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Intern to help revitalize downtown

Grant will allow committee to hire a marketing graduate

May 20, 2009

BY LAURA MUELLER



Perth's downtown will get a boost from an intern dedicated to revitalizing the town's core, thanks to a Valley Heartland grant. *Perth Courier file photo*

The downtown revitalization committee is hoping a youth intern will bring new energy to a number of projects in Perth.

Through the Downtown Heritage Perth Business Improvement Area, the committee applied for and received an \$11,090 grant from Valley Heartland Community Futures Development Corporation towards the salary of a youth intern who will work on marketing, promotion and outreach in the downtown core.

That salary will be supplemented by \$1,600 from each of the BIA, the Town of Perth and the Perth and District Chamber of Commerce to ensure the youth intern can work in Perth for six months on a full-time basis starting in June.

Although the committee had thought it would only be able to hire a part-time intern, after some number-crunching the group was able to create a new, full-time position, said BIA co-ordinator Heather Hansgen.

"It makes it much more likely that we will find someone who is qualified," Hansgen said. "We were concerned that a qualified person wouldn't be able to afford to do it part time."

The committee will be seeking a recent graduate of a post-secondary program with a specialization in marketing, Hansgen said.

A new intern is needed to help the committee move forward with ambitious plans to revitalize the downtown area, Hansgen said.

"Right now we have lists of more projects than we could ever do on our own," she said.

One of those projects is to help the town develop a possible heritage district in the downtown area to expand on the town's heritage branding and market it as a tourism niche, Hansgen said. That would involve working with town staff and other groups to research legislative parameters and the policies of other communities to produce a report for the town's consideration.

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Another major project will be a proposed gap analysis, for which the intern would act as a local contact and liaison. The committee is planning to partner with the Queen's School of Business Monieson Centre to determine the mix of businesses that would best serve the town, and what types of uses are currently lacking in the downtown. The youth intern will present a report on the gap analysis (along with representatives from Queen's) at a public forum.

The intern will also be an important resource for downtown business and property owners. He or she will communicate with downtown property owners to make them aware of loans and grants they can take advantage of, as well as the bylaws that govern heritage designations and property standards. The intern will determine the most common challenges downtown property owners face and compile a report listing those challenges along with best practices.

Other tasks the intern will tackle include undertaking a community improvement plan in consultation with town staff and local stakeholders, implementing several of the goals in the BIA's strategic plan, developing a consumer/visitor survey and making recommendations about key advertising opportunities targeting specific markets. The intern will also attend festivals and events to help promote the town.

"The intern's priority is to help the town move forward," Hansgen said. "I'm not sure how much further we could go without this position."

"I expect it will be a huge leap," she said. "Even though it is temporary, it will put us in a much better position."

Matthew McKenna, a programs officer with Valley Heartland, said the Perth youth intern position is one of 10 youth internships the organization will fund this year.

Lanark Highlands will also get an intern for its youth centre to develop a major fundraising project for 2010 and help co-ordinate activities, McKenna said.

Valley Heartland receives \$100,000 through the Eastern Ontario Development Program to fund work opportunities for recent graduates.


"It's meant to be a step in the door for graduates so they can gain experience and have mentorship," he said.

All of the interns must be recent graduates under the age of 30.


"There is an element of youth attraction and retention," McKenna said. "It is a valuable thing to have highly skilled youth in our area."

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