



MIDDLESEX COUNTY, ONTARIO

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY UPDATE

# 2021-2025



DECEMBER 2020





# Middlesex County Economic Development Strategy Update

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The Middlesex County Economic Development Strategy Update balances daring and pioneering ideas with those that are viable and relevant. It is critical to ground planning efforts in concrete strategies while inspiring and supporting day-to-day tactics in every possible way. This comprehensive roadmap can guide and support growth and diversification over the coming five years and beyond. It can reflect the voice of the community, the priorities of our supporters and partners and set out exact steps to direct our efforts towards opportunities with the highest potential.

Based on the background review, feedback, and analysis, four Strategic Objectives were developed:

- 1 Invest in people and places via rural revitalization
- 2 Entice talented workers and entrepreneurs to relocate here by leveraging the pace of rural life and nearby urban amenities
- 3 Attract investment in tech-based manufacturing, food production, and ag-tech
- 4 Advocate for investment readiness and implement improvements in business development services

The project involved extensive engagement through surveys and interviews with local entrepreneurs and community leaders. A group of sector-diverse stakeholders formed the Economic Development Strategic Plan Committee and met over video conference on multiple occasions to provide input and direction to the consulting team. Discussions included a long-term vision for the County's economy and internal and external partner roles to ensure continued growth and success.



## Strategic Objective 1: Invest in people and places via rural revitalization

**People are proud of their communities. Local procurement and tourism development offer ways to retain investment in the community and attract new revenue.**

### Actions

- Reduce barriers and increase support to spur investment and employment in agri-tourism and rural enterprises.
  - Redefine agriculture and tourism uses within policy documents to broaden flexibility and support for more on-farm diversification, rural enterprises, and small-town experiences.
  - Balance business incentives in Community Improvement Plans to trigger small-scale rural industrial and commercial expansions.
  - Celebrate unique attractions through cooperative tourism development and marketing focused on improved yield, seasonality, and regionality.
- Increase financial support for public realm improvements and strategic amenities in towns and villages.
  - Collaborate with municipalities to inspire volunteers and employers in rural settlement areas to create individual public-space action plans.
  - Communicate ideas with communities, groups, and volunteers to increase interest, viability, community capacity, and citizenship.
  - Leverage municipal funds with financial support from community groups and businesses to trigger the revitalization of public spaces.
- Boost "buy local" campaigns to ensure residents and businesses double down on local procurement.
  - Integrate within tourism marketing initiatives the identification, promotion, and celebration of experiences and products made in Middlesex County and the people and stories behind them.
  - Explore supply-chain challenges and import-replacement opportunities with businesses locally and in neighbouring municipalities to identify potential reshoring.





## Strategic Objective 2: Entice talented workers and entrepreneurs to relocate here by leveraging the pace of rural life and nearby urban amenities

Professionals seek places that offer a quality of life and quality of place. Long-term growth is estimated among employment for Creative Industries. Talented new citizens will have a significant contribution to the local economy and civic duty.

### Actions

- Engage the housing sector to review dwelling inventories to determine options for buyers and renters.
  - Create a task force of employers, real estate professionals, homebuilders, and workforce and housing agencies to identify opportunities and pinch points associated with any plan to attract new residents and talent/employees to Middlesex County.
  - Fast-track strategic initiatives for affordable and attainable housing options contained within the Middlesex County Homeless Prevention and Housing Plan.
  - Encourage financial incentives in Community Improvement Plans and other policy changes to expand the supply of housing stock.
- Collaborate to promote employment and new enterprise opportunities.
  - Promote vacant jobs, business succession gaps, and new enterprise opportunities.
  - Explore linkages with local youth, recently graduated students and motivated expatriates.
  - Implement a targeted talent recruitment plan aimed at specific geographic areas and demographic personas.



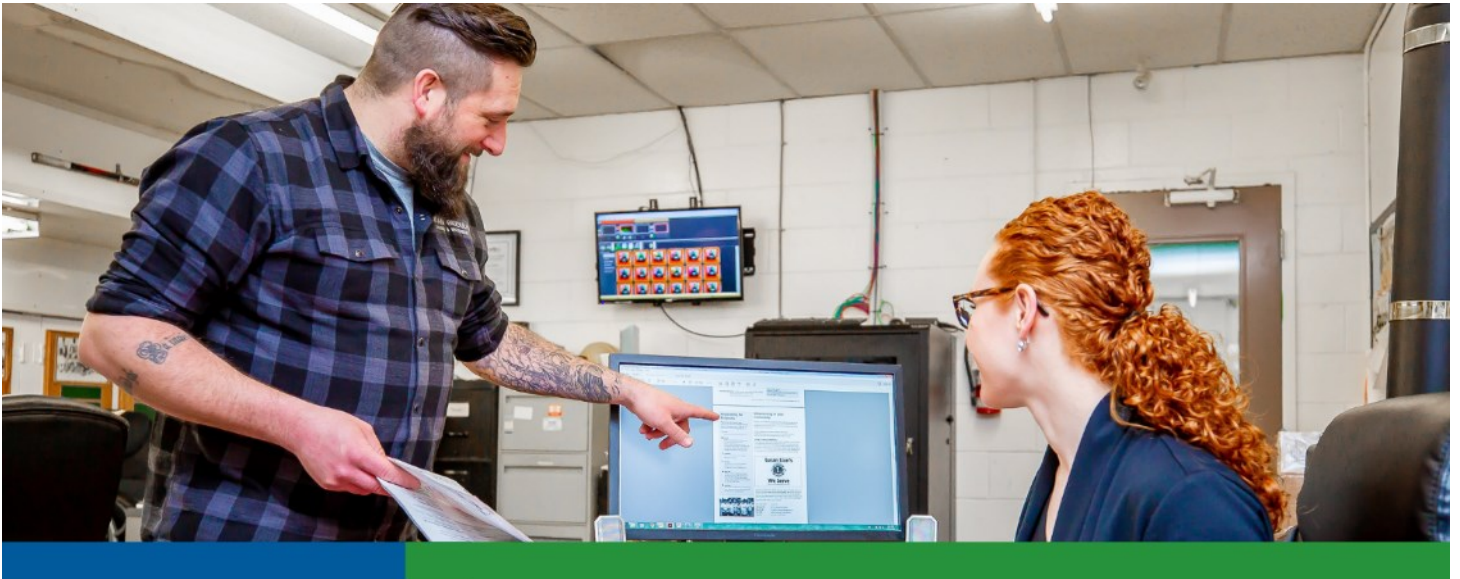
## Strategic Objective 3: Attract investment in technology-based manufacturing, food production, and agriculture technology

**Middlesex farmers are adopting technologies faster than provincial or Canadian averages. Existing manufacturers and food producers are connected to warehouse/logistics opportunities.**

### Actions

- Double down on results-oriented tactics to attract foreign direct investment-related to tech-based food production and agri-tech.
  - Review and implement recommendations within the Employment Lands Needs Study, including the extension of servicing to industrial lands and upgrades to treatment capacities.
  - Continue collaborating with the Ontario Food Cluster and join the Southwestern Ontario Marketing Alliance to generate leads of prospective new investments in Middlesex County and respond to them efficiently.
  - Create a network of innovative companies involved in applied agriculture technology and agri-food processing to stay current with technologies and trends and to position Middlesex County as a destination for related thought leaders and influencers.
- Collaborate with educational institutions, research partners, businesses, and others to define and promote the regional advantage.
  - Gather intelligence and build rapport between secondary and post-secondary education leaders, and tech-based employers.
  - Document and promote regional advantages and opportunities.
  - Explore potential for expanded post-secondary programming in Middlesex County.





## Strategic Objective 4: Advocate for investment readiness and implement improvements in business development services

**Businesses choose to make expansion and relocation decisions in communities that are ready to receive new investment. Cooperation and collaboration – across sectors, regions, and political realms – always have positive results for economic development.**

### Actions

- Implement a robust political advocacy team in cooperation with like-minded municipalities to attract new sources of funding for infrastructure.
  - Implement a robust political advocacy team in cooperation with like-minded municipalities to affect policy change, attract new sources of funding, and generate important outcomes for the economic development of the region.
  - Grow a connected, nimble County-wide economic development team that leverages all assets for the greater good.
- Spur business development with focused community improvement plan incentives.
  - Focus and fund Community Improvement Plan (CIP) incentives on targeted rural revitalization impacts.
  - Promote incentives aggressively and report performance annually, with a goal to ensure that CIPs are adequately funded.
  - Ensure all elected representatives and municipal staff are aware of incentives and the process for applying.

# Priority Actions and Timelines

Action	Priority	Outcome Timeframe
Reduce barriers and increase support to spur investment and employment in agri-tourism and rural enterprises.		
Increase financial support for public realm improvements and strategic amenities in towns and villages.		
Boost "buy local" campaigns to ensure residents and businesses double down on local procurement.		
Engage the housing sector to review dwelling inventories to determine options for buyers and renters.		
Collaborate with educational institutions, research partners, businesses, and others to define and promote the regional advantage.		
Double down on results-oriented tactics to attract foreign direct investment-related to tech-based food production and agri-tech.		
Collaborate to promote employment and new enterprise opportunities.		
Implement a robust political advocacy team in cooperation with like-minded municipalities to attract new sources of funding for infrastructure.		
Spur business development with focused community improvement plan incentives.		

Urgent  
 Start-Stop  
 Long Haul  
 Short-Term  
 Medium-Term  
 Long-Term







## SPECIAL THANKS TO THE Economic Development Strategic Plan Committee

**Cara Finn**

Director of Economic Development  
County of Middlesex

**Warden Cathy Burghardt-Jesson**

Mayor of Lucan Biddulph

**Councillor Kelly Elliott**

Deputy Mayor of Thames Centre

**Councillor Kurtis Smith**

Mayor of Adelaide Metcalfe

**Michael Di Lullo**

CAO of Middlesex Centre

**Demetri Makrakos**

EDO of Strathroy-Caradoc

**Mike Barnier**

Director, Economic Development &  
Community Services, North Middlesex

**Joanne Fuller**

Lambton-Middlesex Member Services  
Representative, Ontario Federation of  
Agriculture

**Debra Mountenay**

Executive Director, Elgin, Middlesex,  
Oxford Workforce Planning &  
Development Board

**Durk Vanderwerff**

Director of Planning, Middlesex County

**Todd Copeland**

General Manager, Community Futures  
Development Corp. of Middlesex County



### Middlesex County Economic Development

399 Ridout Street North,  
London, ON N6A 2P1  
519.434.7321 x2347  
info@investinmiddlesex.ca

[investinmiddlesex.ca](http://investinmiddlesex.ca)

 [@investmiddlesex](https://twitter.com/investmiddlesex)

 [facebook.com/investinmiddlesex](https://facebook.com/investinmiddlesex)

 [linkedin.com/investinmiddlesex](https://linkedin.com/investinmiddlesex)

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