A. **Recommendations**

THAT Council receive Staff Report FAF.20.094, entitled “Small Business Enterprise Centre Digital Main Street Proposal”;

AND THAT Council approve funding for the extension of the Digital Main Street initiative from June 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020 in an amount of $10,000 with the funding to be provided by the Working Capital Reserve.

OR

AND THAT Council approves funding for the extension of the Digital Main Street initiative in an amount of _____________ with the funding to be provided by the Working Capital Reserve

OR

AND THAT Council does not grant the $10,000 request for extension of the Digital Main Street initiative.

B. **Overview**

This report provides an overview of a proposal for the Small Business Enterprise Centre’s Digital Main Street initiative for Council’s consideration.

C. **Background**

The South Georgian Bay Small Business Enterprise Centre (“SBEC”) recently presented an opportunity to the Community Recovery Task Force (“Task Force”) requesting funding to extend the Digital Main Street program. Given that the request was beyond the scope of the Task Force, a report outlining the request is being provided to Council for consideration.
Small Business Enterprise Centre

The SBEC supports small businesses throughout the region in a variety of capacities including business consulting services, marketing, technology, and finance. The SBEC is funded through annual contributions from member municipalities including, the Town of The Blue Mountains, The Town of Collingwood, Wasaga Beach and Clearview Township.

Digital Main Street

Digital Main Street is an initiative funded by the Province of Ontario to help with digital enhancements and digital transformation to strengthen main street businesses. On behalf of the member municipalities, and through funding from the Province of Ontario, the SBEC has been offering digital marketing and ecommerce support through the Digital Main Street program to businesses in the Town of The Blue Mountains, The Town of Collingwood, Wasaga Beach and Clearview Township.

Digital Main Street allows businesses to build internal capacity with digital marketing and ecommerce and provides businesses with access to a Digital Service Squad that reviews a business’s online presence and recommends possible enhancements to service. The Digital Main Street initiative is ending in May 2020, and the SBEC is requesting its member municipalities to provide funding to allow for an extension to the program from June 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020. The extension of the Digital Main Street program would include one-on-one consultation and group training to businesses to build/enhance web presence, development of social media strategies, “Google my Business” services, and e-commerce development using Shopify. Additional programming details are provided in Attachment 1 to this report.

D. Analysis

The COVID-19 pandemic has expedited the need for businesses to be online and active through e-commerce, social media and digital marketing. Over the past five weeks, many businesses in the Town of The Blue Mountains have been implementing new digital strategies to ensure that they can continue to generate sales and maintain brand awareness within the new retail landscape.

As presented, the extension of the Digital Main Street Program is focused on one-on-one business coaching and virtual group workshops. The $10,000 request is to facilitate the extension of the program for the remainder of the calendar year. The program is scalable in the sense that if Council wished to allocate a smaller amount, the number of one-on-one consulting hours would be reduced to reflect the change in funding. The cost of the workshops and the marketing cost to support the program are flat rates.

Attachment 1 provides an overview of the proposal by the SBEC.
Based on the proposal, Council has the following options:

THAT Council receive Staff Report FAF.20.094, entitled “Small Business Enterprise Centre Digital Main Street Proposal”;

AND THAT Council approve funding for the extension of the Digital Main Street initiative from June 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020 in an amount of $10,000 with the funding to be provided by the Working Capital Reserve.

OR

AND THAT Council approves funding for the extension of the Digital Main Street initiative in an amount of _____________ with the funding to be provided by the Working Capital Reserve.

OR

AND THAT Council does not grant the $10,000 request for extension of the Digital Main Street initiative.

E. The Blue Mountains Strategic Plan

Goal #1: Create Opportunities for Sustainability
Objective #1 Retain Existing Business
Objective #2 Attract New Business
Objective #3 Promote a Diversified Economy
Objective #5 Improved Visibility and Local Identity

Goal #2: Engage Our Communities & Partners
Objective #2 Use Technology to Advance Engagement
Objective #3 Strengthen Partnerships

F. Environmental Impacts

N/A

G. Financial Impact

The 2020 Budget did not include the additional $10,000. If Council would like to provide the additional funding, it is recommended that it be funded from the Working Capital Reserve.

H. In consultation with

Ruth Prince, Director of Finance and IT Services/Treasurer
I. Public Engagement

The topic of this Staff Report has not been subject to a Public Meeting and/or a Public Information Centre as neither a Public Meeting nor a Public Information Centre are required. However, any comments regarding this report should be submitted to Tim Hendry, economicdevelopment@thebluemountains.ca.

J. Attached

1. South Georgian Bay Small Business Enterprise Centre Proposal- Digital Main Street Initiative

Respectfully Submitted,

Tim Hendry
Manager of Communications and Economic Development

Shawn Everitt
Chief Administrative Officer

For more information, please contact:
Tim Hendry
economicdevelopment@thebluemountains.ca
519-599-3131 extension 282
Our Organisation
The focus of the Small Business Enterprise Centre is to provide support to start-up and existing small business enterprises during their development, retention and operation.

The program and associated cost?
Our current Digital Main Street (DMS) Program funded by OMAFRA will end on May 21st 2020. We have been providing this service for the past 12 months.
We have an opportunity to continue to offer the program. This will help to support municipal economic recovery initiatives. Utilising existing infrastructure and intellectual property coupled with some program enhancements will allow us to help all businesses in the community (not just those in the downtown) scale up their digital footprint. Clients will learn to implement, navigate, and build internal capacity with digital marketing and ecommerce.

The SBEC will use this funding to provide a hub to support companies wishing to reframe and pivot their business model to generate sales leads and fulfilment using online tools. The program has been designed to support novice to advanced users of technology.

Our Digital Service Squad (DSS) team is experienced at building trusting and empowering relationships with the clients they support.

The infrastructure to operate this support exists and our services are market ready. The SBEC will provide in-kind management, administration, space, equipment/technology to the Digital Service Squad team.

Total program cost: $15,000
Service Dates: June 1st to December 31st

Marketing:
($1000 – Flat rate, based on business population and geography)

Program marketing and promotion through newsletter, social, web, radio, door to door and literature campaigns (These efforts would need to be supported by Chambers, BIA’s, EDO’s, Business assns. And other entrepreneurship ecosystem partners)

1:1 consultations with businesses:
($7000 at $50 Per Hour = 140 hours (or approximately 35 businesses at an average of 4 hours per)

Conduct digital audits
Create a digital transformation plan
Support implementation of the transformation plan *
Refer businesses to approved third party contractors to develop project components

(* Supporting the implementation of the following: Build a basic web presence, Enhance existing presence, Create shareable content (copy, photos and video), Activate and enhance Google My Business listings, Develop social media strategy, and set up a free trial of an e-commerce shop through Shopify.)
Access to live group training session delivery on the following subjects:

($2000 – Flat rate – Webinars are supported by live Q&A, slide share and worksheets)

- Website development and SEO
- Google My Business
- How to build an online store
- Facebook and Instagram for Business
- How to produce, shoot and upload video for small business
- How to take photos for the web
- How to write web copy that works

Access to DMS webinar library

(No charge - Digital Main Street HQ in Toronto will maintain online software infrastructure to access resources and for the DSS to manage client flow)

The potential economic impact

This solution will provide quick wins with long term impact. Helping businesses enhance their digital footprint creates, for them, a competitive advantage. It helps local residents access their products and services virtually. As well, implementing E-commerce and other digital strategies are a great way to level the global playing field. The DSS helps to reduce fear of technology adoption and boosts economic returns through online sales.

Since June 2019 our DSS has serviced 205 businesses across South Georgian Bay, has presented to over 400 businesses in workshop/webinar and has helped 58 businesses to secure a $2500 provincial grant (Grants were available in 2019).