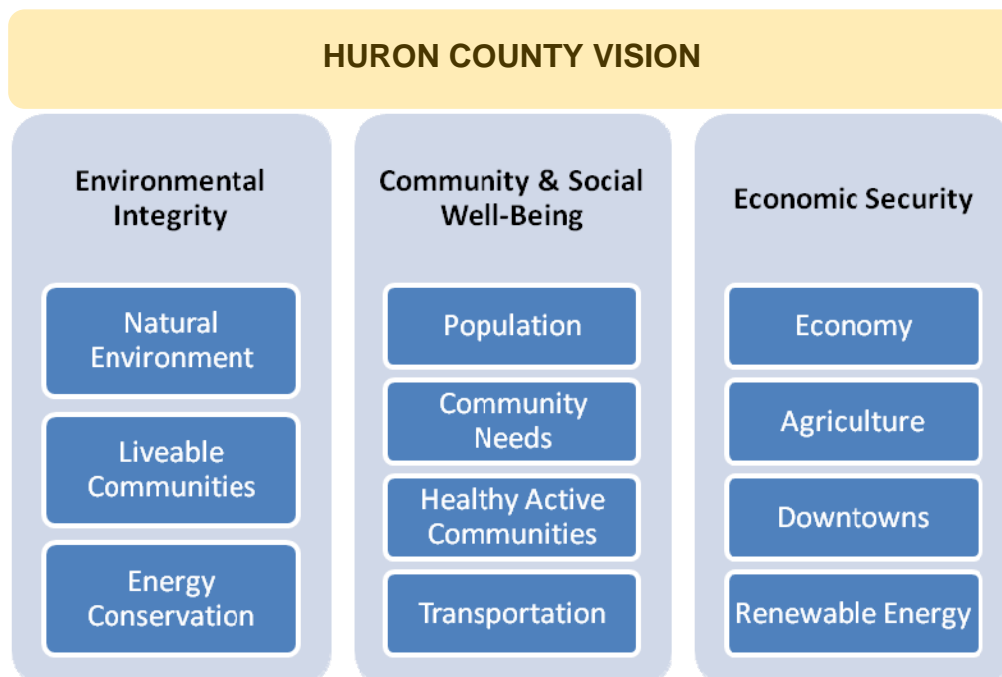


Developing the Plan

The Sustainability Plan is made up of the following components

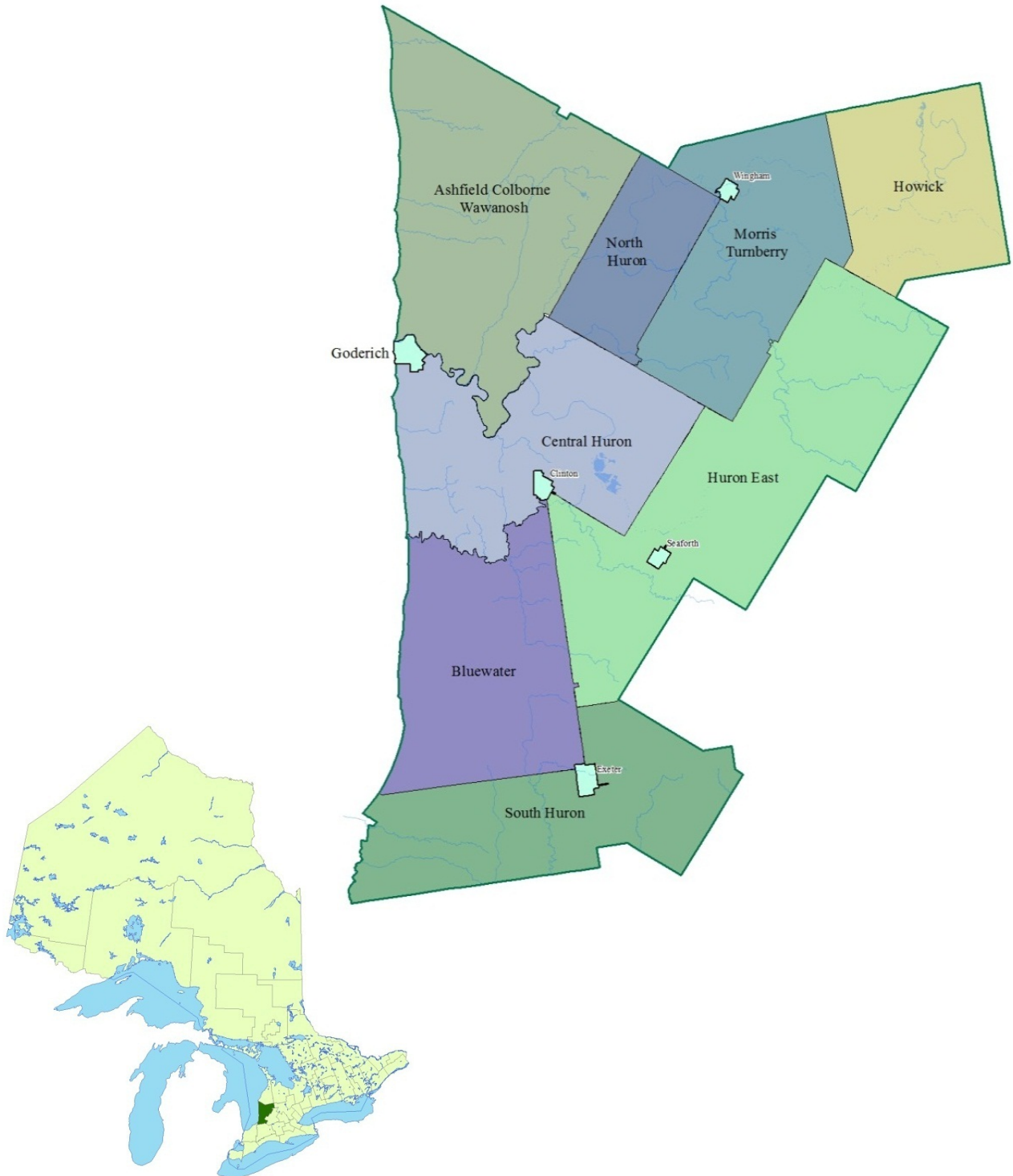
- Vision Statement;
- Community Goals for 2030 (by Theme);
- Strategies (by Theme);
- Priority Projects;
- Immediate and Future Actions (Appendix A); and
- Implementation Plan.

The Community Vision for Huron County is the over-arching vision for the three pillars of sustainability. The 11 Theme areas have been assigned to a pillar, however the strategies and actions within each theme typically cross two or three of the pillars.



Geographic Scope of the Plan

This plan applies to all of our communities within the boundaries of Huron County – including our rural areas, our towns and villages, our larger urban centres, our shorelines, and our natural environment.



Where Are We Now?

Huron County is unique. We are one of the most agriculturally productive counties in Ontario – with over 292,000 hectares of farmland – and a leader and award-winner in agricultural technology and innovation. We have over 100 km of shoreline, earning us the nickname “Ontario’s West Coast”. We are a primarily rural community with urban amenities, and with that comes supportive neighbours and a large volunteer base. We have heritage buildings, picturesque country-sides, walking and biking trails, excellent health care facilities, and more. All of these together make us proud to call Huron County home.

However Huron County is not without its challenges. Conversations with residents and a review of the state and gaps in Huron County (Current Conditions Report 2011) illustrated several challenges we face in each sustainability pillar.

Environmental Challenges

- Loss of forests, wetlands and other habitats;
- Climate impacts on agricultural lands and municipal infrastructure;
- Impact on water quality from soil erosion, agricultural runoff, and stormwater management; and
- Dependency on single-occupancy vehicles.

Social/Community Challenges

- Rural isolation and accessible/affordable transportation;
- Out-migration of youth searching for better opportunities;
- Access to health and wellness services and programs;
- An aging population;
- Insufficient affordable housing; and
- Cost of maintaining and upgrading infrastructure.

Economic Challenges

- Retaining businesses in downtowns;
- Declining workforce and associated “brain-drain”;
- Succession planning for an aging farming population;
- Regional systems to ensure access to local foods; and
- Balancing green energy generation with community goals.

Opportunities for a Sustainable Future

It is our strengths in Huron County that make us more resilient to the changes that we will face in the future, including:

- A beautiful natural environment (Lake Huron shorelines, agricultural landscapes, and more);
- Extensive network of recreational trails;
- Cultural heritage and streetscapes;
- Strong agricultural community with fertile farmlands;
- Lower cost of living and high quality of life;
- Strong economic organizations and support;
- A sense of community;
- Recreational amenities;
- Strong tourism base – people want to come here;
- Transportation infrastructure, including small airports and Port of Goderich;
- An entrepreneurial spirit; and
- A conservation ethic to protect our natural resources.

The Huron County Sustainability plan will, using our strengths as the foundation, help address our current challenges and build a more sustainable future

Community Feedback: Huron County Priorities

Huron County businesses, organizations, government agencies, and general public spoke about their priorities for Huron's future through the many engagement approaches discussed previously. These community priorities were the cornerstone of developing the Huron County Sustainability Plan, and have been addressed throughout the strategies and actions in the Huron County Sustainability Tool-Box (Appendix A). Highlights of these community priorities are summarized below.

Environmental Priorities:

- Ecosystem restoration and protection – including tree planting on unfarmed land and along creeks and rivers;
- Strategies for addressing climate change issues;
- Energy efficiency and conservation;
- Landscaping that decreases lawn acreage; and
- Community power generation (solar, etc.).

Community and Social Priorities:

- A welcoming community to new residents and visitors;
- Community pride and ownership;
- Funding for the arts;
- Developing the next generation of community leaders;
- Compact communities that are walk-able;
- Connections to service providers outside Huron County;
- Enhanced mental health resources and public awareness;

- Addressing homelessness and affordable housing; and
- Walking and biking trails and active transportation.

Economic Priorities

- Agri-food and agri-business;
- Manufacturing and industry;
- Retail and service;
- Tourism and hospitality;
- Culture and the creative economy;
- Attracting more families;
- Retaining and attracting youth to Huron County employment opportunities (especially in healthcare, agriculture, small business entrepreneurship, and manufacturing); and
- Infrastructure (broadband).

Community Questionnaire

Over 600 Huron County community members completed an on-line survey providing their input on priorities and suggested actions for the Sustainability Plan. Survey respondents provided the following information when asked to rank their top priority areas:

1. Economy

- Diversification of employment opportunities
- Responsible development
- Downtowns
- Tax reform
- High speed internet
- Retaining and re-attracting Huron County's youth – through meaningful employment, local education opportunities etc.
- Affordable housing

2. Natural environment

- Protecting natural areas
- Decreasing impacts on water quality from agricultural run-off, erosion, stormwater management
- Waste diversion (composting, recycling etc.)
- Active transportation
- Green energy (with appropriate regulation)

3. Agriculture

- Increasing agricultural niche markets
- Improving access to local food
- Sustainable agricultural practices