symbiotic relationship with local businesses where they are reliant on local businesses for innovation as much as local businesses will be reliant on anchors for innovation and development.

According to Bekar and Lipsey, clusters can act as catalysts for growth by providing a pool of skilled people with broadly complementary knowledge, a group of growing firms, a pool of small start-up businesses developing technologies spun off from existing companies, and finally providing the institutional backdrop for sharing all of this innovative knowledge among firms.⁵ Prosperity clusters become sources of innovation and development of expertise in various fields primarily as a result of the close proximity to vibrant community anchors.⁶

Linking Chamber Priorities:

The review of the concept of prosperity corridors as part of the city's strategic planning session can be linked to chamber priorities established to guide policy development. In connection to the concept, the following priorities can be addressed through the development of prosperity corridors or clusters.

Downtown Revitalization - revitalization of St. Catharines downtown is important to the overall growth and prosperity of the city. Creating clusters or corridors through the downtown, and linking the downtown to other clusters will generate much needed economic growth in the urban core.

³ <http://www.sfu.ca/~rlipsey/Clusters.PDF> Pg 1

⁴ <http://www.sfu.ca/~rlipsey/Clusters.PDF> Pg 3

⁵ <http://www.sfu.ca/~rlipsey/Clusters.PDF> Pg 5

⁶ <http://www.sfu.ca/~rlipsey/Clusters.PDF> Pg 12

Economic Growth and Diversification – future economic growth depends on developing diverse economic models that attract higher wealth creation positions, and position the city to manage an economic downturn in a specific sector. The development of clusters or corridors will focus the attention on the strengths of St. Catharines as an economic entity.

Youth Retention and Employment Opportunities – retaining young professionals, labourers and skilled trades is important to the overall viability to the city's future economy. Through linkages to diverse economic clusters leading to and from centres of culture and education in the city, there will be a stronger business base to support and retain a younger workforce.

Recommendations:

1. The St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce recommends that the City of St. Catharines alter its strategy with regards to '*prosperity corridors*' and build a strategy based on '*prosperity clusters*'.
2. The St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce recommends that when considering prosperity clusters, the City of St. Catharines must take into consideration:
 - Land use
 - Economic development projects
 - Key community anchors
 - Centres of innovation
 - Public transit
 - Traffic movement
 - Aesthetic attractions
 - Marketing
 - City Official Plan
3. In order to facilitate the growth that will need to occur for the establishment of prosperity clusters, the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce recommends reviewing the Community Improvement Plan to ensure it supports and follows the guiding principles of identified prosperity clusters.
4. The St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce recommend that when developing a strategy for prosperity clusters, existing strategic documents such as the Places to Grow Act, and the Community Vision Report be included in the planning process.
5. The St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce urges the City of St. Catharines to develop metrics to quantify 'prosperity' when developing the strategic plan for clusters.