Community Visited: MOUNT ALBERT, TOWN OF EAST GWILLIMBURY

Date of Visit: OCTOBER 6 & 7, 2011

Visit Completed by (community): SCHOMBERG, TOWNSHIP OF KING

Remember to use this reporting template as a guide. Some questions may not be applicable to the community you visited. There may be variations to the questions from community to another. If not, please make note that the question is not applicable.
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BEFORE YOU VISITED THE COMMUNITY

What was your impression of the community before your visit? What were you expecting to see? Please comment on what you knew about this community.

- Small Rural town,
- Small thriving downtown area surrounded by residential area. Safe, clean, attractive
- From web page: looks thriving, positive impression and expectations.

Find information about the community you are about to visit.

How easy was it to get information by internet, mail and telephone about the community you visited?

- Web site is easy to find, gave positive impressions though many links did not work or links were missing.
- Web site is geared mostly to business; community organizations
- Town of East Gwillimbury did not show up in search at all.
- Did not find Mount Albert on the Town of East Gwillimbury website
Are you satisfied with the quality of information you received?

- We did not receive materials other than from the web

If you received information by mail, did the information arrive in a timely fashion?
N/A

VISIT ATMOSPHERE

Date of Exchange: October 6 & 7, 2011

Weather during visit: Sunny and warm Max Temp 22.9 °C Historic average? 16 °C
Perfect days for exploring

Time spent in the community: 4 to 5 hours

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

After taking a five-minute drive through the community without stopping, what was your first impression?

- Lots of parks & green areas.
- Mixed housing - well kept and nice looking, "bedroom" community. Beautiful "heritage" homes and old trees. Beautiful vistas.
- Signage at town entrances: some have seen better days, old, faded or missing giving impression of an "old & tired" town.

- Quiet downtown area, very few businesses. Little to see, shop for, or explore.
ENTERING THE COMMUNITY

How favourable an impression of the community did the entrances provide?

- Signage shabby, faded, old; giving impression of an old, tired small town.
- Too many signs in certain areas - sign "pollution".
- No sign indicating "Commercial or Business" area. HWY#48 & Princess - no gateway sign at all.
- Mostly signs identified East Gwillimbury... Mount Albert should have more of an identity.
- Watertower has no town name on it - an opportunity missed.

Specific signage: see above

Other types of entrances such as airport, bus terminals, passenger rail and/or harbour: N/A

Comments:

OUR RATINGS THOUGHOUT THIS REPORT ARE BASED ON AN AVERAGE FROM RESPONDENTS

Rating of community entrances as a whole:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

X

Needs Urgent Attention Satisfactory Excellent

HOUSING AND RESIDENTIAL AREAS

Comment on the overall quality, affordability, and availability of housing in the community?

- Good mix of homes; townhomes, duplexes etc. Seniors residence; adaptive reuse and conversion to homes.

Mix of housing to suit a variety of income levels: seems to be a good mix
What were the most appealing features of the housing in this community and why:

- Very attractive & well kept.
- Nice mature trees in older section. Beautiful "heritage" homes. Many green areas & playgrounds in newer areas.
- Front porches on many homes promotes a community feeling.

What were the least appealing features of housing in the community and why:

- Subdivisions seem to be very separate from each other - would benefit from interconnected trails and/or a common area
- New residential neighbourhoods use inefficient, car focused street pattern

Comment on the quality and availability of residential infrastructure (e.g. roads, sidewalks, lighting, public transportation, green space and indicators of environmentally conscious practices).

- Many green spaces, parks with playgrounds; paved walking path in Vivian Park
- Sidewalks on most streets except the older subdivisions.
FICE –FULL PICTURE (Final Report)

- Princess Street has no sidewalks
- Garbage bins and recycleable bins in park areas.
- Public transporation- YRT buses observed

Overall rating of housing and residential areas, by type of housing and overall appeal:

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<th>Overall appeal of housing for (rate 1 – 10)</th>
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EDUCATION

Pre-school/Daycare:
- One private on Centre st.
- Drop in family centre in the community centre,
- Programs in library.

Primary/Elementary: One elementary observed - typical looking, 44 years old.

High School or College/University: Bussed to Newmarket

Comments about education services in the community:

Availability and appearance of schools: typical school building from 1960s

Ease of locating the school(s):
- Easy to see on Mount Albert Rd.
- Walking distance through park to the downtown area.
- Close to old downtown and residential, but far away from most new homes
Programs or services that stand out: N/A

Comments:
- No secondary or post-secondary schools

HEALTH, SOCIAL AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

*Healthcare Facilities*

Hospitals in the community: 0 - have to go to Newmarket or Uxbridge

Physician and dentist offices and clinics:
Doctor's office looked in need of some TLC to be more inviting.
Dentist and chiropractor in the downtown area.
Pharmacy in the Downtown Core

Long-term care and nursing home facilities:
Did not see one, though a seniors residence is located just to the east of Centre St. and is currently being expanded

Other health services (e.g., chiropractor, physiotherapy, naturopath, massage):
chiropractor, dentist available in downtown core

Ease of locating these facilities: downtown and easy to find

Residents (young and old) thoughts about the quality and availability of healthcare facility and services: N/A
Social and Support Services

Social services (e.g., day care, senior’s centre, counselling):

- Seniors programs through East Gwillimbury.
- Seniors residence provided programs according to local resident.
- Seniors’ Centre in community hall/library.
- Good Multi-purpose Centre in library building
- Family drop in Centre at Community Hall.

Types of not-for-profit organizations and clubs:

- Lions facilities and park on the Southwest edge of community.
- Masons Hall on Main Street, Legion

Ease of locating these services/organizations: adequate

Emergency Services

Adequacy of fire, ambulance and policing services: did not notice any
DOWNTOWN

Variety of shopping:
- Small town “main street” with minimal mixed retail, business services
- nothing to draw you in except the Benjamin Moore store

Customer service: Friendly & pleasant

Window displays:
- Mostly non-existent
- Some retailers working to get customer and community involvement
FICE –FULL PICTURE (Final Report)

Signage:
- inaccurate, not-engaging, confusing,

Variety and quality of merchandise: poor, little variety

Quality and availability of parking: parking is good, plenty of room

Quality (e.g., appearance, adequacy, etc.) of lighting:
- Typical utility pole with lights - does not add to the ambience

Ease of locating the downtown area:
- No signage indicating there is a commercial area or a downtown.
Potential for the downtown to play a greater role in tourism:

- No street vibe
- With the many beautiful "heritage" buildings in the area they could be used for tourism type business: galleries, specialty stores, B & B, coffee shops etc.
- More variety in retail - a draw is needed.
- Addition of planters, window boxes, benches along Centre Street may add to the complete look.
- Need something to make one stop the car and explore.

Desirability to live downtown: N/A

Rating of the overall impression of the downtown:

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Needs Urgent Attention | Satisfactory | Excellent

BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

Retail

Mix of retail shopping:

- little variety
- Basic services such as grocery store and liquor store are on the outskirts, largely accessible only by car on a road zoned 80 km/h, with many heavy trucks zooming along
- The stores on Hwy 48 appear typical. Friendly service

Overall appearance:

- Many different buildings ages and style adds interest.
- Some businesses feel inappropriate for a commercial core i.e. – Self serve Car Wash
- Too many buildings without occupants
Variety of shopping and merchandizing:
- limited shopping options with basic services such as grocery store, LCBO, hardware store on edge of Town and only accessible by car.

Customer service: friendly

Goods do local residents appear to need to travel to surrounding communities to buy?
- clothes, shoes, books, sporting good, giftware, health food, toys, furniture, home décor, butcher; most things other than regular groceries, hardware and paint.

Stores or services were missing that you would expect to find?
- Coffee shops, giftware & crafts, galleries

Commercial and Professional Businesses

Convenience of bank and ATM locations:
- the only bank found is located on Centre St. Did not see a bank in the plaza on Hwy # 48 only an ATM in Foodland

Convenience of bank hours of service: Adequate and typical

Types of commercial businesses serve the local community (e.g., high-speed internet provider):
- There does not seem to be community WiFi available
Availability of other professional services (e.g., accounting, legal, etc.):

- Many professional services noticed indicating that maybe there are many home businesses.

- Local funeral home, unusual in a town the size of Mount Albert.

Professional services that are missing: real estate office, legal office.

**Industry**

Major industrial sectors in the community (e.g., manufacturing, construction, transportation):

- Retail: Major employers: Foodland & Home Hardware
- no modern, planned and defined business/industrial park area.
- Some established industrial areas around Hwy #48 – appears older and unplanned.
FICE –FULL PICTURE (*Final Report*)

Major employers in the community:
- Foodland, Home Hardware

Major types of manufacturing in the community: N/A

Major types of primary industry in the community (e.g. agriculture, fishing, mining, etc):
- Agriculture

Noticeable dependence on any one type of industry: N/A

Industrial park or serviced land where industries could locate or expand:
- area around Hwy 48, though it does not appear to be identified or promoted as such

Community’s desirability as a location for industrial development:
- it is right on HWY 48 which may be desirable for industrial/commercial developments.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

Convenience of municipal office locations:
- East Gwillimbury Town Hall is approximately 7mi/11km away in Sharon

Information such as Community Brochure/Guide, Business Directory, Community Profile:
- Municipal office did not have a spare copy of the Leisure Guide to give us.
- MountAlbert.com brochure not at town offices.
- Brochure should be available as pdf on mountalbert.com.
- Local information is available at the library.

Availability of information on the website:
- No specific info on Mount Albert on the Town of East Gwillimbury web site.
- Could not find a link to mountalbert.com

Availability of contact information and location of the Business Improvement Association on the website:
- Could not find a link from the East Gwillimbury Chamber of Commerce website to the Mount Albert BIA website.
FICE –FULL PICTURE (Final Report)

Ability to find adequate information to make informed retail, commercial and/or industrial:

- Nothing found on Town of East Gwillimbury web site pertaining to Mount Albert

Public Infrastructure and Municipal Services

Public Transportation:

- YRT busses observed throughout the village and in the Plaza on Hwy #48 - did not explore route & timetables
- Envious by comparison to Schomberg not having YRT service.

Sidewalks, Streets, Drinking Fountains, Benches, etc.:

- Sidewalks in most subdivisions and downtown
- Side street towards senior's residences (Bank St.?) has lamppost right in the middle of the sidewalks
- Confusing street – sidewalk interface, some are easily fixed
• No benches on Centre St.

Landscaping, Trees: nicely landscaped, beautiful old trees

Public Restrooms, Pay Phones, Public Internet Access: N/A

Street Signage, Lighting:

• Typical utility pole light standards – Nice newer lights in the subdivisions
• Banners downtown, not updated
• Very attractive flower baskets, but Christmas decorations still in place

Conflicting land uses in the community (e.g., a residential subdivision next to a pulp mill):
• Car wash backing on to a subdivision and located right downtown.
Appropriate or inappropriate land-use (e.g., commercial, residential, green space, etc.):
- Car wash backing on to a subdivision and located right downtown.

Traffic or pedestrian congestion:
- No congestion issues.
- Speeding cars observed on Centre St.

General accessibility of community facilities and infrastructure for individuals with disabilities:
- Due to age of many buildings accessibility will be a challenge.
- Municipal Centres appear to be accessible; the community center on Main St. has a ramp which is good for wheelchair and stroller access.
- Post office ramp has quite a large "lip" at the bottom and should be corrected.
- Impressed with the paved walk path in Vivan Creek park.
- Signs, garbage bins etc. placed in area that impedes foot traffic or wheelchair users.
- Side street towards senior's residences (Bank St.?) has lamppost right in the middle of the sidewalks.
TOURISM, ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Strength of tourism sector:

- Heritage & old homes, nature,
- Conservations area & parks, beautiful views,
- Mount Albert Sports Day & Spring Fair, Brooks Farm, Agriculture for Agritourism and Agri-tainment Opportunities
- Ponderosa Campground

Community slogan/brand: "Good Old Fashion Service delivered with Small town Friendliness"

Well known attraction, event or festival:

- Though there seems to be some festivals our group was not aware of them ahead of the visit. Found flyers in the library.

Community events that could be expanded and/or developed to become tourist attractions:

- Mount Albert Sports Day,
- "Music Mania Mount Albert"
- Studio tours
- Santa Claus Parade
FICE –FULL PICTURE *(Final Report)*

Attractions (natural or man-made) that could be developed to draw tourists:
- Farmer's Artisans markets, guided/self guided walking tours of "heritage homes" and architectural buildings.
- Better shopping on Centre Street...a central store - "general store" with tearooms, local arts & gifts, local bakery etc.
- Lacking destination & synergy type activities i.e. - Specialty shopping Spa, Art galleries, Studio tour, Historic Walking tours

Underdeveloped attractions:
Farming, eat locally and seasonal celebrations.
- Local campground and golfing.
- Bike routes from other areas...walking area, heritage walks,
- Brooks Farm

*Services for Tourists*

Visitor's Centre, Chamber of Commerce office, or other facility:
- did not see a visitor's Centre or the Chamber of Commerce, BIA office

Tourism staff, facilities, location, signage, marketing material, maps, etc.:

Quality and availability of public restrooms: only saw porta-lets

Quality and appearance of existing tourist attractions:
- Brooks Farm was visited -great spot - lots of people during the weekend - did not have a Mount Albert brochure
- Missing opportunities to cross promote at destinations such as Brooks Farm and Ponderosa Campground.
FICE –FULL PICTURE (Final Report)

Tourism businesses (group tour operators, bus/rail tours, boat rentals etc.): N/A

Restaurants and Accommodations

Eateries, restaurants, etc. that could cater to tourists:
- A variety of places to eat, interesting mix.
- Garbage, grease bins receptacles near entrance - very unsightly.
- Restaurant signage: not in fitting with heritage building character & excessive

Facilities that can accommodate a conference and/or a large number of visitors:
- EG Community Hall & Sport Park & Ross Family Centre gymnasium could accommodate large gatherings
Recommended places to stay or eat:
- The local pub and the bistro next door - Petit Gourmet - had great food and friendly service.
- No overnight tourist accommodation (B&B’s/Motels) other than Ponderosa campground west side of Hwy #48
- One of the restaurants displayed a Closed sign though it was open.

PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Public Recreation Facilities:
- Community Centre & Ross Family Centre w/library and a gym very nice.
• Pavillion is an asset for outdoor community events i.e. – picnics, farmers market but could use some TLC.

• Arena located in Sharon

• New parks get more love than the old parks

Private Recreation Facilities: N/A

Parks: Many beautiful parks, walking paths paved in Vivian Creek Park. Playgrounds in most parks, soccer, baseball, tennis, BMX trail etc.
Residents’ thoughts regarding the availability of community events:

**Popular community events:** Spring Fair & Sports Day, Music Mania

**Entertainment options:**

Residents’ thoughts regarding availability of entertainment options: Limited choices

**Nightlife:** None, other than a visit to the Pub

**Recreation activities and facilities:**

Rating of the overall suitability of facilities for each of the following groups:

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<td>Families</td>
<td>7.5</td>
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<td>Teens</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Singles, young adults</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior citizens</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newcomers</td>
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**CULTURE AND HERITAGE**

Availiability and maintenance of heritage buildings:

- Many heritage type buildings noticed though cannot be sure they are all designated/plaques as such.
- Older homes well maintained/restored with pride.
- Beautiful converted church. Lovely old building housing insurance co. could be "focal/inspiration" point of Centre St.
FICE –FULL PICTURE *(Final Report)*

- Historical plaque programme

- Churches well maintained

Outstanding architectural or design features of religious buildings:
  - Beautiful stained glass on the United Church

**ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

Businesses and retail specializing in reused or organic merchandise: N/A

Advertisements, billboards and/or fliers advocating recycling, green energy or other “green” practices:
  - Library had some information

Evidence of recycling (curb side recycling, recycling bins throughout the community, availability of reusable bags): Recycling bins very evident at curbside

Use of public transportation:
  - YRT - routes & timetables not explored. We are very envious of this service!
Evidence of using sources of alternative energy:
- one PhotoVoltaic Solar energy generation (PV) installation at Vivian Creek though no signage or promotion of installation. One installation observed on private sector building at NE corner Hwy 48 and Mount Albert Road.

Local attitudes about environmental sustainability and “green” practices:
- Evidence of garbage in some of the parks.
- Indication of good environmental consciousness by signs to preserve the Oak Ridge Moraine displayed on private properties.

WELCOMING COMMUNITY (NEWCOMERS ARE DEFINED AS INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES AND IMMIGRANTS WHO COME TO LIVE AND/OR WORK IN THE COMMUNITY).

Employment or job placement services:
- The library seems to be the only resource that may provide newcomers service indirectly.

Translation services: N/A
Services or businesses operated by newcomers: N/A
Legal services: N/A
Ethnic diverse population downtown: N/A
Immigration services: N/A
FICE –FULL PICTURE (Final Report)

Housing information:

- Though lots of new housing areas are being developed, we were unable to find a real estate office

Community or youth centres:

- Drop in Family Centre in Community Centre
- Programs in Library

WRAP-UP

Perception versus Impression

Was your perception prior to the visit accurate? No

In what ways was the community different from what you expected?

- Much fewer businesses downtown. Lack of retail.
- Residential area much larger than business area.
- Surprised at the many new sub divisions and the beautiful old homes.

Did the information you collected prior to the visit accurately reflect what you observed/experienced? Why or why not?

- Perception from web site is of a more vibrant community than is actually there.

Community Residents

Were community residents knowledgeable about their community?

- Server at one restaurant very knowledgeable about all eating places in town
- There were very few residents about (bedroom community)

Did they refer you to someone else who would help? If yes, who? n/a

In general, did residents you spoke with have a positive or negative attitude toward their community? Why? Did you sense community pride?

- Friendly and Proud of Mount Albert & many had lived there all their lives.
- No concerns about safety
- Pride of ownership obvious in residential areas
- Happy and laid back!
- Seems a great place to raise kids.
Did residents identify any particular issues to be of major concern (e.g., safety)? None mentioned

Senses

Taste

Was there any specialty food item, bakery, restaurant or candy store that you will remember?

- The Pub & Petit Gourmet had great food
- Sweet potato fries – Yummy!

Smell

Is there a scent that characterizes the community? No

- Spilled pickles all over floor in the coffee shop

Sight

- The Insurance building on Centre St.
- Le Petit Gourmet and the Pub.
- Green areas and hills, topography, rolling hills
- Beautiful old homes

Was there a colourful or striking feature that made an impression on you?

Sound

What sounds did you hear? Please comment on the level of noise in the community.

- Very quiet, train whistle,
**FICE –FULL PICTURE (Final Report)**

**Other**

How would you describe the overall environmental health of the community (e.g., air quality, litter, noise pollution, etc.)?

- Clean & maybe too quiet
- Some litter in public areas

What if anything, did you experience that had a strongly negative or positive impact on the way the community felt to you? Be specific.

- So quiet I felt conspicuous too few people about
- Did not like the junk dealer at west end
- Signage looked old,
- Friendly service in restuarants & shops.
- Gorgeous old homes - bedroom community

**About this Community**

What is the most outstanding feature of this community?

- Heritage type homes downtown,
- Beautiful views, topography
- Petite Gourmet, Brooks Farm, Pub

What will you remember most about this community six months from now (positive or negative)?

- Quiet bedroom community

What local restaurant, specialty shop or attraction would bring you back to this community in the near future?

- the Pub, Petit Gourmet, Brooks Farm

**Would you consider this a suitable location for:**

A young family?

- Yes - seems to have affordable housing, great parks. Car would be needed

A retired person?

- For those who like a quiet lifestyle. Housing options good, senior citizens housing available and being expanded, car needed.
Young, single adult?
- May be too quiet, no apartments, not much entertainment for young adults, car needed

A tourist?
- Nothing much to see or do although potential is there for day-trippers.

A new retail or service business?
- More retail is needed, however a plan for revitalization may be required first. Good potential for retail with many new homes around. Promote local shopping

A new manufacturing business?
- Potential, but not perceived as being wanted

A new immigrant? – N/A

Five positive things you observed about this community
1. Heritage type homes
2. Green spaces, views & parks, old trees & rolling hills
3. Well maintained neighbourhoods
4. Sidewalks throughout
5. Good restaurants

Three potential opportunities available to the community:
1. Promote tourism & community pride through special events
2. Encourage more retail on Centre St.
3. Revitalize Centre St/Downtown area

Five biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community:
1. Bedroom community - limited employment opportunities
2. No tourist draw
3. Little opportunity to open retail in downtown area
4. Limited shopping
5. No identity/visible community spirit other than Family Sports Day
Looking at tomorrow...

Which action would you recommend that this community take on right away (quick win)?

- Brighten up downtown area with flowers/planters/benches.
- Encourage local crafters, artisans and retailers to open up.
- Start a Fall/Winter decorating contest among homes and among businesses downtown.
- Clean up signage; implement a signage "by-law". Keep banners up-to-date with current events e.g. Music Mania or fall/winter generic banners.
- Fix broken links on Mount Albert website.
- Update town brochure - have available on web site as PDF downloadable document.
- The Town of East Gwillimbury should profile Mount Albert on web site and provide appropriate links.

- Improve relationship between community groups and business community.
- Start to develop a plan for improving downtown.
Look forward three years...

What would you like to see changed in this community? or remain the same?

- Improve shopping opportunities,
- Create a tourist attraction like local arts, crafts, antiques.
- Emphasize the historical/heritage/agricultural aspects & conservation area
- Add more local bulletin boards and wayfinding signage
- Create events to showcase community and heritage buildings.
- Become a major sports centre - build on making great teams in all sports.
- Bury utility poles on commercial core sections of Main & Centre Street.
- Support and encourage mix use development

Turn inward and reflect on your own community

What have you learned here that has changed your impression of your own community?

- Schomberg has a lot to offer, diverse shopping, promoting shop locally
- Schomberg is hidden from drive-by traffic.
- Main street too narrow - drivers need to focus on traffic and miss the businesses. Need to advertise locally.

Has this experience given you any new ideas about what is needed in your own community?

- Need to advertise locally.
- Improve signage to eliminate confusion.
- Create a brochure for promotional purposes.
- Map missing on SVA web site
- Public Transportation/ York Region Transit Connection is Lacking
- Children's splash pad area lacking and some of the features at the Childrens play areas,
- More garbage/recycling bins
FICE –FULL PICTURE (Final Report)

ONE idea that you would like to borrow for use in your own business/community and describe how you would start to implement it within the next 72 hours!

- Create a Village Brochure. Village Association to partner with Economic Development Officer to design, fund, develop and produce a brochure similar to Mount Albert’s.

Additional Comments:

- Mount Albert needs to establish their own identity.
- Web site had many broken links and was not up-to-date

Rating of overall experience as a volunteer visitor

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Would not do it again Satisfactory x Great fun! Lots of learning!

Sign me up for the next one!