



**COUNTY OF WELLINGTON
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION
PLAN 2023 - 2026**

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1. INTRODUCTION

The County Economic Development team is pleased to present its plan of activities for the next three years. This document, prepared by staff, communicates the areas of focus to help businesses and support the communities in Wellington County. In addition to internal brainstorming, consultations were held with member municipalities, business support agencies, and non-profit partners, those individuals with whom staff are proud to serve the County. A final in-person workshop with the Wellington County Economic Development Group ensured the proposed County activities align with locally planned efforts and individual community priorities.

It is November 2022, the hopeful end of the Covid-19 pandemic and time for revisiting the basics of economic development. The resiliency of the local economy has been thoroughly tested. Supply chains required restructuring, those that could digitized or tested new ideas, and many economic relationships have been re-formed. The County benefitted from a strong rural community culture, and many actions took place to confirm that local support. Council was responsive with the establishment of the County Keep Well fund, \$1M in pandemic relief loans provided to businesses across Wellington County. The business directory continued to be a crucial resource for supporting the local economy. RIDE WELL provided essential transportation for Social Services when their Wellington Transportation programme was suspended. The Smart Cities Office also provided emergency food and business support through immediate programming. The International Economic Development Corporation just this month recognized the County with an award for its Taste Real Market Boxes, an innovative collaboration with the eight local farmers' markets in getting product to customers at a time when customers were not able to shop in person.

Today, a shortfall of immigration, a low vacancy rate for housing, and a disconnect between employer and employee expectations, presents opportunities for intervention. The three-year Economic Development Action Plan focuses on addressing local challenges and being proactive in preparing the local economy to be more resilient. Staff have proposed activities that are intentionally creative and actionable. The areas of focus are as follows:

1. Business Attraction, Retention, and Expansion
2. Community Improvement Programme
3. Talent Attraction and Newcomer Support
4. Tourism
5. Shop Local Support
6. Workforce Development
7. Attainable Housing
8. Our Food Future
9. Broadband Internet and Connectivity
10. Rural Transportation

1.1.1. THANK YOU

In addition to thanking Warden Lennox and Councillors Duncan, Ballantyne, Breen and Bulmer for their feedback and support, County Economic Development staff are grateful for the contributions of the below individuals. Their time provided to a survey, a workshop, and consultations resulted in this document being one which focuses on the core concepts of economic development, and an environment which is truly collaborative.

Township of Centre Wellington, Manager of Economic Development	George Borovilos
Town of Erin, Economic Development Officer	Robyn Mulder
Guelph Eramosa Township, Chief Administrative Officer	Ian Roger
Township of Mapleton, Economic Development Manager	Aly Hill
Town of Minto, Director of Economic and Community Development	Belinda Wick-Graham
Township of Puslinch, Chief Administrative Officer	Glenn Schwendinger
Township of Wellington North, Economic Development Officer	Dale Small
Township of Centre Wellington, Manager of Community Development	Kristen Drexler
Township of Centre Wellington, Tourism Development Coordinator	Joao Corrolo
Wellington-Waterloo Community Futures	Rick Whittaker
Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs	Rian Omollo
Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade	Laura Gibson
Saugeen Economic Development Corporation	Rose Austin
Guelph Wellington Business Enterprise Centre	Kristel Manes
Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin	Charlene Hofbauer
Innovation Guelph	Linda Horowitz
Guelph Wellington Local Immigration Partnership	Leen Al-Habash
Wellington Federation of Agriculture	Janet Harrop
County of Wellington, Director of Planning	Aldo Salis

1.2. THE TEAM



The County Economic Development division is composed of three economic development officers, a federally funded Talent Attraction position, a Coordinator, and an Administrative Assistant. Smart Cities funded staff consist of a Smart Cities Project Manager and a Sustainability Coordinator. The Manager (currently vacant) reports to the County Council via the Economic Development Committee of Council. Economic Development is within the Wellington County Museum and Archives department. Together, the division provides business support services, manages countywide programmes, conducts economic planning, and runs events in support of and in conjunction with member municipalities.

The Economic Development division leads and participates in activities that grow and develop Wellington County. The County differentiates itself from member municipal economic development efforts as the County perspective is regional and beyond.

1. The County conducts work beyond municipal borders to align goals (County Community Improvement Programme business incentives).
2. The division elevates the work undertaken in the individual municipalities (international investment attraction).
3. Staff lead larger countywide initiatives to leverage larger opportunities (broadband buildout, Taste Real).
4. County economic development will fill the gap where member municipalities do not have the funds to participate in certain initiatives, do not have the staff or expertise, or where the projects are better suited at a regional level.

In 2012, the Wellington Municipal Economic Development Group (WMEDG) was formed, consisting of representation from: Ministry of Agricultural Food and Rural Affairs, Wellington Waterloo Community Futures, Innovation Guelph, Business Centre Guelph Wellington, Saugeen Economic Development Corporation, Guelph Wellington Local Immigration Partnership, Waterloo Wellington Dufferin Workforce Planning Board, Wellington Federation of Agriculture, and an Economic Development representative from each of the member municipalities. The group meets in person once a month and has proven to be successful in incubating new programmes, sharing information, and collaborating on economic development initiatives.

An overview of the WMEDG partners and their areas of focus are as follows:

Organization	Primary Contact	Organizational Role	Organizational Focus
 Wellington Waterloo Community Futures (WWCF)	Rick Whittaker General Manager	WWCF is a not-for-profit organization supported by the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario). WWCF offers support, financing, and training for rural businesses in Wellington County and the Region of Waterloo.	WWCF is focused on continuing to provide business loans, business coaching, and expanding community economic development partnerships.
 Saugeen Economic Development Corporation (SEDC)	Rose Austin General Manager	Promotes sustainable economic and social development throughout Wellington North, Minto, Mapleton, and surrounding communities in adjacent Counties to collaborate, positively impact economic growth, support youth retention and development, growth and retention of local business; and integrate efforts to leverage newcomer attraction to the region.	SEDC is focused on supporting local businesses and entrepreneurs through loans, grants, and workshops, focusing on advancing women economically, attainable housing, and workforce development.
 Workforce Planning Board - Waterloo, Wellington, Dufferin (WFPB)	Charlene Hofbauer Executive Director	Leads local workforce development by identifying local labour market needs, trends, and priorities. Works with communities and stakeholders to develop action plans to address identified issues and needs.	WFPB is focused on awareness and support for in-demand careers, supporting employers' recruitment and retention practices, and local labor market planning.

 Guelph Wellington Local Immigration Partnership (GWLIP)	Leen – Al-Habash Project Manager	Mobilizes community stakeholders in support and research opportunities to improve Guelph and Wellington County immigrant integration. Recent support and research activities have included identifying immigrant housing barriers, refugee settlement, and community neighborhood snapshots.	GWLIP is focused on raising awareness and support for making communities more welcoming to newcomers. In addition, there will be a further focus on the barriers newcomers are facing in the community and elevate their voices in public processes.
 Innovation Guelph (IG)	Alison Crumblehulme CEO	Provides mentorship and business support programmes and services geared to help innovative enterprises to launch, grow, and thrive in Guelph and Wellington County.	IG is focused a focus on providing support and programming for startups and small/medium-sized enterprises. Clean Tech and Green Energy enterprises will be a primary lens of focus. In addition, innovation Guelph would like to increase the mentorship and business support programmes and services to deserving equity groups.
 Business Centre Guelph Wellington (BCGW)	Kristel Manes	It serves as an entry point for Guelph and Wellington County entrepreneurs to help individuals get into entrepreneurship and support existing entrepreneurs with consultative advice to grow and expand their small businesses in Guelph and Wellington County.	BCGW is focused on championing the innovation of future-focused business models, such as cooperatives, social enterprises, and circular economy.
 Wellington Federation of Agriculture (WFA)	Janet Harrop President	Wellington Federation of Agriculture works for farmers' economic, environmental, and social well-being. The WFA is a local county affiliate of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and will liaise with the OFA to all levels of government, commodity, and rural groups to meet these needs.	WFA is focused on Housing for the next generation of farmers and agricultural workers; increased value-added processing; identifying missing inputs; Advocacy for Agricultural Land Sustainability

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA)	Rian Omollo Senior Program Analyst	OMAFRA is the Ontario Ministry that works to build the agriculture, food, and rural sectors of the Province. OMAFRA also has the responsibility of providing regulatory oversight in those sectors to ensure compliance.	OMAFRA works to strengthen the agricultural, food, and rural sectors of Ontario by investing in innovative technologies, reviewing policy, undertaking investment attraction, and providing data collection and analysis support.
Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade (MEDJCT)	Laura Gibson Regional Manager	MEDJCT is the Ontario Ministry that works to grow the local economy by supporting job creation, attracting investment, and developing market opportunities. MEDJCT is active internationally and manages a large network of foreign trade, and investment offices in key markets around the world.	MEDJCT supports job creation, innovation, and trade for all Ontarians. They have a range of programmes and services available to help business innovate and compete in today's global economy. MEDJCT also continues to build strategic partnerships and work to promote and bolster Ontario's economic competitive advantage.

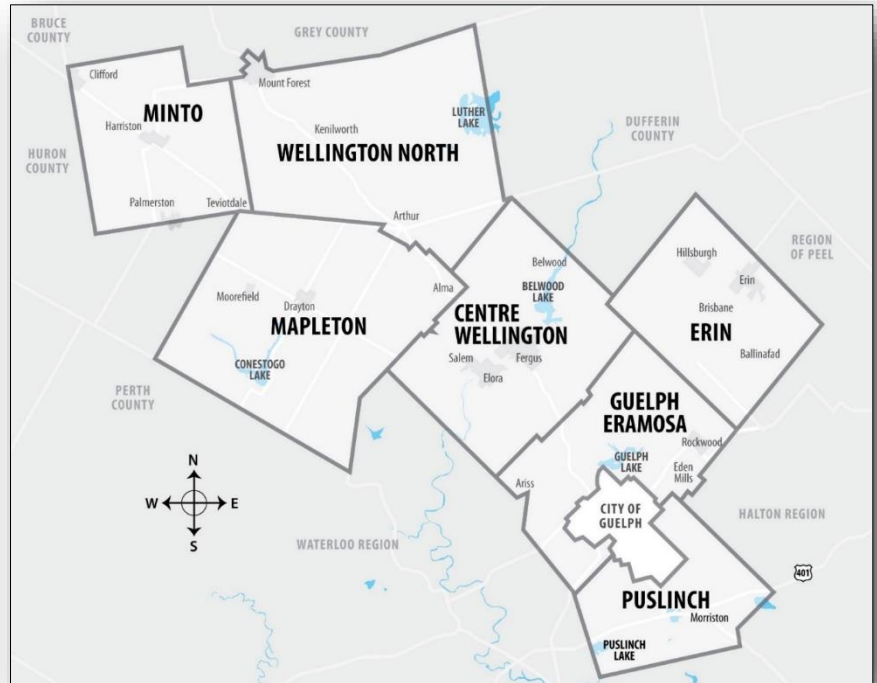
1.3. LOCAL ECONOMY

Wellington County is in Southwestern Ontario, just over one hundred kilometres west of Toronto. Wellington County is the upper-tier municipality of seven-member municipalities. The County expects its population to grow to 160,000 by 2051, a 60,000 person increase from 2020.

The County is close to major highway corridors such as Highway 6, 7, 10 and 401; and other significant air, freight, and deepsea ports. This central location allows for ground access to 200 million within a 12-hour drive and the quick movement of goods to various international markets. In addition, the County has access to a well-trained workforce due to its proximity to multiple post-secondary institutions nearby, such as the University of Guelph, University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University, and Conestoga College.

The County of Wellington has a vibrant economy, with manufacturing, agriculture, health care and creative professional sectors being primary focus sectors. Of the jobs in Wellington County, the manufacturing sector employs 18%, construction employs 13%, and health care and social assistance employ 8.2%.

The joint strength economically of Wellington County and its member municipalities is agriculture. A majority of the land in Wellington County is prime agricultural, making it some of the most fertile land in the province. As a sector, agriculture is a strong driver of economic activity, further amplified by area institutions like the University of Guelph, which has a rich history in agricultural research, education, and innovation. Now more than ever, it is essential to focus efforts on protecting this economic asset for future generations. To preserve the value of this economic asset, we partnered with the City of Guelph to create the Our Food Future programme, emphasizing the benefits of circular economy practices.



WELLINGTON COUNTY ECONOMIC SNAPSHOT

Population 102,250 residents (2021)	Population Growth 12.5% (2016-2021) vs 5.7% percent in Ontario	Population Projection Expected to grow to 160,000 by 2051.
Local Government County of Wellington (upper level) and 7 member municipalities.	Geography Wellington County covers 2,610 km² of land in Southwestern Ontario.	Households Wellington County has an estimated 36,040 households in 2021.
Average Household Income The estimated average household income in Wellington County was \$123,772 (2021).	Average Household Income \$88,901 (Minto, Wellington North) \$126,691 (Mapleton, Centre Wellington, Erin) \$170,976 (Puslinch, Guelph/Eramosa).	GDP \$4,073 M (2020)
Average Age 42 years.	Immigration Newcomers to Canada make up nearly 11.5 percent of Wellington County's population	GHG Emissions 13.82 tonnes per capita
Labour Force Wellington County labour force was estimated at 58,164 in 2021. A 1.8% increase from 2020 to 2021.	Local Jobs Wellington County had an estimated 47,249 local jobs in 2021.	Unemployment Rate The rural unemployment rate was estimated to be 4.3 % (2021).
Business Count Total number of businesses with one employee or more in Wellington County is estimated at 3,791.	Top Sectors of Employment Manufacturing Retail Trade Construction Health Care Agriculture	Growth Sectors Wellington County saw 277 new manufacturing jobs, 163 new health care and social assistance jobs, and 83 new construction jobs (2021-2022).

GROWTH AND ENGAGEMENT



497
(-75)

New Residential
Units (2020)



4,572
(+2.3K)

RIDE WELL Rides
Completed
(2021)



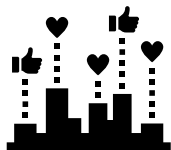
600
(+109)

EcDev Enquiries
(2021)



+9%

Jobs Created
(2016-2019)



\$82.5K
(+\$22.5k)

CIP Investments
(2021)



3,085

SWIFT rural
broadband: properties
added to service area
(2020-2023)



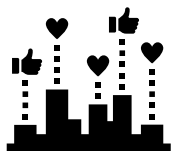
64%
(-9%)

Member-
municipality fund
(BRE)
(2021)



4.06K
(+22.37K)

EcDev Webpage
Views
(2021)



59
(+18%)

New Businesses
(2021)



\$92.5K
(\$0)

Direct Business
Support
Organizational
Funding
(2021)



190
(+14)

Taste Real Partner
Businesses
(2022)



26
(-14)

Of EcDev
Newsletters (2021)



23

Newly Circular
Businesses
(2020-2021)



65
(+15)

Of Tourism Signs
(2021)



31.6K
(+189)

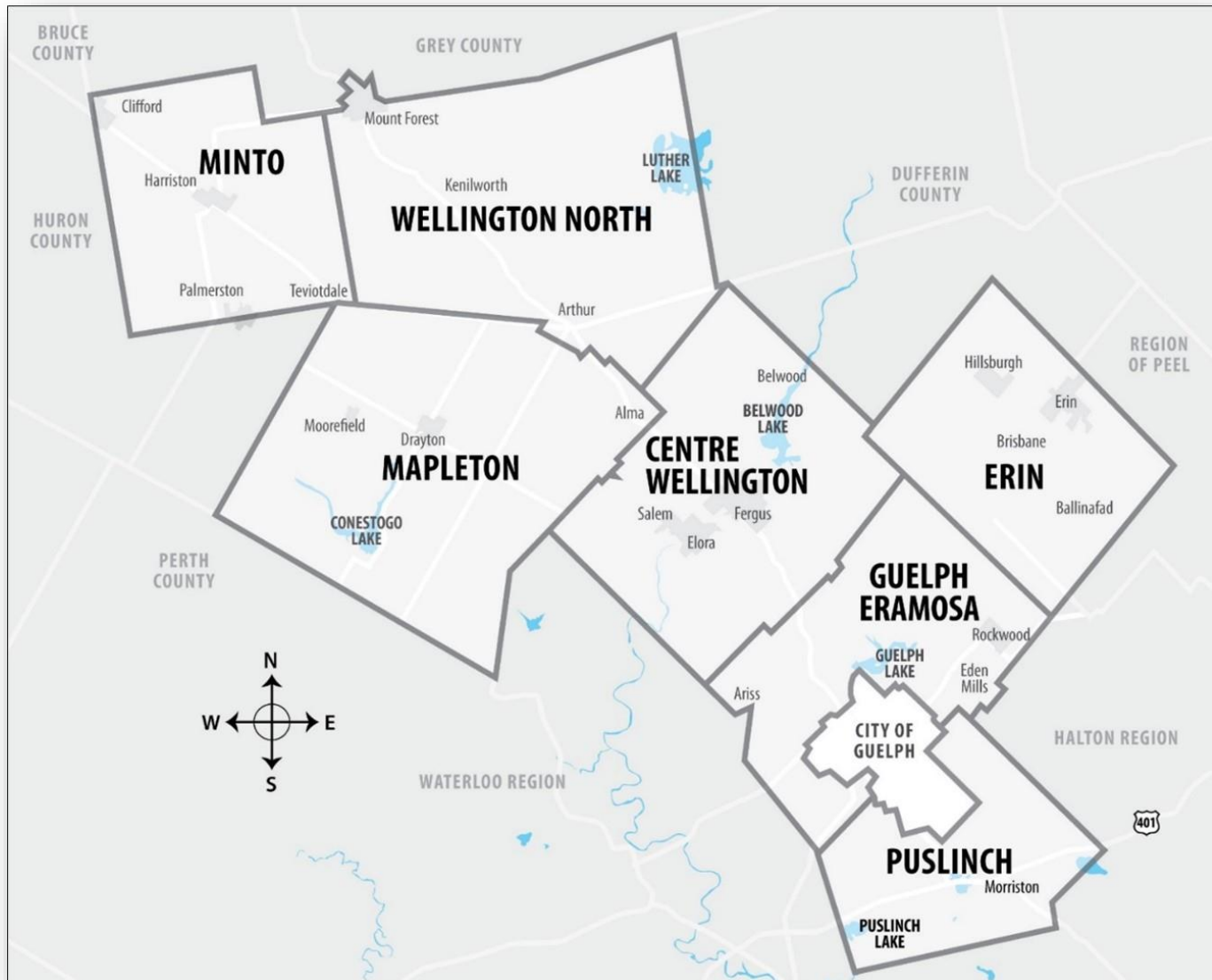
EcDev Newsletter
Views
(2021)



5.35K

EcDev Newsletter
Subscribers
(2022)

2. MEMBER MUNICIPALITY COMMUNITY PROFILES



Wellington County consists of seven member municipalities stretching across a diverse geography, varied economic strengths, demographic, and cultural uniqueness.

2.1. TOWNSHIP OF CENTRE WELLINGTON

Population: 31,093

Projected Population: 58,900 (2051)

Average Age: 43

Geography: Land Area is 407.54 kilometres squared

Settlement Areas: Fergus, Elora/Salem

Business Count: 1,426

Average Household Income: \$115,287

Median Household Income: \$101,000

Labour Force Participation: 60%

Labour Force: 18,651

Local Jobs: 12,549

Top Sectors of Employment: Manufacturing (15%), Health Care and Social Assistance (11%), Educational Services (9%), Retail Trade (9%), Construction (9%)

Growth Sectors: Manufacturing, Health Care and Social Assistance, Educational Services, Professional/Scientific/Technical Services, Construction

GHG emissions: Estimated at 9.59 tonnes per capita

Website:

<https://www.centrewellington.ca/en/index.aspx>



Centre Wellington is the largest township in Wellington County and offers both a small town and a rural lifestyle. Centre Wellington is an established tourism destination and the hub for many tourists to the County of Wellington. The charming heritage towns of Fergus and Elora offer a thriving cultural scene with many locally-owned one-of-a-kind shops and specialty stores. Centre Wellington is anchored by the natural beauty of the Elora Gorge, which offers picturesque walking trails, ziplining, rafting, and tubing opportunities.

Centre Wellington is well positioned for the anticipated population growth in the future and has a diversified economy with strengths in hospitality and tourism, arts and culture, manufacturing, and agriculture. Centre Wellington is developing a new 58-acre business park with anticipated sales occurring in 2023. Centre Wellington's industry areas of interest are Agriculture/Agri-Food, Creative Economy, Health Care, and Manufacturing. In addition, Centre Wellington is home to Jefferson Elora, one of the County's largest employers.

2.2. TOWN OF ERIN

Population: 11,981

Projected Population: 26,300 (2051)

Average Age: 43

Geography: Land area is 297.75 kilometres squared

Settlement Areas: Erin, Hillsburgh

Business Count: 519

Average Household Income: \$152,724

Median Household Income: \$127,000

Labour Force Participation: 66%

Labour Force: 7,865

Local Jobs: 4,156

Top Sectors of Employment: Manufacturing (11%), Retail Trade (10%), Professional/Scientific/Technical Services (8%), Construction (8%), Health Care and Social Assistance (7%)

Growth Sectors: Professional/Scientific/Technical Services, Public Administration, Retail Trade, Educational Services, Manufacturing

GHG emissions: Estimated at 7.60 tonnes per capita

Website: <https://www.erin.ca/>



The picturesque Town of Erin is a rural community lush with rolling countryside, meandering rivers, small settlement areas, and quaint village settings. Its bustling downtown, Erin village, is a medley of adorable shops and lovingly preserved buildings. Nearby Hillsburgh offers a relaxing and picturesque pond adjacent to the Hillsburgh Library, also serving as a connection point to the 47km Elora Cataract Trailway. Erin is known for its equine and agri-tourism culture, while also accompanying and bordering the Town of Caledon and Halton Hills. Erin acts as an active member of Headwaters and Central Counties Tourism, with visitors having the opportunity to watch various equine events throughout the year, create wonderful memories on family farms, or attend the well-established Erin Fall Fair.

The Town of Erin has access to many population growth areas and areas of significant economic activity in the Province of Ontario, such as: Toronto, Peel Region, Halton Region, Guelph, Waterloo Region, and Orangeville. Erin is in close proximity to significant land transportation routes (Highway 10, Highway 124, Highway 410, Highway 401, Highway 407, and Pearson International Airport), allowing for access to a large domestic and international customer base. A new Wastewater Treatment plant is currently under construction, its supply of undeveloped industrial land is primed for business attraction in the near term. The Town of Erin's focus areas from a business attraction and retention perspective include Agri-Food and Agriculture related activities, Tourism, Advanced Manufacturing, Environmental and Clean Technologies, and Professional Services.

From a local business perspective, Erin's value proposition for local business investment is strong, its population is expected to double by 2051, allowing its local business to cater to a growing customer base.

2.3. GUELPH ERAMOSA TOWNSHIP

Population: 13,904

Projected Population: 14,700 (2051)

Average Age: 42

Geography: Land area is 291.73 kilometres squared

Settlement Areas: Rockwood

Business Count: 463

Average Household Income: \$142,964

Median Household Income: \$129,000

Labour Force Participation: 61%

Labour Force: 8,466

Local Jobs: 6,563

Top Sectors of Employment: Manufacturing (13%), Retail Trade (10%), Educational Services (9%), Construction (8%), Health Care and Social Assistance (7%)

Growth Sectors: Educational Services, Manufacturing, Finance and Insurance, Retail, Professional/Scientific/Technical Services

GHG emissions: Estimated at 8.31 tonnes per capita

Website: <https://www.get.on.ca/>



Guelph/Eramosa is a growing and vibrant rural community mixed with stunning landscapes and natural wonders. The Rockwood Conservation Area has served as a popular filming destination offering its mesmerizing scenery and formations. Boasting over eleven municipal parks and over 81 kilometers of trails. Opportunities to explore The Kissing Bridge, the Ignatius Jesuit Centre farm and walking trails, or have a beach day at either Guelph Lake or Rockwood. Guelph Eramosa is home to many well-known festivals and cultural events, such as the Hillside Festival and Eden Mills Arts Festival.

Guelph Eramosa Township is centrally located and shares a border with growth and innovation areas like the City of Guelph, Waterloo Region, and Halton Region. In addition, Guelph Eramosa has close access to key transportation routes such as Highway 401 and Highway 7 and three international airports (Toronto Pearson, Waterloo International, and Hamilton International). Guelph/Eramosa has many assets to continue as a vital economic contributor to Wellington County; with an ample supply of un-serviced and developed employment lands, steps must be taken to further their development. Additionally, Guelph/Eramosa has a strong agriculture and agri-food sector, home to a large amount of prime agricultural land.

2.4. TOWNSHIP OF MAPLETON

Population: 10,829

Projected Population: 14,400 (2051)

Average Age: 35

Geography: Land Area is 534.87 kilometres squared

Settlement Areas: Moorefield, Drayton

Business Count: 317

Average Household Income: \$112,063

Median Household Income: \$109,000

Labour Force Participation: 58%

Labour Force: 6,268

Local Jobs: 4,156

Top Sectors of Employment:

Agriculture/Forestry/Fishing/Hunting (22%),
Manufacturing (15%), Construction (10%), Retail
Trade (7%), Health Care and Social Assistance (7%)

Growth Sectors:

Agriculture/Forestry/Fishing/Hunting,
Manufacturing, Health Care and Social Assistance,
Educational Services, Wholesale Trade

GHG emissions: Estimated at 24.33 tonnes per capita

Website: <https://mapleton.ca/>



The Township of Mapleton is a community rich in heritage and culture. Mapleton has a strong arts and culture scene anchored by the Drayton Festival Theatre, among one of Canada's most successful professional theatres. Mapleton is an agriculture and agri-food powerhouse within Wellington County; the Mapleton Farmers' Market offers an opportunity to sample some of the locally grown and produced products.

Mapleton is home to some of Wellington County's largest agricultural producers and growers, thanks to Mapleton's abundant amount of prime agricultural land in the County. From a growth perspective, Mapleton has been constrained by the lack of servicing capacity for many years but is working through plans to increase its servicing to allow for the expansion of their employment lands and residential development within its urban boundary. Economically, Mapleton is focused on developing and supporting: Agriculture, Tourism, Health Care, and Creative Economy sectors. Additionally, there is a focus on local entrepreneurship, arts and culture, local business promotion, and local food opportunities.

2.5. TOWN OF MINTO



Population: 9,094

Projected Population: 15,200 (2051)

Average Age: 42

Geography: Land Area is 300.19 square kilometres

Settlement Areas: Palmerston, Harriston, Clifford

Business Count: 385

Average Household Income: \$90,383

Median Household Income: \$84,000

Labour Force Participation: 57%

Labour Force: 5,208

Local Jobs: 4,908

Top Sectors of Employment: Manufacturing (23%), Agriculture/Forestry/Fishing/Hunting (10%), Retail Trade (9%), Health Care and Social Assistance (9%), Construction (9%)

Growth Sectors: Manufacturing, Health Care and Social Assistance, Agriculture/Forestry/Fishing/Hunting, Professional/Scientific/Technical Services, Retail Trade

GHG emissions: Estimated at 20.74 tonnes per capita

Website: <https://town.minto.on.ca/>



Visiting Minto's three revitalized downtowns boasts an unexpectedly diverse array of entertainment, shopping, history, and food options – from the Grey-Wellington Theatre Guild and the Norgan Theatre, to antique shops and everyday essentials, The Palmerston Railway Heritage Museum, renovated libraries, and independent eateries. Minto offers many fresh local food options, including the one-of-a-kind Farmers' Market in Palmerston, or find handmade goods at the Makers' Markets located throughout Minto.

The Town of Minto is located on the north-western boundary of Wellington County, well-situated mid-way between the major centers of southern Ontario and popular recreational areas along the eastern shore of Lake Huron and south Georgian Bay. It is only a 1 to 1 ½ hour drive from the municipality to Canada's "Golden Horseshoe" industrial heartland, like Toronto and Hamilton, and under an hour to Kitchener-Waterloo and Guelph. The City of Owen Sound offers Great Lakes port and shipping facilities, as does the Town of Goderich, situated approximately one hundred kilometers to the southwest. Minto has a strong manufacturing appeal anchored by one of the County's largest employers, TG Minto. Minto is primed for population growth of ~60% between 2020 and 2051. Minto is focused on continuing to invest and innovate in rural community development and creating a strong sense of place.

2.6. TOWNSHIP OF PUSLINCH

Population: 7,944

Projected Population: 10,000 (2051)

Average Age: 46

Geography: Land Area is 214.62 kilometres squared

Settlement Areas: Aberfoyle, Morriston

Business Count: 228

Average Household Income: \$198,987

Median Household Income: \$133,000

Labour Force Participation: 59%

Labour Force: 4,658

Local Jobs: 7,432

Top Sectors of Employment: Manufacturing (31%), Construction (15%), Health Care and Social Assistance (14%), Retail Trade (14%), Transportation and Warehousing (8%)

Growth Sectors: Manufacturing, Construction, Health Care and Social Assistance, Retail Trade, Transportation and Warehousing

GHG emissions: Estimated at 10.09 tonnes per capita

Website: <https://puslinch.ca/>



Puslinch has the laidback feel of country living while still having convenient access to urban amenities near major cities. Just minutes from Guelph, Puslinch offers immense recreational facilities at the [Puslinch Optimist Center](#) and activities and events year-round, including the regionally recognized [Aberfoyle Antique Market](#). The [Aberfoyle Farmers Market](#) provides opportunities to explore and purchase many locally made and sourced products. The emerald of Puslinch lies in its natural features and various trails and forest tracts. These contribute to a high quality of life that contribute to investment attraction and growth.

With the continued growth of warehousing and logistics across the Greater Toronto Area, Puslinch's location to major transportation and goods movement corridors, including Highway 401, Highway 6, CP Mainline, CN Mainline, Waterloo International Airport, Pearson International Airport, Hamilton International Airport, and the Port of Hamilton. Puslinch is proximal to notable innovation and growth centres like Waterloo Region, Hamilton, and the broader Greater Toronto Area. Puslinch's access to well-educated talent and residents with occupations and educations from nearby institutions in high paying and in demand industries in the nearby centres allows Puslinch to enjoy a higher level of resident financial prosperity than other parts of the County. Ongoing economic focuses within Puslinch include: growing its industrial base and diversifying its agricultural industries.

2.7. TOWNSHIP OF WELLINGTON NORTH

Population: 12,431

Projected Population: 20,500 (2051)

Average Age: 42

Geography: Land Area is 526.31 square kilometres

Settlement Areas: Mount Forest, Arthur

Business Count: 500

Average Household Income: \$87,418

Median Household Income: \$78,000

Labour Force Participation: 57%

Labour Force: 7,049

Local Jobs: 7,485

Top Sectors of Employment: Manufacturing (21%), Agriculture/Forestry/Fishing/Hunting (10%), Construction (10%), Health Care and Social Assistance (9%), Retail Trade (9%)

Growth Sectors: Manufacturing, Health Care and Social Assistance, Retail Trade, Finance and Insurance, Professional/Scientific/Technical Services

GHG emissions: Estimated at 16.11 tonnes per capita

Website: <https://www.wellington-north.com/>



Wellington North encompasses endless walking and cycling trails, unique stores, gift shops, and fashion destinations that dot this unique destination on the mountain top. Take a stroll through Arthur, Canada's Most Patriotic Village and check out the many murals that are located throughout the town, or visit and experience why Mount Forest proudly calls itself, High, Healthy and Happy. Find fresh produce and goods at the Farmers' Market, and see for yourself why Wellington North is an agricultural hub. Hosting one of the top 100 festivals in Ontario, watch fireworks fly at the Fireworks Festival, learn about the historic landscape at Mount Forest Museum and Archives, and Lynes Blacksmith Shop, or catch a show at the Grey Wellington Theatre Guild, and simply explore all the treasures Wellington North has to offer.

Wellington North is a well-diversified and ever-evolving Township in Wellington County. Wellington North boasts a strong industrial and manufacturing employment base, coupled with a strong agriculture and agri-food business sector. Wellington North's sectors of focus include Manufacturing, Construction, Agriculture/Forestry, Retail, and Health Care.

The Township is home to one of the County's largest employers, Musashi Auto Parts Inc, an anchor business in Wellington County, which supports Ontario's robust automobile and auto parts sector. Economically, the Township is focused on supporting pending population growth through investments in local wastewater capacity and the streetscapes of its largest urban centers Arthur and Mount Forest. The Township is anticipating 58% population growth between 2020 and 2051.

3. MEMBER MUNICIPALITIES

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In preparation of this report, staff provided a questionnaire to member municipal economic development representatives, seeking information on economic development actions, barriers, and focus for the next three years. The results highlighted the significant geographical, cultural, and economical differences between communities. For simplicity, staff have grouped the municipalities and the general themes observed in the economic development priorities, challenges, and opportunities:

Northern Wellington County (Mapleton, Minto, Wellington North):

The northern municipalities rely more heavily on agriculture, retail, and manufacturing sector employment. Historically, this region has experienced more challenges in workforce attraction than other areas of the County. Recently, the issue of housing affordability has grown in this region, primarily due to residents being unable to compete with Greater Toronto Area (GTA) resident in-migration. The cost of living in the north for an average earning resident exceeds any income increases. As a result, local employers have difficulty retaining and attracting staff. Rising fuel costs and limited alternative rural transportation options has compounded these pressures on local employer's ability to attract and retain out-of-market staff.

Areas of focus:

- Developing more welcoming and inclusive communities
- Downtown beautifications/improvements
- Diversity and inclusion plans
- Attainable housing



Centre Wellington:

Central Wellington is poised to receive the most growth over the near term. Centre Wellington is a strong hub of economic activity in the County, particularly manufacturing, tourism, the arts, and professional services. With two of the County's most populated urban centers (Elora and Fergus) and its visitor appeal, the area is experiencing growth-related pressures, such as inadequate parking, limited rental unit supply, and high housing costs. Rising fuel costs are putting further pressure on local employers' ability to attract and retain out-of-market staff from Guelph, further compounded by wage stagnation and limited rural transportation options.

Areas of focus:

- Diversifying its tax base through investments into servicing and selling municipally owned employment lands.
- Raising Centre Wellington's profile as a prospective business location; through marketing, and updated Community Profiles.
- Contributing to the creation of more attainable housing.

Southern Wellington (Erin, Guelph/Eramosa, Puslinch):

These communities have the unique advantage of proximity to the GTA's large urban centers, major transportation corridors, Highway 6, 7, 10, 401 and three international airports (Toronto, Hamilton, and Waterloo). In addition, low vacancy, and high prices in the GTA's warehousing and logistics real estate market have led to large warehouse and logistic centre investments due to their affordability and strong location from a goods movement perspective.

The area is home to higher-earning commuters who work in the nearby GTA and Waterloo Region. The median household income figure highlights similar affordability challenges that the rest of the County faces. Lack of diverse housing options and reliable transportation options to the regions, compounds employers' challenge in obtaining workers.

Areas of focus:

- Addressing infrastructure capacity limitations by studying and/or implementing increased water and wastewater capacity to unlock additional residential and employment land.
- Make use of employment lands within the context of existing municipal servicing capacities to access commercial and industrial land effectively.
- Study and assess the economic development impacts of the highway 6 and 401 Morriston Bypass Expansion project, which may have implications on employment land, downtown development, industrial land access, and urban-to-rural connections. Ongoing Township and County support/advocacy will be needed to ensure that appropriate access will be provided.
- Increasing contact with the business community and encouraging greater community collaboration. Encourage actions through organizations like the Chamber of Commerce and/or local BIA's.

4. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS



4.1. BUSINESS ATTRACTION, RETENTION, AND EXPANSION

Business Attraction, Retention and Expansion (BRE) aims to support local businesses so they can move to, grow, create jobs, and stay in Wellington County. BRE is a core economic development activity that builds competitiveness for the region by fostering a strong business ecosystem.

Wellington County Economic Development first undertook BRE function in 2014 by conducting business surveys to understand sectoral (i.e. agriculture, manufacturing, healthcare, and the creative economy) challenges in Wellington County. The County has since held periodic business surveys to understand what the business community needs and how to support them accordingly. For example, in 2020 the County surveyed 435 businesses to gather feedback on how COVID-19 impacted them, and what support they needed from the government moving forward. The results were shared with local municipalities and various actions were taken based on the feedback, such as shop local campaigns and providing regular updates to businesses on funding and resources available to them.



In 2016, the County expanded its BRE activity by creating a fund that each of the seven municipalities could access yearly to implement their own business support activities. Each municipality can request up to \$25,000 in funding from the County following an application and internal review process. This has led to several hyperlocal BRE projects, such as local community improvement programmes, LaunchIt Minto, and the Centre Wellington Tourism Shuttle Bus.

There has been interest from the member-municipalities to further collaborate with the County on BRE efforts. One staff member (James) will be dedicated to providing expanded direct business support over the next 3 years. Economists have predicted several challenges for businesses including labour shortages, inflation, supply chain disruptions, and an economic recession. BRE will be crucial to supporting businesses through these challenges. The following strategic priorities are designed to help the County maintain a strong, competitive business ecosystem through economic challenges.

Strategic Priority	Description
BRE Fund	The BRE Fund will continue to be offered to local municipalities. Each of the 7 local municipalities have accessed the fund to either continue existing programmes, or try new ones that directly support businesses in their communities. An overview and metrics are presented in a separate report to January Committee.
Boots on the Ground support	A core BRE activity is regularly meeting, communicating, and networking with businesses and large employers in each of the communities and helping them connect to resources that are available to them. As a regional municipality, the County will leverage its network of partner organizations, governments, non-profits, and private sector stakeholders to ensure businesses have a point of contact.

Celebrate and promote successes	Wellington County businesses have shown resiliency by innovating, adapting, or pivoting their products and services. There is significant value in celebrating business accomplishments and promoting them to the community. This encourages buying local, which strengthens economic supply chain resiliency, creates local job opportunities, and builds economic, social, and environmental sustainability.
Collaborate with partner organizations to support small businesses	Wellington County has a strong network of strategic partners. These partners should be leveraged to find new innovative ways to support the business community. This includes hosting events, cross-promoting webinars, and other sessional resources, and providing mentorship opportunities.

Strategic Priority 1 – BRE Fund			
Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Liaison with Municipalities	The County will continue to work closely with its local municipalities to ensure they are finding value in accessing the BRE fund, and that they have quality projects in the works for the County to support.	Lead	2023
Review Return on Investment (ROI) annually	The County provides an annual look at the return on investment from BRE Fund projects. This will be a continued practice as a means to measure success. Member municipalities benefit greatly from this Fund, where significant projects would not have been possible without County support.	Lead	2023

Strategic Priority 2 – Boots On the Ground Business Support			
Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Direct Business Consultation	Consulting with businesses about their immediate and long-term needs will enable the County to be strategic, anticipating the supports needed. Enough cannot be said about having an individual that can be contacted for business support at the County level. The County will look at accompanying local EDOs and municipal representatives on local tours/visits of businesses within the County. We have recognized a need for a stronger role in providing accessible business support services to the County businesses in collaboration with the municipalities. There is also a need to reconnect with businesses that were surveyed in 2020 that were looking for assistance. The County can also leverage its existing network to help connect large employers when they are undertaking new projects, innovating, and/or talent attraction.	Lead	2023
Develop County Economic Development Overview Handout	Several member-municipalities currently undertake regular boots-on-the-ground support.		

	Other upper-tier municipalities, such as Grey County's Made In Grey, have specific BRE webpages that outline resources available. Whereas Bruce County targets entrepreneurs by providing a business plan template, Wellington County will develop a departmental overview that highlights support and opportunities available to businesses at the regional level. This will accent the County's existing digital presence and provide a physical handout for businesses to reference and find contact information. The County will also work with member-municipalities to distribute these handouts when they have business meetings in their municipalities.	Lead	2023
Undertake Business Attraction Communication	The County will meet with local, provincial, national, or international businesses that are interested in expanding or growing their business in Wellington County. As part of this action, the County will explain the strategic and competitive advantages of locating in Ontario and Wellington County. Business attraction strengthens the County's economy by bringing new, high-quality jobs to the region.	Lead	2023

Strategic Priority 3 – Celebrate and Promote Business Success

Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Identify business innovation and success through the COVID-19 pandemic	When businesses shut their doors during the COVID-19 pandemic, some had the opportunity to innovate, pivot, or try something new. Several of these new ventures resulted in significant business growth. The County will look to identify who these businesses are, what led to the success, and how they plan to move forward.	Lead	2023
Promote business success on digital channels	The businesses that are identified from the previous action will be promoted on the County's digital channels (i.e. social media, webpages, newsletters) to celebrate them and notify the public of their new offerings.	Lead	2023
Host Business Celebration Events	Collaborating with relevant partners, the County will develop a plan for hosting industry-specific events to celebrate these successes. This will provide valuable B2B networking opportunities as well as additional exposure to neighbouring business activities.	Lead	2023-2025

Strategic Priority 4 – Collaborate with Partner Organizations on Supporting Small Businesses

Action	Description	Role	Commencing
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Pilot a business competition with partner organizations	The County, the Business Centre of Guelph-Wellington, and Innovation Guelph will deliver business competitions. The competitions will result in supports being offered such as valuable expert mentorship time. The County would receive valuable feedback as part of this competition (i.e. a survey completion to be entered into a draw), while businesses will have a new opportunity to receive additional expertise and support. The County will also look at being more involved and support local municipal business plan competitions hosted by member municipalities.	Lead	2023
Participate and support regional networking opportunities	County Economic Development will continue to participate in tradeshow, conferences, and local committee meetings where local businesses will be in attendance. This provides an opportunity for networking and educating businesses about the County's BRE support and efforts. For example, the County participates in the annual Innovation Expo hosted by Innovation Guelph, and in Ontario Food Cluster events.	Lead	2023

Strategic Priority 5 – Sector Specific Support

Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Support Agriculture	With an average of \$60M to \$80M per year in construction activity, and the research, soil quality and regional expertise, agriculture is a strong and diverse sector in Wellington County. To support the sector and its over 3,200 jobs, the County will revisit the Food and Beverage Industry Strategy, work with partner agencies and Smart Cities to encourage agrifood start ups, and better understand the unique offerings and problems that need to be solved locally. In addition to unique local strengths, several international trade agreements position the County well for international investment attraction. The County will continue to participate in the Ontario Food Cluster, seek knowledge transfer and value-add opportunities to benefit the County, and promote Wellington County as a global investment site for food.	Lead	2023
Support Manufacturing	Manufacturing represents 8,700 jobs in Wellington County, and 10% growth in jobs in the last 5 years. Industrial development activity has increased steadily over the last five years, with significant expansions made in several industries. Understanding how to support these industries (i.e. plastics) will be a priority. Also of importance will be understanding the land and infrastructure capacity,	Lead	2024

	with the County undertaking an employment land strategy.		
Support Health Care	The health care sector in Wellington County has grown to 3,800 jobs. Notable is the number of health-related businesses that have opened in the last five years, many in the downtowns.	Lead	2023
Support Professional Services	While representing over 3,000 jobs in Wellington County, the professional and creative services sector has grown the most in the last five years. The implementation of the County Tourism Strategy will support this sector, as will connecting to businesses in this sector and promoting Wellington County as a place where creative professionals can thrive.	Lead	2023

The County works closely with the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus (WOWC) to support its top sectors, as these sectors are representative across Southwestern Ontario. The WOWC advocates and engages with other levels of government as one united voice on opportunities, common needs, and issues of critical importance to Southwestern Ontario. The Caucus represents the voice of 15 upper and single tier municipalities representing 20% of the province's population. WOWC is focused on advocacy and partnerships supporting high-speed internet, Attainable Housing, Workforce Planning, Rural Transportation, and Infrastructure funding.



4.2. COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

The Invest WELL Community Improvement Programme (CIP) allows the County of Wellington to provide grants, and loans to support business projects that significantly impact the community. The Invest WELL CIP budgets **\$160,000 per year** to support the seven member-municipality CIPs.

The County has engaged RCI Consulting Inc to complete a CIP review and update. The updated document will better align with County goals and improve internal review processes. The new CIP document will be put forward for council adoption in 2023.

Programme information can be found at www.wellington.ca/cip.



Elora Distilling Company

Strategic Priority	Description
CIP Promotion	Focus will be on creating connections with local businesses that are investing in the community. By recognizing and celebrating their completed projects, staff hope to encourage other businesses to participate in a community improvement programme by showcasing the value this type of investment brings to the community.
Invest in County-wide Goals	Reviewing the Invest WELL CIP will ensure the programme targets projects will contribute to making Wellington County more resilient. The review will also seek to ensure the programme is efficient, scalable, and innovative. • Use Land Strategically: Redevelop vacant/underutilized lands to grow employment. • Provide Rental Housing: Upgrade or create new rental housing, promote mixed-uses, and downtown residential intensification. • Improve Buildings and Infrastructure: Adapt buildings for reuse, incorporate sustainable features, and upgrade utilities/servicing. • Diversify the Economy: Create new on-farm diversified or agriculture-related uses, new business in a target sector, and new business in downtown areas. • Promote Tourism: Increase short term accommodation options, enhance tourism assets, and participate in tourism promotion.

Strategic Priority 1 – CIP Promotion			
Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Collaborate with Member Municipalities	The County will work with member municipalities to make it easier for potential applicants to access information. Staff will hold joint CIP presentations and information sessions with member municipalities. In addition, early discussions with both County and member municipal representatives will enable a more effective process for applicants.	Support	2023
Distribute Marketing Materials	As mentioned in the BRE section, the County will also develop a brochure that outlines resources available to the business, which include information about the Invest WELL CIP. The County will provide these materials when visiting businesses for future project considerations and to spread the word about the CIP. The County has also developed a webpage that highlights all the completed CIP projects with before and after photos at https://www.wellington.ca/en/business/ed-completed-cip-projects.aspx	Lead/Support	2023
Proactively follow-up with CIP recipients upon completion of their project	Building relationships with the recipients is an opportunity for the participant to provide feedback and facilitates future partnership opportunities.	Lead	2023
Explore new visualization marketing tools or avenues.	Businesses often need guidance on what types of projects would be eligible for funding under a CIP. This action aims to understand the benefits of providing visualization tools when presenting the CIP as an opportunity to businesses. These avenues could include video production, QR code links to similar completed projects on handouts, or partnering with colleges and universities as a means to provide digital renderings.	Lead	2024
In-person Certificate Presentations	A certificate presentation should be conducted once a business has completed their CIP project. This is an effective way to show participants that the County is excited to support them and their projects, and it provides a connection for any future projects. Presentations should involve any of the following: the local mayor or councillor, the local economic development representative, the County economic development representative.	Lead/Support	2023

Strategic Priority 2 – Invest in County-wide Goals			
Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Clarify internal roles and responsibilities for Tax Increment Equivalent Grants (TIEG).	The TIEG requires involvement from Economic Development, Treasury, and in some instances Planning staff at both the County and member-municipalities. This internal review process will be improved to ensure greater consistency and role clarity among stakeholders when administering tax increment equivalent grants.	Lead	2023
Establish a Community Improvement Plan Working Group with Member Municipalities	The County will create more dialogue, awareness, and continuous improvement opportunities and resolve challenges experienced with the Community Improvement Plan amongst the County and the member municipalities. It is anticipated that the group will meet at least two times a year with discussions which may include upcoming CIP applications or areas for process improvements.	Lead	2023
Review the Community Improvement Programme to better align with County priorities.	The County has hired RCI consulting to revise the Invest WELL CIP programme to be more impactful, transparent, and aligned with County priorities (attainable housing, promoting tourism, improving building reuse/sustainability.)	Lead	2023
Develop an annual CIP report to Council	The annual CIP report highlights to Council the projects funded by the CIP, return on investment, successes, and rejected applications from the previous fiscal year.	Lead	2023

4.3. TALENT ATTRACTION AND NEWCOMER SUPPORT

Retaining and growing businesses in Wellington County requires a labour force that is adequate in supply and sufficiently skilled to meet employer demands. The County has committed to proactively attracting immigrants and newcomers, from anywhere in Canada, to support the local economy. While the County works on talent attraction, at the same time, companies must be aware of their role in helping create the right workplace environment that would help attract and retain the best talents.



In recognition of a growing workforce challenge, the County benefits from being part of the bigger picture, as a member of the Western Ontario Warden Caucus (WOWC) - a strategic regional economic development planning body. As the County designs and implements its own newcomer attraction portfolio, the County will continue to support the WOWC Workforce Planning as its Strategic Priority 1 in its Economic Development Strategic Plan.

The year 2021 saw 9 in 10 recent immigrants living in one of Canada's 41 census metropolitan areas (CMAs), which are large urban centres of over 100,000 residents – as was the trend over the past 50 years. However, the share of recent immigrants who have settled in Canada's largest urban centres continued to decline, falling from 56.0% in 2016 to 53.4% in 2021. In contrast, an increasing number of recent immigrants have settled outside these key urban centres, strengthening population growth: 4.4% in small urban areas and 3.2% of recent immigrants settled in rural areas.

The County embarked on promoting Wellington County as a welcoming place to live and work, to help attract newcomers as early as 2015. Through the Talent Attraction and the Newcomer Support Programme, with support from Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), some strides have been made. However, much more needs to be done to create a more welcoming community for newcomers and supporting businesses in becoming more inclusive and welcoming workplaces.

Strategic Priority	Description
Support for employers becoming more diverse and welcoming.	This priority focuses on supporting employers to make their workplaces more respectful and open to diversity. In addition, this priority helps connect employers with resources to develop strategies and awareness of necessary accommodations to help create successful newcomer integration. Finally, this programme helps guide local businesses on the benefits of newcomers to their companies and workforce.
Create more welcoming communities	As Wellington County becomes more diverse, residents and businesses must be sensitive to newcomers. This priority aims to make residents and businesses aware of the benefits of having newcomers, as well as how being welcoming and friendly to them is essential to their transition into the community. A welcoming County has community-wide benefits; newcomers come with diverse skills and experiences needed for Wellington County to continue to be a thriving place to live, work, and play.

Be a relevant and trusted partner to newcomers	This priority focuses on ensuring that Wellington County positions itself as an attractive destination for newcomers and ensuring that we have the support and services necessary to make their transition successful into their new community. This will include working with existing communities, long-time residents, and employers to ensure preparedness and harmonious co-existence.
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Strategic Priority 1: Support for employers becoming more diverse and welcoming			
Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Facilitate employers' forums, workshops, or events under Workplace Diversity and Inclusion	This action will work closely with the Local Immigration Partnership to proactively address ongoing hot topics, such as immigration programmes, building HR strategies for Diversity and Inclusion, and making workplace more inclusive. Facilitation methods may include forums, workshops, or events. In addition, partnering with LaunchIt will assist in delivering and hosting workshops and connecting with employers in the northern part of the County. Employers are expected to gain capacity, relevant tools, and perspectives from the presentations of DEI experts.	Lead/ Partner	2023
Facilitate one-on-one employer engagement sessions about talent attraction needs/barriers	This action aims to emphasize awareness on the talent attraction problems faced by employers and connect best possible solutions through talent attraction supports. The County would discuss labour/ resources challenges being experienced by employers, become familiar with regional needs and trends, speak to the benefits of newcomers, and ways to overcome these challenges. Engagement methods may include individual employer meet and greet sessions, and employer "mentoring newcomers" volunteer opportunities to give back to the community.	Lead	2023
Develop and distribute Talent Attraction information materials to local community organizations	This action will develop and distribute materials to economic development, as well as update the Newcomer Support webpage for better user experience to ensure businesses and newcomers know that we exist and how we can help them. In addition, efforts will be focused on the County's industries that are most in need of talent, and to help build awareness of the type of employers and jobs that are available. Proactive flyer distribution to these industries allows for a constant reminder of talent attraction services and the benefits newcomers could have on their business. Materials would be distributed to stakeholders like: Chamber of Commerce, Trade Organization, Support Service Providers, and others.	Lead	2023

Strategic Priority 2: Create more welcoming communities			
Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Plan and host Multi-Cultural Festival(s) and/or events	This action will look at working closely together with Settlement Service Providers, the Local Immigration Partnership, and member municipalities with an aim to acknowledge, appreciate, and celebrate the multi-cultural diversity located within the County. It provides an opportunity to build stronger connections and awareness of the cultures among residents. Events may include community get togethers, celebrating religious events, and others. This may also include utilising the exhibits at the WCMA to showcase “Immigrants - then and now”.	Partner	2023
Make Wellington County “Welcoming Community” public awareness campaign	The County will work closely with Settlement Services and aim to raise awareness among community residents of the importance of immigration and the role each member of the public plays in making sure the community is welcoming. A public awareness campaign may include setting up social circles with community leaders and video promotions of local newcomer success stories within the County.	Partner	2023
Support and encourage newcomer welcoming initiatives in member municipalities.	This action aims to encourage initiatives that make newcomer integration into the community successful. The County will encourage the provision of appropriate (culturally sensitive) welcome packages and the hosting of newcomers’ welcome events in all member municipalities.	Lead/ Partner	2023
Facilitate the creation of Newcomer Welcoming tours.	In partnership with Tourism, this action will allow newcomers to experience and become familiar with key points of interest in the County. The newcomer welcoming tour will also create an opportunity for newcomers and members of the broader community to socialize and develop connections.	Partner	2024
Develop and deliver “Creating a Welcoming Community” training.	This action will work with a Subject Matter Expert/ DEI Expert and aim to remind elected officials and senior management of the importance of newcomers and how to be more welcoming and highlight barriers newcomers face in the community and its effect.	Support	2024

Strategic Priority 3: Be a relevant and trusted partner to newcomers			
Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Develop and execute a multi-channel promotional strategy focused on elevating	This action aims to elevate prospective newcomer awareness of Wellington County, as a place to live and work. The multi-channel promotional strategy may include participating, sharing information/resources, and representing Wellington County at expos such as	Participate	2023

newcomer awareness of Wellington County.	Immigrant Business Expos, Path to Prosperity Expos, and the Newcomers Canada Global Talent Expo to amplify awareness.		
Facilitate a series of forums and events to engage and connect with newcomers in the community.	This action will be in partnership with Settlement Services and Local Immigration Partnership and will aim to create a space for newcomers to come together and share their experiences, ask questions, meet others, and learn from special presentations targeted to their needs. This is beneficial for the County as it creates an environment for continual feedback and an ongoing relationship with newcomers. Initiatives may include informational sessions, social gatherings, and other group sessions.	Partner	2023
Support local growers of ethno-cultural products	People feel welcomed when they can find products they enjoy in their local grocery store. It is difficult for new farmers to launch, but there is an opportunity for existing farmers to grow new crops that are in demand. Farmers can often be unaware of where to find seeds, how to grow and importantly, how to market these products. In collaboration with Smart Cities, Innovation Guelph, and Taste Real, niche markets will be explored by facilitating an industry discussion day “Growing ethnic products in Wellington County” involving the entire value chain (where to resell, what parts of the animal to use).	Support	2024
Work with WOWC, International Student Experience University Guelph	The Federal Government is continuing its ambitious plans of attracting immigrants by setting targets of 465,000 permanent residents in 2023, 485,000 in 2024 and 500,000 in 2025. Partnering with university and college co-op departments within the County, the attraction of international student talent will be done by making them aware of the County’s top industries and making employers aware of the international student talent pool that is available.	Partner	2023

4.4. TOURISM

Tourism is a key part of Economic Development and plays an important role in attracting investment, talent, and sales to a region.

The County is home to key tourism destinations, including Elora-Fergus, the Aberfoyle Antique Market, the Grand River Conservation Areas, and many outstanding festivals and events that attract significant numbers of visitors to the area. Currently, the County of Wellington's Economic Development division undertakes limited initiatives to support the local tourism sector.



Through the award-winning Taste Real Local Food programme, the County promotes local farm and food businesses and actively promotes culinary and agritourism experiences. We work closely with municipal stakeholders to amplify local festivals and events through the Top 5 Things to do in Wellington County campaign, the online Festival and Events calendar, and the Experience Wellington website. The CIP and Tourism signage programmes further support tourism businesses locally. Beyond that, we have not had an active tourism mandate to date.

Leveraging the \$85,000 received as part of the 2022 FedDev Tourism Relief Fund, the County is developing a tourism strategy to establish the County's role within the local tourism eco-system. The plan will identify strategic opportunities to support the sector and enhance the County's positioning as an appealing rural tourism destination. This includes strategic business support and network building activities, fostering tourism product development, and actively telling the story of Wellington County to attract visitor spending and economic opportunity.

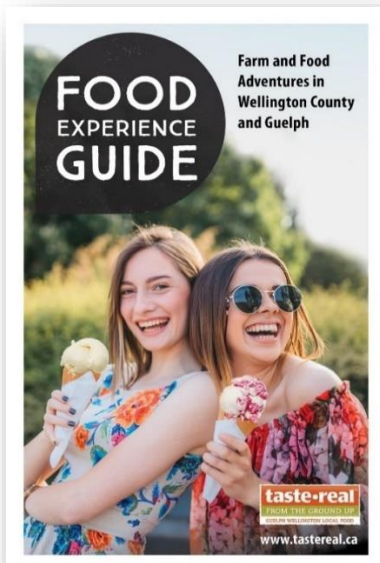
Strategic Priority	Description
Strengthen the Tourism Network and Operators	Staff will create an inventory of tourism assets and businesses, and facilitate networking, learning and collaboration opportunities across the sector. Leveraging the expertise, funding, and priorities of the Regional Tourism Organization, Elora Fergus Tourism, and local business support organization (i.e. BIAs, Chambers), the team will identify gaps and opportunities identified through business feedback.
Facilitate Tourism Experience Development	Staff will foster the development of market-ready tourism products and experiences to encourage visitor spending in all areas of Wellington County. This includes supporting industry-led and partner-led tourism product development as well as create seasonal/product focused self-guided trails. Working with other County Departments and organizations, the team will identify gaps and opportunities and elevate underutilized tourism assets. Staff will continue to collaborate the Wellington County Museum and Archive's Destination Development study and future visitor experience focused projects.

Market and promote Wellington County experiences	Telling the story of Wellington County in an authentic and engaging way is key to encourage visitation and support local businesses. To allow for more strategic outreach and allocation of marketing dollars, staff will create a marketing and communications plan, refine our online presence, and update photo and video assets. Staff will continue grow engagement in the Tourism Signage initiative and further engage with regional and provincial partners to amplify our messaging.
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Strategic Priority 1 – Strengthen the Tourism Network and Operators			
Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Establish the County's role and positioning within the Tourism Sector	Informed by the results of the Tourism Strategy, staff will identify Wellington County's role within the local tourism sector, and its positioning within the wider context of local, municipal, and provincial support organizations. This will help to leverage partnerships and avoid duplication of efforts as actions are undertaken to support the industry.	Lead	2023
Inventory and assess our local tourism sector	Create an inventory of Wellington County's tourism assets (i.e.: accommodations, tourism operators, hospitality, events, infrastructure, and natural features, etc.) to create a better understanding of the tourism landscape.	Lead	2023
Enhance information sharing and knowledge transfer in our Tourism Sector	Develop a sector-specific mailing list to inform operators of applicable opportunities, as well as create business to business connections.	Connect	2023
Create sector specific networking and learning events and opportunities	Work with partners to create industry-focused networking events, training workshops, and support tools to increase tourism readiness, and foster collaboration. Potential partners (RTO, Elora Fergus Tourism, Visit Guelph, BIAs, Chambers).	Connect	2023
Engagement with cultural sector and creative businesses	Fostering and growing the cultural sector and businesses, establishing Wellington County as a place where creative professionals can thrive.	Connect	2024

Strategic Priority 2 – Facilitate Tourism Experience Development			
Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Support development of industry-created tourism products	By providing connections and project support, staff will foster industry-led tourism product development such as businesses expanding current operations to include a tourism aspect (i.e., agri-tourism), or businesses interested in offering a collaborative tourism experience (i.e., Gin Trail). Staff will foster ongoing consultations with the community emphasizing inclusivity and regenerative tourism goals. Staff can assist with navigating the	Support	2023

	development process and accessing seed funding where possible.		
Identify opportunities and partnerships for underutilized tourism assets	Building upon the findings of the tourism strategy, staff will investigate and consult with member municipalities on the activation of underutilized tourism assets and activities. Examples include cycle tourism, trails, Grand River access points etc. Development of these assets will depend on future funding opportunities.	Lead	2024
Develop an array of day-tripping itineraries and trails	Trails and self-guided itineraries are an excellent tool to encourage individuals visiting a tourism hot spot, such as Elora, to explore more rural destinations and hidden gems in Wellington County. Staff aim to create several food, cultural, and activity-based itineraries to spread out visitor spending to all areas of Wellington County. Since butter tarts continue to be a favourite way to engage visitors, staff will investigate the viability of re-instating the Butter Tart Trail, a trademark owned by the Township of Wellington North.	Lead	2023
Partner or facilitate events and initiatives to create visitor experiences	In keeping with creating great visitor experiences, staff will engage with opportunities and events highlighting Wellington County as a destination. Wellington County will host the Culinary Tourism Alliance's Feast On The Farm Event on October 1 and 2, 2023.	Partner	2023
Review upcoming County capital projects for tourism implications or opportunities.	To take advantage of opportunities to improve critical tourism assets during capital project construction, or the potential impacts to tourism assets.	Connect	2023
Participate in the Museum and Archives – Destination development study	A key tourism asset in Wellington County, staff provide input and support for the WCMA's destination development project and ideas on how to activate the site from a visitor lens.	Support	2023



Strategic Priority 3 – Market and Promote Wellington County Experiences			
Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Revise Experience Wellington website	The existing Experience Wellington website will be reviewed, content updated, and improved upon for the customer experience. An environmental scan of other destination websites will be undertaken and a list of desired features for inclusion in a future Wellington County website refresh will be made.	Lead	2023
Develop an Experience Wellington marketing and engagement plan	Informed by the Tourism Strategy, staff will develop an Experience Wellington Marketing and Engagement Plan in partnership with the Communications team. This will allow us to develop key messaging, maximize our reach, and allocate marketing dollars strategically.	Lead	2023
Produce and promote a video series of Seasonal Tourism experiences in Wellington County	This action focuses on the successful rollout of the recent Seasonal Tourism videos to assist in storytelling efforts. The videos will be promoted via social media.	Lead	2023
Update the Wellington County Visitor Map	Design, print and distribute a new visitor map	Lead	2023
Develop an authentic photo and video collection	Staff will work with the Communications team to examine how to collect more authentic, user-generated and County-owned image and video assets to use for marketing purposes.	Support	2023
Publish the Wellington County Food Experience Guide	The Local Food Map is a well-loved tool to connect consumers with local farms and food business. Staff will continue to publish the printed map on a biennial basis, adding an online map version.	Lead	2024
Seek out new signage locations and proactively contact businesses	The County Tourism signage creates awareness of tourism businesses across Wellington County. Staff will continue to grow the signage programme and increase the number of participating businesses.	Lead	2023
Digitize County Signage locations and client information into GIS.	A digital map will be created to make County signage more accessible and trackable for internal staff.	Lead	2024
Work with the County Roads Division to identify upcoming public works projects and any impacts to County signage.	Staff will work with Publics Works to understand their short- and medium-term projects/activities within road corridors. Staff will explore ways to reduce the impact to signage visibility and downtime, including re-location and reinstatement.	Lead	2023



4th Line Cattle Company

4.5. SHOP LOCAL SUPPORT

Shopping locally has enjoyed some unprecedented attention over the last few years as the pandemic disrupted supply chains, especially in the grocery sector.

Consumers sought out local options to purchase food and supplies, and many farm and food businesses adapted their sales and delivery models to fit with these new demands and ever-changing health regulations.

With retail storefronts closing their doors to in-store traffic, many retailers pivoted to offer a variety of new sales channels, including phone and online while restaurants offered take-out and prepared food options to be reheated at home.



Downtown Erin

This challenging time led to some business closures, yet others embraced the change and adapted. This led to new products, new avenues for sales, and in some instances, a new service delivery model. These efforts resonated with many consumers, and staff saw incredible support showcasing pride of place in community members making an effort to buy local, promoting businesses through social media, purchasing gift cards, and shining a light on local like never before.

Municipalities and Chambers ran a variety of shop local and gift card campaigns, and the County efforts included the creation of a Takeout Food Map, a Picnic campaign, a farmers' market box series, a holiday food and gift guide, and seasonal shop local itineraries.

Over the next three years, staff aims to build on the momentum and continue to work with local businesses and partners (municipalities, chambers, etc.) to keep shopping locally front of mind. This means assisting businesses with expanding into new commerce options, creating, and maintaining an online presence, supporting the downtowns, and providing reasons for locals and visitors to eat, shop, and play locally. Staff will also continue to work with farm and food businesses to highlight local food options through the award-winning Taste Real Programme.

Strategic Priority	Description
Broaden Shop Local support	Having built a strong shop local food brand through the Taste Real programme, staff will leverage the successes and support shop local opportunities for businesses within and outside the food/ag sector. Staff will focus on strengthening downtowns, provide access to business support, and increasing a digital presence and sales opportunities.
Taste Real	Leveraging Wellington County strong agricultural sector and rich local food offerings, staff will strengthen local purchasing relationships through food service and directly through residents. Key deliverables include the facilitation of local events, the production of the Local Food Map, and assistance to the Farmer's Market Working Group.

Shop Local Marketing	Staff will amplify the shop local messaging by supporting local initiatives, creating applicable seasonal campaigns, and highlighting the excellent made-in Wellington County products and businesses.
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Strategic Priority 1: Broaden Shop Local Support

Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Increase Online Presence	Providing businesses the opportunity to expand their digital footprint through online point of sale systems and website creation/enhancements will allow for a greater online presence and bring on more opportunities to expand their shop local objective into the digital age of retail. Staff will connect businesses with available expert resources and organizations, such as Digital Mainstreet.	Connect	2023
Strengthening the Downtowns	This action will aim at emphasizing the importance of community downtowns. Staff will work with the member municipalities to understand what is done to support downtown merchants. This may include helping them to diversify their sales opportunities, signage, storefront improvements, beautification, using the CIP to encourage patios, for example. This may also include supporting existing BIAs, Chambers, and the municipalities to recruit new businesses to the downtowns. The Roger Brooks Destination Assessment will be used as a guide.	Lead	2023
Provide ongoing business consultations	This action leverages our expertise in the agri/food sector but can be applied to businesses across the board. Staff provide consultations and connections along the food value chain to assist with the development of new products, processing, training, funding and more. This action aligns with BRE activities.	Connect	2023

Strategic Priority 2: Taste Real

Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Continue the annual delivery of the Fall and Spring Rural Romp Events.	The Rural Romp has been a signature event in Wellington County for 16 years. Staff continually evolve the event and adapt to feedback received. The Rural Romp highlights and celebrates local food offerings throughout the County and encourages visitors and residents to explore many of Wellington County's local farm and food experiences.	Lead	2023

Develop an updated Local Food Map in both print and online mediums.	The Local Food Map will be updated and made available in both print and online formats. This action will allow the map to be accessible to a broader audience of residents, growers, and producers.	Lead	2023
Facilitate Wellington County Farmers' Market Working Group	Farmers' Markets play an essential role in the local food fabric. This action aims to strengthen local farmers' markets by leveraging the stakeholder position at the Wellington County Farmers' Market Working Group to promote collaboration, continual improvement, best practices, and building partnerships. Continue facilitating the award-winning Farmers' Market Box initiative, the Farmers' Market Trail, and other collaborative projects.	Connector	2023

Strategic Priority 3 Shop Local Marketing			
Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Amplify partner shop local campaigns	Staff will work with local partners (Municipalities, BIAs, Chambers) to support shop local campaigns by utilizing County communication channels.	Support	2023
Business highlights and advertising in local media	Work with local media to showcase Wellington County businesses and products. Facilitate the production of the quarterly Toque Magazine business feature.	Lead	2023
Create seasonal marketing campaigns highlighting locally made products	Through the creation of seasonal shop local campaigns, staff will amplify awareness of local products and businesses informing residents about excellent options available locally. These campaigns correspond with holidays, such as the Holiday Food and Gift Guide, or seasons (Nurseries and Greenhouses in the Spring).	Lead	2023



Seasonal Shop Local Campaign

4.6. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The County understands the importance of the need to attract and maintain employees to sustain its economy. While workforce demand may not have changed, there have been significant changes to labour market trends. It is more difficult to attract workers to traditional industries, on which the local economy relies. This fact is coupled with lesser interest in youth entering such industries, and employers' expectations of workers not meeting labour market realities.



Wellington Perforated

Data from the Workforce Planning Board shows certain populations, specifically aged 20 to 24, have disengaged from the labour market. These realities present the need for supporting local employers. Staff have seen that employers who have invested in their employees, with skill building and culture development, have seen lower turnover rates.

By identifying strategic opportunities for skills development and training partnerships, analyzing workforce and labour force metrics on a continuous basis, and committing to workforce attraction and retention efforts, the County and its business climate will work to improve and be proactive towards workforce development opportunities and challenges.

Strategic Priority	Description
Skills Development and Training Partnerships	This priority aims at preparing and enhancing the skill acumen and training opportunities to those within the County. The County will work with partners to identify industry skill gaps and facilitate the appropriate training programmes as well as support the creation of employment readiness sessions. Inspiring today's youth, the County will seek to visit elementary and high schools and talk about local opportunities available right now in in-demand sectors and the salaries that accompany them.
Workforce and Labour Force Metrics Analysis	The County will monitor and analyze commuting patterns into and out of the County as it relates to local and out-of-County employment figures. With collaboration from the Wellington-Dufferin Workforce Planning Board and additional partners, the County will continue to develop and maintain connections geared towards the compilation of workforce and labour market research and the execution of an employment gaps and housing gap analysis within the County.
Workforce Attraction and Retention	This priority aims at emphasizing the importance of workforce attraction and retention within the County. Retaining and attracting new employees in County businesses requires that the expectations between employees and employers be bridged. The County will meet with employers to understand expectations, and will also study salaries, culture, and perceptions in specific industries across the region. The County can provide employers with educational tools known as "In the Eyes Of." Expanding upon existing workforce resources will broaden the capabilities to attract and retain employees in a variety of job sectors, which will create the potential for a sector-specific workforce recruitment pilot to be initiated within the County.

Strategic Priority 1 – Skills Development and Training Partnerships			
Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Explore Skills Development Training Programmes for In-Demand Industry Sectors	The County will support the Wellington-Dufferin Local Planning Board in identifying localized training models and expanding professional connections to support industries and provide support for people to move into in-demand and in-need sector training. This will include, but not limited to, additional institutional connections apart from Conestoga College and establishing more programmes into communities which solve labour force gaps, like Drive Forward has helped with the need for AZ and DZ drivers.	Support	2023
Develop Employment Readiness Sessions	The County will support the creation and marketability of employment readiness sessions through the Wellington-Dufferin Workforce Planning Board, with a partnership with the Career Education Council being explored. These sessions will enable participants to learn skills for navigating the workplace with success, create opportunities to be taught practical job readiness skills, as well as provide the opportunity to meet, network, and discuss important topics related to soft skills and answers to important career questions by a sector-specific expert. These will assist those entering the labour force for the first time, high school students, as well as immigrants coming into Canada.	Support	2023
Expand Partnerships for Youth Skilled Trades Programmes	This action aims at supporting the Wellington-Dufferin Workforce Planning Board in connecting with local employers, education, and skill development organizations. An element of youth outreach through elementary and high school visits will take place to showcase to students the exciting career opportunities in local in-demand sectors, such as manufacturing and agriculture, and their accompanied salaries across the County. The County will also look at working with member municipalities and their existing partners, such as the Career Education Council, to support events surrounding career pathways, job recruitment and volunteering.	Lead/Support	2023

Strategic Priority 2 – Workforce and Labour Force Metrics Analysis			
Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Analyze ongoing workforce commuter patterns in and out of the County	This action will look at analyzing ongoing workforce commuter patterns in and out of the County, as well as work-from-home trends and figures, and pursue a partnership with Community Futures for support. This will help the County understand the flow of workers travelling from home to work, specifically to see the demographics that represent those with local jobs and those who commute out of their municipality within the County, and to understand what underlying factors may influence these choices.	Lead/Support	2023
Continue developing and maintaining connections geared towards workforce and labour market research	The County will develop and maintain connections that are geared towards workforce and labour market research, in order to understand patterns that relate to industry gaps, employment gaps, and additional variables that may influence the overall workforce development potential within the County.	Lead	2023
Employment Gap & Housing Gap Analysis	This action aims to produce an employment gap and housing gap analysis for the County in partnership with the Wellington-Dufferin Workforce Planning Board. Looking into existing employment gaps, housing gaps, and insight from various sector representatives and stakeholders, the County will conduct a more in-depth review of how these existing gaps, for both current and future labour force participants, affect the total economic climate within the County and for member municipalities.	Lead/Support	2024

Strategic Priority 3 – Workforce Attraction and Retention			
Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Expanding upon Existing Resources	The County will support the Wellington-Dufferin Workforce Planning Board in the expansion of existing resources that are currently being used as they relate to workforce development. Findyourjob.ca will have its access broadened and marketability expanded into a labour market information intelligence resource for Employment Ontario, local government, jobseekers, and employers. The County would also support the Planning Board in the development of employer accounts that would let employers customize labour market information (LMI) dashboards for	Support	2023

	their industry and organization to be able to view this information in real-time.		
Conduct a Workforce Recruitment Pilot	Agencies and sector representatives will be consulted upon to gather information and interest in pursuing a workforce recruitment pilot, and to understand the major shortfalls in accessing all types of talent within each sector. The County will co-lead this action with the Wellington-Dufferin Workforce Planning Board in order to conduct an initial workforce recruitment pilot with the healthcare sector.	Lead/Support	2024
Continue with Day in the Life Videos	The County will look at providing financial support to the Wellington-Dufferin Workforce Planning Board for the continued creation and promotion of content in the Day in in Life videos, as well as recruitment for summer students to act as videographers for these video segments. These feature videos will continue to feature in-demand local occupations where turnover rates are higher and act as an information resource to help with workforce development and increase the potential to attract new talent across County-wide in-demand sectors.	Support	2023
Develop “In the Eyes Of” Information Resources	The County will meet with employers to understand organizational expectations, including studying salary grades and wages, workplace culture, and perceptions in specific industries across the region. The County can then provide employers with educational tools known as “In the Eyes Of.” The County will execute a campaign to get the word out to employers.	Lead/Support	2023



4.7. ATTAINABLE HOUSING

A space that one calls home is a fundamental part of one's identity. As population and workforce gaps grow, and demands are on the rise, housing supply options and expected growth targets are at a crossroads. The current economic and housing climate is calling for the development of new housing options, different than the traditional single-family detached home Wellington County has seen to date.



With the goal of increasing the stock of rentals and higher density housing options, the County created an Attainable Housing Taskforce in 2021, with elected officials and senior staff providing direction in three different areas. A public awareness campaign educates the public on the realities of lack of housing, and for the role of the community in being open to new housing options. Policy changes to improve the housing development environment within the County and member municipalities are also being explored, as is using the CIP to incent property owners to invest in creating and renovating units to increase the rental housing stock. The goal is to increase the number of housing units available that the County's workforce is trying to obtain, housing that is affordable to their income and satisfies their personal needs.

Strategic Priority	Description
Public Awareness Campaign	The public has a significant role in helping enable more housing options in Wellington County. Educating and raising public awareness on the importance of attainable housing within the County and ways that individuals can contribute to its creation. Through a marketing campaign, which will include real local stories on the impact of housing in day-to-day lives, and a variety of public events with speakers from diverse backgrounds in the housing community, staff look to emphasize the importance of increasing housing types and densities within the County.
Improve the Housing Development Environment	This priority focuses on continual improvement to the process of developing housing in the County. Staff will work alongside the Planning Department to encourage the streamlining of the housing development process in Wellington County.
Maintain and Expand upon Opportunities for Rental Housing Stock	This priority focuses on maintaining and creating opportunities to generate additional rental housing units in the County. Working with our various partners, including existing landowners, we can collaborate on utilizing the CIP programmes, partnerships, and planning tactics to encourage the creation of additional rental units.

Strategic Priority 1 – Public Awareness Campaign			
Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Encourage public discussion	Staff will collect and share impact stories as part of the campaign to emphasize the realities the current housing climate is having on singles, seniors, families, workers, immigrants, and businesses. Staff will support member municipalities at their local public information sessions as they pertain to the importance of housing options. Various campaigns will be developed, including community being defined by its relationships and spaces, rather than its built form.	Lead	2023
Facilitate public engagement sessions	This action aims to build local knowledge and capacity for the public to be open to and better understand alternative housing options and land ownership. The goal will be to facilitate discussions with the goal of creating a more accepting attitude in understanding the need for housing options in the community. Speakers relevant to the topic will be engaged to provide insight on the subject.	Lead/Support	2023

Strategic Priority 2 – Improve the Housing Development Environment			
Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Improve County and Municipally Adopted Housing Literature	County Planning staff and member municipalities will review and adjust the language of their plans, policies, and bylaws to encourage housing development outside of single-family detached dwellings within the County. This will include updating the County Official Plan, including the implementation of Community Planning Permit System policies.	Support	2023
Identify and enhance underutilized lands	Staff will support Planning and Housing staff, and member municipalities, in identifying underutilized properties with the potential for developing housing.	Support	2023
Develop Housing Incentive Programmes	This action aims to work alongside member municipalities to research and implement County CIP programmes that would be enticing for members of the development and non-profit community to participate in, to encourage more housing projects within the County.	Support	2023

Strategic Priority 3 – Maintain and Expand Upon Opportunities for Rental Housing Stock			
Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Maintain Regional Partnerships	Staff will continue to build relationships with community organizations, including non-profits, and serve as a conduit between them, partner organizations, municipal planning departments, and funding sources as it pertains to housing. Work alongside the Western Ontario Wardens’ Caucus, the Centre Wellington Healthy Growth Advisory Committee, and other groups with an objective to combat housing issues.	Support	2023
Explore land for housing	The County will discuss with and encourage community organizations and businesses that own land to maximize the utilization of their land and purpose by undertaking an attainable housing project component. This initiative compliments efforts towards business attraction and sector development.	Support	2023
Collect Housing Metrics	As a benchmark, data will be compiled as it relates to new units created across Wellington County. Staff will support the Planning Department in improving the consistency in the collection of local building data. Additional metrics can include social media traffic on posts relating to housing, attendance rates for public information sessions, types of enquiries as it relates to housing, and the uptake on CIP programmes that correlate to new housing or additional investment onto existing housing stock.	Support	2023
Promote the creation of Additional Residential Units (ARUs) in the County	This action will look at public awareness, education, and promotion of the creation of additional residential units to new or pre-existing homes within the County.	Support	2023

4.8. OUR FOOD FUTURE

The Smart Cities Office launched in 2020 when the County partnered with the City of Guelph to create the Our Food Future project. Awarded \$10M by the INFC to build a Circular Economy (CE) within our regional food supply chain, the work of Our Food Future is contributing to local resiliency by designing waste out of the system.



The high-level goals of this project are to:

- Increase access to affordable nutritious food
- Create new circular businesses and collaborations
- Increase economic value of waste

The Circular Economy (CE) is emerging as a key tool in sustainable planning and strong stewardship action. In opposition to our linear economy – which relies on extractive resources and expects to produce waste – circularity sees waste as a design flaw. By identifying ways to connect by-products to new value chains, we are creating greater efficiency and resiliency. The Circular Economy approach aligns with climate action plans, net zero targets, and Indigenous world views.

Since 2020, the Smart Cities project has gone from strength to strength, adding an additional \$5.7M in federal and private funding. It has launched COIL – the Circular Opportunity Innovation Launchpad – to extend business support to all of Southern Ontario, and the Zero Waste Economic Transformation Lab (ZWETL) to apply circular practice shift to non-food sectors. It just announced the creation of the Circularity and Climate Solutions Hub which will develop systems to scale environmental solutions. The Smart Cities project has garnered national and international awards, and the world is now looking at our region as a centre of expertise and leadership in Circular Economy.

Our Food Future is funded only to the end of 2023. A plan is being drafted to continue the momentum of our work and identify a strategy to keep existing partnerships and programmes running.

Strategic Priority	Description
Continued expertise in circular economy practices	Our municipality demonstrated a commitment to innovative partnerships by launching the Our Food Future project. The County will meet the original triple bottom line goals of the initial project – waste reduction, food security, and business growth – and continue to be seen as a leader in CE in additional sectors. This leadership advantage will attract innovative businesses and investment opportunities focused on the Net Zero economy.
Supporting the evolution of agriculture	Agriculture is undergoing rapid transformation. The changing climate is putting new pressures on crops and animals through extreme weather events and shifting growing zones. Global commitments and recent federal policies and funding recognize these new challenges; they now require greater carbon sequestration and fewer Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions to be achieved through emerging best practices and technology solutions. As one of the largest drivers of our region’s economic activity, our agricultural sector is positioning to thrive in these new conditions and will need support for: • New best practices: As farmers adapt, they will require help to backstop risk, encourage uptake, and verify place-based results.

	• New connectivity: As fibreoptic and expanded cell networks reach our rural areas, data-driven machinery will demand new labour force skill sets and protection from cybersecurity risks. • New focus on adaptation: Food security planning must be grounded in a climate resilient agri-food system at a regional, coordinated level.
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Strategic Priority 1: Expertise in circular economy practices

Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Meet the initial goals of Our Food Future	Increasing value from waste, building access to nutritious food, and training newly circular businesses are components of our triple bottom line goal of “50/50/50 by 2025”. This overarching benchmark will be met by the end of our funding in December 2023.	Co-Lead	2020-2023
Continue to reduce waste in innovative ways	The IC&I green bin pilot has been a successful example of innovative and circular waste reduction, providing service to local businesses and rescuing edible food for local residents. The County will work with Solid Waste Services to ensure we can promote expansion of these service routes.	Partner	2024-2025
Continue to deepen our support for food security	Working in partnership with public health agencies, large emergency food organizations in Guelph, and local not-for-profits, the County will continue to build circular connections to support our most vulnerable households.	Partner	2024-2025
Continue to connect local businesses to CE training and funding opportunities	The COIL programme of Our Food Future has established an extensive system of scaled funding and training streams which will continue to expand. Sharing these ongoing opportunities with WMEDG partners will position our businesses for success.	Partner	2024-2025

Strategic Priority 2: Supporting the evolution of agriculture

Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Develop the Experimental Acres	Farmers are moving towards climate friendly best practices and need sector support during this transition. The Experimental Acres has been designed as a municipal tool to do this while coordinating connections to additional funding. The County will evaluate and evolve the current pilot and share what is learned with other municipalities.	Lead	2023
Host and participate in knowledge events for agriculture	The County will continue to promote regenerative agriculture and soil health knowledge by convening and attending events, conferences, and partnership meetings for the agricultural sector.	Partner	2023

Investigate opportunities related to agricultural technology	Broadband expansion, precision technology and cybersecurity issues will impact agriculture in our region over the next three years. The County will pursue pilots and partnerships to strengthen our region's readiness for these innovations.	Connector	2023-2025
Food security planning grounded in a resilient agri-food system	The County will contribute to the Planning Department's future Climate Adaptation plan, supporting a coordinated approach to local food hubs, future weather stressors, pests, and new growing zone challenges.	Partner	2024



Experimental Acres at Falk Farm, Erin

4.9. BROADBAND INTERNET AND CONNECTIVITY

The internet is essential to our families, farms, and businesses. For Wellington County to remain competitive in today's global economy, broadband internet must be available to every address in the County.

Broadband internet roll out is being handled by the Provincial government. The Province through Infrastructure Ontario will provide internet service providers (ISP) and telecommunication companies an opportunity to bid for the opportunity to connect communities, including those in Wellington County. Wellington County has allocated approximately \$4 million, demonstrating our proactive commitment to ensuring broadband internet is delivered quickly and effectively. The \$4 million will help accelerate reviews, approvals of infrastructure installations, and be used as an incentivization tool for ISPs and Telecommunication companies to exceed service performances included in their proposals.



The County is working closely with our previous SWIFT partners and the Western Ontario Wardens Caucus in their advocacy efforts to speed up the installation of broadband internet and to ensure the chosen ISP's deliver the speeds and service capacity indicated in the provincial RFP's.

The province has publicly committed to having broadband internet available across the Province by 2025.

Strategic Priority	Description
Internet investment readiness	This priority aims to ensure that we are ready when SWIFT 2.0 expansion activity begins. The County will be pre-emptively prepared by allocating funds for the possible creation of incentives to fill gaps in service. This action also ensures we are advocating Wellington County's needs to other forms of government and proactively developing an awareness of Wellington County.
Ensuring digital equity	The expansion of connectivity will benefit many, but equity will remain a concern. Fibreoptic networks will need to be balanced with lower-cost cell tower coverage in order to ensure accessibility for all residents. Expanded networks also introduce opportunities for enriching County functions such as newcomer attraction, tourism, and emergency preparedness. Examples may include a dedicated hot spot programme for newcomers, an electric trolley between anchor tourism communities, and emergency management communication hubs.

Strategic Priority 1 - Internet investment readiness			
Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Re-establish the County Broadband Working Group	This action aims to ensure the County is organized and aligned across its departments and able to mobilize to deliver on broadband. The group will be focused on advocacy, planning discussions with chosen ISPs, and ensuring our municipal permitting process is able to respond quickly to the influx of permit requests during construction. During construction, this group will address and triage high-priority incidents and deficiencies. The group will triage high-priority issues during construction.	Facilitate	2023
Collect internet speed data throughout the County over a multi-year period.	This action aims to collect baseline internet speed data. This data is not publicly available to the County. This data will aid our understanding if SWIFT 2.0 is delivering on the forecasted internet speeds and identifying areas requiring improvement. Through targeted mailouts and social media posts, members of the public will be encouraged to run speed tests and submit the data to the University of Guelph's R2B2 Lab for analysis.	Lead	2023

Strategic Priority 2 - Ensuring digital equity			
Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Tracking digital services	Mapping the gaps in service and understanding the rollout of expanded coverage will highlight the range of choices available to our residents. Working with Social Services and poverty action groups will allow the County to plan supports where they are needed, such as adding public wifi spots.	Partner	2023

4.10. RURAL TRANSPORTATION

In 2015, Wellington County conducted a rural transportation study with the Rural Ontario Institute to understand existing service providers and public transit demand levels. The rural transportation service providers in the County of Wellington are summarized in Appendix “B”. Around the same time, Economic Development completed 400 Business Retention and Expansion surveys with businesses, and we heard that transportation was a barrier for their workers.



In 2018, the County received provincial funding to pilot a rural transit model. RideCo Inc., a Waterloo-based technology company, was hired to build an app and develop an on-demand transit service to meet the needs of County residents across a large geographic region. The service works by pooling passengers travelling to similar destinations in one vehicle, thereby reducing the number of vehicles needed while maintaining the on-demand functionality. The pilot is ongoing but is set to end in 2025. A service review is currently underway with Dillon Consulting Ltd. to help determine how the programme will operate beyond its pilot phase. Aside from requiring a full-time dedicated staff position, the service is heavily subsidized by public funding. The service is likely to continue needing subsidy to maintain its affordable, low-cost rate for the public. RIDE WELL was also initially intended to help attract talent to communities and extend employers’ reach to a larger talent pool. However, the end-user to date has been residents that have limited alternative options for frequent essential trips. For example, customers tend to use the service to get to lower-income employment, to appointments that they cannot drive to, or to complete essential errands such as grocery shopping and banking.

The review by Dillon Consulting will help determine long-term options for transportation in Wellington County. This will include cost implications, cost-benefit analysis of different service models (i.e., fixed-route, feeder services, etc.), administrative requirements, and potential funding opportunities.

As part of the review, the following strategic priorities have been identified for rural transportation in Wellington County:

Strategic Priority	Description
Review RIDE WELL pilot and determine sustainability	This priority will explore longer-term options for improvement of the Ride Well services in line with the recommendations identified in the Wellington County Roadway Master Action Plan.
Connect and foster an integrated rural transportation network	Many transportation service providers have ceased operation due to low demand throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Wellington County will continue to expand dialogue among transportation partners that remain and seek ways to integrate and cross-market one another’s offerings. For example, Ride Well and Guelph Owen Sound Transportation (GOST) have agreed to partner on marketing and explore

	transit opportunities. This action seeks to continue finding new pathways and partnership opportunities to enhance transit connectivity in Wellington County.
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Strategic Priority 1: Review RIDE WELL pilot and determine sustainability

Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Conduct cost-benefit analysis of the RIDE WELL pilot service to understand future implications	This action aims to objectively assess the cost implications with the service in relation to its benefit to better understand cost implications of continuing an on-demand transit model.	Lead	2024
Review the RIDE WELL Pilot Project and determine long-term administration and sustainability of the service	This action aims to study the RIDE WELL programme and determine the successes, shortcomings, and suitability of the model as a continued rural transportation service offering. The study will also help determine what organization is best equipped to deliver the service in the future (e.g., County, Private, Social Enterprise, Member Municipality, Non-Profit). The review will provide a cost-benefit analysis of alternative service models that may be more efficient. This will be conducted based on data and findings from the RIDE WELL pilot.	Lead	2022
Develop a Lessons Learned and Best Practices Report based on the experience with RIDE WELL as a rural transportation option	This action aims to provide a best practice guide of what the County learned from the RIDE WELL Pilot project. By aggregating user data, surveys, and operational challenges experienced, we will create a guide that indicates who the programme supported, whom it did not, challenges/barriers observed, failures/success of the operating model, and functionality required for it to be a viable rural transportation option.	Lead	2025

Strategic Priority 2: Connect and foster an integrated rural transportation network

Action	Description	Role	Commencing
Study and seek integration of all Wellington County transportation options into trip-planning apps and mapping solutions	This action aims to integrate RIDE WELL's service offering when users are trip planning on various applications (e.g. Google Maps). This would consist of last kilometer services from existing bus stops to destinations. This action would start with integrating RIDE WELL and explore integration of other options in the County thereafter.	Leader	2025

Undertake targeted outreach campaign to grow Youth and Seniors Ridership	This action aims to raise awareness of transportation options available, and proactively reach target demographics. Additionally, this is an opportunity to get specific demographics comfortable with current and potential future technology. This action will encompass outreach to community organizations. Outreach tactics may include presentations, print flyers, and coupons.	Lead	2023
Identify intersecting transportation networks and discuss integration and partnership opportunities with service providers	Staff will study the existing transportation networks in the County and proactively approach and discuss opportunities for partnerships or integration. This action aims to increase the interconnectedness between transportation providers in Wellington County to maximize the rider's convenience and options.	Lead	2023
Prepare for future transportation infrastructure	Guelph is expected to receive high speed rail service into the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) by 2026. This will bring local communities even closer to Toronto and Waterloo Region. In addition, the Region of Waterloo is currently undergoing a \$30.2M airport expansion. Wellington County is strategically located to benefit from these infrastructure investments. It will lead to workforce attraction, new development, and growth of the region. This action will start preparing for these benefits. The County will analyze commuter patterns and plan for potential high-traffic routes between hubs of activity. The County will also plan for sustainability by exploring the electrification/automation of transit fleets.	Partner	2025

5. MEASURING SUCCESS AND PROGRESS ROI



5.1. MEASURING PROGRESS

Many of Economic Development's contributions are intangible and difficult to track impact of every action. Staff have established a series of aspirational goals for each programme. These aspirational goals provide us a sightline to incrementally work towards in local communities. The County will compare its actions to this desired future state to ensure alignment with the economic vision for the community. Economic Development will prepare an annual report to the County Economic Development Committee demonstrating where the County is on the path to achieving the strategic priorities and success measures, while highlighting successes and challenges encountered along the way.

Programme	Strategic Priorities	Success measures
Attainable Housing 	Public Awareness Campaign	Successful submission of public impact stories to the County that have generated ongoing online public engagement and media traction to stress the importance of attainable housing. Strong public interest and attendance to public information sessions surrounding the topic of attainable housing.
	Improve the Housing Development Environment	Greater amount of housing development proposals being submitted to the County and member municipalities as a result of improving and opening up municipally adopted literature (i.e. bylaws, strategic and official plans). Greater amount of housing development applications geared towards housing that is not just single-detached family homes; more housing stock variations becoming present within the County.
	Maintain and Expand Upon Opportunities for Rental Housing Stock	Greater number of ARUs being developed with new housing projects. Greater number of ARUs being developed within or adjacent to existing housing within communities throughout the County. Increased rental housing stock within the County.
Talent Attraction and Newcomer Support 	Support our employers becoming more diverse and welcoming	Host 1 employer workshop/ event per year. Onboard at least 3 employers as mentors to newcomers per year. Connect with at least 30 employers per year.
	Create more welcoming communities	Successfully advertise local newcomer(s) success stories promotional video.

		Host 4 newcomer events/ workshops per year with approximately 10 newcomers in attendance. Successfully support the delivery of welcoming communities training.
	Be a relevant and trusted partner to newcomers.	Enhance content and informational resources on Newcomer Support webpage. Increased engagement with international students. Increased engagement with newcomers.
Workforce Development 	Skills Development and Training Partnerships	Market and share at least 2 additional skills development and training programmes looking to address employment and industry gaps. Successful creation of employment readiness sessions within the County. Establish at least 3 additional connections with local employers, educational institutions, and skills development organizations. Visit a minimum of 10 schools (elementary and high schools) to promote early-on career interests for in-demand sectors in the County.
	Workforce and Labour Force Metrics Analysis	Successful accumulation and interpretation of data from workforce commuter patterns in and out of the County. Maintained partnerships with communities and organizations to enhance workforce data and metrics. Establish a quantitative and qualitative connection between sets of data outlining gaps in the housing market (i.e. affordability, variability, availability) and their relation to employment gaps within the County.
	Workforce Attraction and Retention	Enhanced content and scope of Findyourjob.ca, as an enhanced resource relating to workforce development. Develop at least 1 workforce recruitment pilot within the County. Continued production of Day in the Life videos for in-demand local occupations. Creation of “In the Eyes Of” information resources for employers within the County.

Rural Transportation 	Review RIDE WELL pilot and determine sustainability.	Develop fully costed budget overview of the current Ride Well service and prepare future cost implications for running a more permanent service. This includes providing estimates for gas-tax or alternative funding opportunities. Develop alternative service models with costs and comparisons to the pilot. Develop list of roles and responsibilities required to operate service to determine departmental suitability.
	Connect and foster an integrated rural transportation network.	Establish marketing and cross-promotional partnerships with at least 5 transportation services in Wellington County. Reach at least 10% of users as youth, and 20% of users as seniors (as of October 2022, youth account for 3% of total completed rides, and seniors account for 11% of total completed rides). Establish at least 3 new partnerships with neighbouring municipal transportation services.
Community Improvement Programme 	CIP Promotion	Invest full CIP budget by 2025. Deliver at least 7 CIP presentations in collaboration with member-municipalities. Meet with at least 35 CIP participant businesses. Participate in at least 20 certificate presentations with businesses.
	Invest in County-wide Goals	Maintain current evaluation lead time of a maximum of 3 business days. Organize and host a CIP working group meeting 4 times per year (once each quarter). Provide an annual report to council that details the number of CIP participants, the investment amount, and the return on investment each year.
Broadband Internet 	Internet investment readiness	Increase km of new fibreoptics and number of addresses passed. Convene municipal broadband working group.
	Ensuring digital equity	Expand number of public Wi-Fi and charging spots. Attract increased cell coverage expansion.

Programme	Strategic Priorities	Success Measures
Our Food Future 	Expertise in circular economy practices	Growing number of local businesses getting Circular Economy training and support.
	Supporting the evolution of agriculture	Expand number of Experimental Acres pilot sites and County partnerships. Support and host 2-3 soil health events/year.
	Enable the County's climate goals	GHG emissions reduction through programme activities.
Experience Wellington County 	Support our tourism network and operators	Create a tourism inventory and contact list. Host three Tourism Networking / Learning Workshops.
	Facilitate tourism experience development	Create ten trails, itineraries, or experiences.
	Market and promote Wellington County experiences	Create one Marketing and Communication Plan.
Shop Local 	Broaden Shop Local Support	Connect ten businesses with Digital Mainstreet. Successful downtown development initiatives for at least 5 businesses, including elements such as improved signage, storefront improvements, and beautification. Support County BRE staff with conducting Business Consultations and BRE interviews within member municipalities.
	Strengthen the Taste Real Programme	Host two Rural Romp Events/Year. Create two versions of the Local Food Map (online and print). Facilitate the Farmers' Market Box Programme (Summer and Holiday Box).
	Highlight our local businesses and products	Coordinate and leverage Shop Local Campaigns by partner organizations and municipalities. Run three annual seasonal Shop Local Campaigns. Facilitate four annual Business Highlights in Toque Magazine.

Programme	Strategic Priorities	Success Measures
Business Retention, Expansion and Attraction 	Business Retention and Expansion Fund	All 7 municipalities access \$25,000 each year.
	Boots on the Ground Business Support	Connect and network with 10 largest employers in Wellington County. Set up over 50 virtual or in-person meetings with businesses that need support. Deliver departmental overview to over 100 businesses.
	Celebrate and Promote Business Success	Develop and publish at least 10 success stories each year. Host at least 1 business celebration networking event.
	Collaborate with Partner Organizations on Supporting Small Businesses	Pilot a business competition as a creative way to gather feedback, and for businesses to receive promotion and possible mentorship resources. Attend at least 3 regional business events each year.
	Sector Specific Support	Set up meetings with County's largest employers in each of the following sectors: Agriculture, Manufacturing, Health Care, and Professional Services, to assess needs for sectoral support.

APPENDIX B – RURAL TRANSPORTATION SERVICE PROVIDERS IN WELLINGTON COUNTY

Wellington County is host to a variety of different transportation options. The following table outlines the existing transportation options available to residents and visitors:

Transportation Service	Description
RIDE WELL	Wellington County's own rural transit pilot service, funded in part by the Provincial Government until 2025. Ride Well provides on-demand service, door-to-door across Wellington County and Guelph. The service operates Monday to Friday, 6:00am to 7:00pm, and it uses ridesharing technology to pair similar trips and passengers together. More information is available at www.ridewell.ca
Wellington Transportation	This service is operated by the Community Resource Centre of North and Centre Wellington. They use a fleet of volunteer drivers to help low income and seniors complete essential trips such as getting to work, getting to medical appointments, and getting to the grocery store.
Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada (VON) Transportation Services	Volunteer and paid drivers provide seniors and adults with disabilities transportation to medical appointments, grocery shopping, adult day programmes, and other appointments.
Guelph Owen Sound Transportation (GOST)	Owen Sound's pilot service for daily commuting between Guelph and Owen Sound with stops in Mount Forest, Arthur, Fergus, Elora, and Guelph. The service runs 7 days a week, and a full schedule can be found on the GOST webpage: https://www.owensound.ca/en/living/guelph-owen-sound-transportation.aspx
GO Transit	GO buses travel through the County and Guelph with stops in Aberfoyle, Rockwood, the University of Guelph, and Guelph Central Station.
Denny Bus Lines Ltd.	Offering commuter service from Erin to Guelph. There is not a set schedule, and the service runs when there is sufficient demand.
Fergus-Elora Taxi	Taxi services with a licensed Accessible vehicle, located in Fergus, Ontario.
Dan's Taxi	Taxi services located in Fergus, Ontario.
TJ's Taxi Services	Listowel-based taxi company with a fleet located in Mount Forest, Ontario.
Red Car Services	Shuttle service based in Guelph to provide intercity transportation, including frequent trips to and from the Toronto Pearson International Airport.
Driverseat Guelph	Location in Guelph provides airport shuttle services, medical drop-offs, employee shuttles, and wedding transportation options.