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**To:** Mayor and Council

**From:** Briar Kelly, Community Economic Development Officer

**Meeting Date:** September 8, 2025

**Subject:** Report #CAO-009-2025 - Rural Ontario Development Program Funding Application

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## Recommendation

Be It Resolved that Council of the Township of Clearview hereby receive report #CAO-009-2025 (Rural Ontario Development Program Funding Application) dated September 8, 2025; and,

- 1) That Council approve staff to submit an application to the Rural Ontario Economic Development (ROD) Program for funding to develop an Economic Development Strategy for Clearview Township; and,
- 2) That the Mayor supports allocating an amount up to \$40,000 in the 2026 Budget from the Economic Development Reserve Fund to satisfy the 50% municipal cost-sharing requirements for the ROD Program.

## Background

The Rural Ontario Development (ROD) Program is a \$20 million funding initiative launched by the Ontario government's Ministry of Rural Affairs to support rural economic growth and community development. The program replaces the former Rural Economic Development (RED) Program and has been enhanced and expanded to better serve rural communities. The program provides 50% cost-sharing funding for eligible projects that enhance municipal economic development capabilities. Applications for the current intake period are open until September 24, 2025,

Clearview Township currently operates without a comprehensive economic development strategy, limiting the Township's ability to strategically pursue economic growth opportunities and compete effectively for investment attraction. This represents a significant gap in the Township's planning framework that should be addressed to ensure sustainable growth and prosperity for the community. Economic development strategies focus on creating diverse employment opportunities, supporting local businesses, and generating tax revenue that can fund improved municipal services and infrastructure.

## Comments and Analysis

The Rural Ontario Development Program represents a cost-effective opportunity for Clearview Township to enhance its economic development capacity. An economic development strategy is a critical tool for municipalities that are looking to proactively support business growth and workforce development. For rural municipalities like Clearview Township, economic development strategies are particularly valuable for leveraging unique assets such as quality-of-life advantages, natural resources, and strategic geographic positioning while addressing challenges related to infrastructure, workforce, and competition with urban centers.

Upon creation of the strategy, the expected outcome is a clear identification of economic opportunities and gaps, as well as develop a long-term roadmap for:

- Business retention and attraction
- Economic resilience and diversification
- Key sector supports
- Balanced long-term growth management
- Infrastructure development
- Downtown/main street revitalization
- Key Performance Indicators

Staff are currently gathering quotes from economic development consulting firms as required in both the ROD Program application documents and Clearview Township's Procurement By-Law. Based on costs incurred recently by other regional municipalities for similar economic development strategies, staff anticipate quotes will range from \$50,000 to \$80,000.

This cost range reflects the comprehensive nature of economic development strategy development, which typically includes multiple phases of work and extensive stakeholder engagement requirements. This process typically requires 6-8 months to complete and results in a strategic document that provides clear direction for municipal economic development activities over a 5 or 10 year period.

The creation of an economic development strategy involves several key components and phases. Some of these activities will be led by the selected consultant with other being the responsibility of staff. These activities include but are not limited to:

- Economic base analysis and demographic profiling
- Assessment of existing economic assets and infrastructure
- Review of current municipal policies and development frameworks
- Competitive analysis of regional economic positioning
- Business and community stakeholder engagement
- Target sector identification and analysis

- Investment readiness evaluation
- Site and building inventory analysis

## **Financial Implications**

The Rural Ontario Development Program, although cost-effective, does require a level of investment from the municipality. As stated in the Program Guidelines, there is 50% cost-sharing requirement between the Province and the municipality. This type of project is eligible within Stream 1: Economic Diversification, Competitiveness and Capacity Building. Under this section of the program, the cost-sharing by the Provincial is limited to a maximum of \$50,000.

The recommended Reserve Fund allocation of up to \$40,000, as part of the 2026 Mayor's Budget, provides adequate coverage for the municipal cost-sharing requirement across the full estimated cost range and includes contingency for potential project enhancements or additional consultation requirements.

## **Clearview's Strategic Plan**

The above initiative supports the following strategic pillars:

- Recreation & Culture
- Core-Business (Agriculture)

## **Report Appendices**

Appendix A – Rural Ontario Development Program Guidelines

## **Approvals**

**Submitted by:** Briar Kelly, Community Economic Development Officer

**Reviewed by:** John Ferguson, CAO

**Financial Implications Reviewed by:** Kelly McDonald, Treasurer/Director of Finance

**Approved by:** John Ferguson, CAO