

Perth County Strategic Plan 2023 - 2026

 **Perth County**
Cultivating Opportunity

Prepared by



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Introduction

The County of Perth is an upper-tier municipality that is comprised of four lower-tier member municipalities, Perth East, Perth South, North Perth, and West Perth, and provides some shared services to the separated cities of Stratford and St. Marys. The region is home to over 80,000 people, with growth expected to continue at a rapid pace. With on-going growth and change expected, it is critical that the County have an up-to-date municipal strategic plan to guide their goals, priorities, and actions into the future. With a new County Council in place the time is right to refresh the strategy to ensure the County is on the path to success.

Strategic Plan Refresh Process

In 2019, Perth County and its member municipalities collaboratively developed new municipal strategic plans. Since that time, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged and wreaked havoc around the globe, forcing governments to focus on addressing the immediate public health implications that followed. On review, it was noted that many of the goals and priorities were still relevant to the work Perth County was undertaking or anticipating over the coming Council term. Based on that, it was determined that Perth County would pursue a refresh of their municipal strategic plan rather than develop something entirely new.

The municipal strategic plan refresh process involved a review of existing background strategies and documents, survey-based consultation with the community, and comprehensive workshops with County Management Staff and County Council. An online community survey was promoted to encourage residents to voice their opinions. 93 responses were received. Three facilitated discussions were held with the County's management team and sixteen staff members participated in total.

This data was analyzed and refreshed priorities and actions were proposed based on the feedback received. A workshop was held with County Council to validate and review the refreshed priorities and actions.

The following report shares a summary of the data collected, including an identification of key themes from the consultation, the existing mission, vision, and goals, as well as the refreshed priorities and actions.

Key Themes

The following section details the key themes that emerged throughout the consultation process.

Rapid Growth and the Importance of Regional Planning: As noted, the region has recently experienced rapid growth, with many new and more diverse residents moving into the region with changing needs and expectations. Residents noted significant concerns around urban sprawl and the protection of farmland and the environment. The need for meaningful regional planning policy was considered critical to guiding future growth in a responsible and sustainable manner. The County's Official Plan exercise is currently nearing completion to support these efforts.

Increasing Community Diversity: It was frequently noted that Perth County's population is becoming more diverse on several fronts and focus needs to be directed towards ensuring new residents feel welcome and want to stay within the region. Future planning and service delivery will need to consider how the population has changed and ensure the County delivers services in an equitable and accessible manner that responds to the needs of all residents.

Protecting the Environment: The impact of climate change and the need to protect the environment was frequently noted throughout the consultations, particularly, as noted above, in the face of rapid growth. The County recently completed a Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan and Environmental Stewardship Plan is forthcoming to facilitate action in this area. A Climate Change Coordinator has been approved in the current budget to begin supporting work related to this theme.

Labour Availability: Canada is facing a labour shortage and Perth County in no exception. Many businesses are challenged to find the labour they are looking for.

Consultation identified the need to attract, retain, and develop a skilled workforce, including the potential to develop and deliver related training, and to ensure youth want to stay or return to the region. Access to housing and transit were considered perpetuating factors to this challenge. Labour availability is not just a key concern for Perth County employers, but for the sustainability of County itself as they compete for top talent in a tight labour market.

Housing Availability and Affordability: Consultation identified that there was a significant lack of affordable and available housing in the region. As unaffordability increased across Canada, many urban residents relocated to more rural communities for their comparatively affordable housing. As a result, Perth County housing prices have increased significantly, making housing unaffordable for many residents. This has led to increasing incidences of homelessness in the community and is making it challenging to attract needed labour. The County is currently incorporating an affordability lens to subdivision review.

Supporting the Agricultural Sector and Preserving Prime Agricultural Land: The agriculture sector was frequently cited for its impact and importance to the regional economy. However, with rapid growth, many residents noted concerns around sprawl encroaching on agricultural lands and felt strong protections were needed to preserve the land and economic activity. Investment attraction and innovation were noted as key opportunities to support and enhance the sector.

Transit Need and Sustainability: Transit was highly valued by residents and can play an important role in moving people around the region for socio-economic purposes. PC Connect was established as a pilot transit service in the region with the aid of government funding, however that funding ends in 2025 and the long-term sustainability of the service is in question.

Improved Collaboration and Understanding on Service Delivery: Since the completion of the last strategic plan, it was noted that the County has been improving collaboration and relationships with its member municipalities. To aid this, service delivery agreements were created for planning and emergency management portfolios

and the intent is to continue this process for other departments. Service delivery agreements have been fundamental in defining roles, responsibilities, and expectations to maximize service delivery effectiveness between partners.

Technology Driving Improved Efficiency and Effectiveness: The effects of COVID-19 enabled the County to rapidly adopt technology to innovate and deliver services in a new way, such as legislative services and court services switching to virtual delivery and/or engagement. Technology has also improved collaboration on service delivery with member municipalities. However, the adoption of technology comes with new risks and risk management must be a priority in these cases. With the rapid change and adoption of technology, it is important to remember that not everyone in the region is technically savvy and consideration should be given to ensure those individuals can also easily and effectively access Perth County services.

Strategic Plan Mission

Perth County is an innovative and entrepreneurial region. We celebrate community and enjoy an exceptional quality of life that offers everything from rural landscapes and small towns to urban centres.

Perth County is a diverse, resilient and welcoming region offering excellent services and exceptional quality of life to a broad range of residents. Perth County embraces landscapes that range from rural settings to cozy villages, small towns and large urban centres. The collective communities within Perth County exhibit pride, a strong service orientation and a commitment to volunteerism and support where people from all walks of life pitch in and make a difference in the lives of their community and their neighbours. Perth County is a strongly innovative and entrepreneurial environment that leverages location, resources and attitude to enable commercial, agricultural and agribusiness operations to successfully compete on the world stage.

Strategic Plan Vision

Perth County aspires to be a self-reliant and fiscally responsible region and to continue to be known for exceptional service delivery and client-service focus. The County will strive to enable the region to grow responsibly, innovate successfully and experience excellent quality of life.

The vision for the community builds on what we already value and possess. We seek to be self-reliant and fiscally responsible. We want to maintain and reinforce strong community identity, values and sense of belonging. We need to continue to sustain community involvement and a culture of volunteering throughout the County.

Maintaining and preserving the agricultural lands that are our foundation is essential. That means thinking about how we grow responsibly, reconsidering density and identifying a pace of growth that is reasonable and responsible.

Retaining our shared identity and our ability to effectively partner and collaborate will be critical going forward, as well a shared commitment to our shared success. Service delivery is a core emphasis of the County. Our vision is ensuring efficient and effective delivery that is transparent, relevant and focus on community needs and requirements.

To do that requires a culture that is strongly client-service focused, that is receptive to continuing and on-going change and that emphasizes creativity, flexibility and adaptability.

The result should be communities where residents receive the same service experience, regardless of how, when and where they access our services. Our services should leave our residents better off, experiencing an enhanced quality of life, and where they recognize the collaborative roles of the County and the member municipalities. Collaboration needs to be a fundamental principle that underlies all of this.

We need to reinforce and sustain our shared and common values, and make sure that we move away from “us and them” in favour of an aligned, collaborative, and cooperative approach to service delivery.

Strategic Plan Goals

GOAL 1 – Growth and Economic Development

GOAL 2 – Regionalization and Service Effectiveness

GOAL 3 – Customer Service Excellence

GOAL 4 – Community Development and Planning

GOAL 5 – Corporate Sustainability

GOAL 1 – Growth and Economic Development Priorities

Priority 1. Perth County is Recognized as a Leader in Agricultural Productivity in Ontario

- Attract private and public agriculture-related investment that is complementary and supports workforce development, growth, and innovation in the regional agricultural sector.
- Maintain an on-going business retention and expansion visitation program with the agribusiness value chain in the region.
- Develop appropriate policies and regulations to preserve and enhance agricultural land and encourage farm gate sales, secondary occupations, and processing of agricultural products within Perth County.

Priority 2. Perth County Growth is Responsible and Strategic to Enhance Economic Viability

- Work with member municipalities to support responsible residential growth to stimulate the development of attainable housing options within the County while ensuring the preservation of farmland.
- Explore mechanisms to improve the workforce and labour reliability while increasing the total number of skilled people working within Perth County.
- Focus on strategic and impactful opportunities to promote growth in attracting industry and business into appropriately serviced areas.

Priority 3. Flexible and Affordable Transportation Options Exist within the County

- Collaboratively develop a sustainability plan to enable on-going and meaningful transit access for the region with clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and expected outcomes for each partner.
- Support the development of diverse and flexible transportation options throughout the County and connecting into southwestern Ontario to support commuting and service access.

Priority 4. Flexible and Affordable Connectivity Options Exist within the County

- Undertake additional advocacy to support enhancement of high-speed internet in areas where it is still not possible to access in the County.

GOAL 2 – Regionalization and Service Effectiveness Priorities

Priority 1. Services and Service Expectations are Clearly Defined and Communicated

- Collaborate with partner municipalities to continue to clearly define, establish, and coordinate services, service levels and standards, and a continuum of service expectations throughout the County.
- Proactively communicate committed services and service levels to new and existing residents.
- Promote, educate, and demonstrate the value and cost of services that are delivered.

Priority 2. Services are Efficiently, Effectively, and Equitably Delivered on a Regional Basis

- Enable the implementation of more technology-driven solutions to support service delivery and collect, monitor, analyze, and share data and information.
- Maintain and enhance partnerships to realize efficiencies and deliver services effectively (throughout the County, as well as with Stratford and St. Marys, and beyond).
- Collaboratively deliver services on a regional basis throughout the County.
- Fairly and equitably allocate the costs of services that are delivered.
- Embed on-going service quality improvement capacity within the County organization.

GOAL 3 – Customer Service Excellence Priorities

Priority 1. Perth County Demonstrates Service Excellence

- Continually encourage service excellence within the County.
- Design and deliver all services to optimize the client experience while applying a cultural lens to service enhancements to support equity and diversity.
- Innovate technology, structures and processes to support an exceptional and consistent service experience for all service delivery opportunities.
- Innovate with technology for information sharing, monitoring, and reporting on services and service delivery throughout the County for staff, Council, partners, and the community.

Priority 2. The Culture of Perth County Accepts and Embraces Change

- Promote and recruit for a culture that supports on-going change and service enhancements.
- Continually identify, assess, and deliver on opportunities and technologies that improve process efficiencies and enhance service experiences.

GOAL 4 – Community Development and Planning Priorities

Priority 1. Perth County Planning Policy Supports the Aspirations and Goals of the County as a Whole

- Establish appropriate guidelines and policies to support responsible growth.
- Create policy that enables member municipalities to efficiently and proactively manage growth and development while protecting productive agricultural lands.
- Work collaboratively to complete and implement the recommendations of the Official Plan.
- Develop, implement, and promote policies and communications that encourage the creation of affordable, attainable, and diverse housing.

Priority 2. Perth County Minimizes Greenhouse Emissions and Climate Change Impact

- Support and champion initiatives that help the County, its residents, and its landowners protect the region’s soil, water, air, and lower their environmental footprint.
- Include impacts of climate change and greenhouse gas reduction impact in all reports where applicable.

Priority 3. Perth County is an Attractive Destination for Residents and Visitors

- Maintain a tourism promotion and development program to expand awareness of regional tourism opportunities and maximize visitor spending.
- Develop and implement opportunities to anchor youth in the community while attracting young families and qualified employees to reside in Perth County.
- Ensure County services meet the needs of residents at all ages.
- Work with partners to provide opportunities for reskilling and upskilling.

Priority 4. Perth County Residents Enjoy an Exceptional Quality of Life

- Design and provide services, programs, and policy that support the needs of Perth County’s diverse residents supported by meaningful community engagement.
- Promote and support adoption of programs and services that enhance quality of life and well-being for residents.
- Plan and implement changes to address future growth in service delivery needs as the population grows and changes.

GOAL 5 – Corporate Sustainability

Priorities

Priority 1. Perth County is an Attractive Employer and Staff are Knowledgeable, Capable and Supported in Their Roles

- Promote and model behaviours that reflect the desired culture throughout Perth County.
- Support professional development, work-life balance, and positive work culture for all County employees.
- Develop a succession plan and retention strategy that attracts and retains qualified, capable, and service-oriented staff.
- Provide training, on-boarding and performance management support that clearly establishes employee expectations.
- Collaborate with partner municipalities for training opportunities to enhance interoperability.
- Promote our desirability as an employer of choice.

Priority 2. Facilities and Infrastructure are Well Maintained and Responsibly Managed

- Establish and maintain comprehensive, appropriate and relevant asset management plans.
- Responsibly maintain, plan for usage requirements, and enhance facilities and infrastructure to efficiently and effectively deliver County services.
- Review un- and under- utilized buildings to determine potential future options for use or removal.

Priority 3. Technology is Embraced as a Means of Enabling Culture and Effectively Delivering Services

- Implement technology solutions that align and support the desired corporate culture.
- Protect County assets through the implementation of cyber-security best practices.
- Be a leader in developing, enhancing, and implementing technology solutions that support efficient and effective service delivery with the County and its member municipalities.
- Create guidelines and approaches for using technology to support exceptional internal collaboration and external service delivery.
- Ensure risk management and cyber security practices are considered for new or improved technology integration.