



Thrive

County of Huron
Economic Development
Strategic Plan
2022-2025

Prepared for the County of Huron by Oosterbaan Strategy

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Executive Summary

This Economic Development Strategic Plan was created in 2022 for the County of Huron's Economic Development department. It is the culmination of findings from the 2021 BR&E process, a consultation process that included sector-based engagement and roundtables; member municipality engagement; and staff input including those representing key internal departments, and the Economic Development Board.

The outcomes of this process draw on the department's capacity and business units, leveraging our strengths to advance our opportunity sectors and priority areas.

Our biggest opportunity sectors include:

- Agriculture
- Clean energy and clean tech;
- Film Office;
- Tourism Sector;
- Local food - Taste of Huron and
- Newcomer & Youth Engagement.

Across all sectors, we will continue to provide entrepreneurship and small business support, and focus on stemming the workforce shortage through initiatives that promote inclusion and belonging for newcomers, youth attraction and retention, and a livable, high quality of place.

These are captured in Economic Development's new mission, and vision statements:

Mission Statement

Offering support and leadership to enhance the economy and quality of place in Huron County.

Vision Statement

A diverse, thriving, and sustainable economy and rural community.



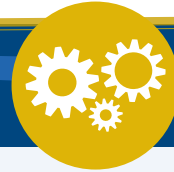
Strategic Goals

Four goals were created that guide our actions and operations. They represent both our departmental values and provide direction to our activities and projects. They are:



1. Include

Huron County offers an inclusive and high quality of place for living, working, and running a business.



2. Collaborate

The Economic Development Department is the go-to leader on regional economic and community development activity, playing a key role in sharing information and coordinating initiatives to create alignment amongst partners.



4. Sustain

Huron County sustains a thriving business community that has access to high-quality, responsive support which enables resilience, growth, and innovation.



3. Communicate

Increase understanding of the work that the County of Huron's Economic Development Department is undertaking and opportunities available to support economic development in the region.

These strategic goals are pictured in the following infographic. They are presented in concert with the economic development “bucket theory,” which uses the analogy of a bucket to represent our local economy. It explains everything we do as economic developers as either:

- Increasing flow to our bucket,
- Churning its contents,
- Stopping leakage from our local economic base.



Strategy Implementation

This strategy will be implemented over the course of 5 years with review and reassessment annually. Each year an Operational Plan will be created and taken to an individual staff work plan level.

2023 Operational Plan will be focused on leveraging existing capacity and strengths, and building solid foundations. We will develop tools and resources, and capitalize on immediate opportunities.

This will include:

- Highlighting the success of the Huron Business Centre.
- Becoming investment ready.
- Accelerating the tourism sector as an element of the department's workforce strategy, in addition to growing the sector.
- A focus on workforce attraction and retention.
- Mental health coordination & collaborations for all sectors.
- Succession planning for the business community, led by the Huron Business Centre.
- Youth and newcomer engagement, attraction, and retention through welcoming community projects.
- Enhancing collaborative opportunities to support and grow the economy, reduce duplication of efforts and recognize efficient use of dollars invested.
- Enhanced communications to highlight local business and the work of the department.
- Development of meaningful performance metrics for the department.

There will be an environmental lens applied to all of the departments work and application of the *Rural Lens* tool.

Highlights of 2023's implementation will include:

- Establishment of a film office for Huron County. The majority of film production happens between October and April. This is an excellent opportunity to attract capital into the County and drive business to our hospitality and commercial assets in the shoulder seasons. Skills development opportunities for seasonal live theatre staff will be developed.
- Working with partner municipalities to develop an investment attraction program including community profiles and an inventory of available land as well as a collaborative process for handling inquiries.
- Expanding Huron County's participation in the Clean Energy Frontier (CEF).
- Dedicating resources to workforce over the next 15 months through the Rural Economic Development (RED) program addressing the number one business barrier noted in the 2021 BR&E.
- Manage investment inquiries currently totaling over \$400 million.

Year 2's Operational Plan will focus on growth based on the foundations constructed in 2023.

Year 3 will re-evaluate priorities under each goal and objective. Adjustments will be made and opportunities capitalized on.

Years 4-5 to be determined in year 3 of the strategy.

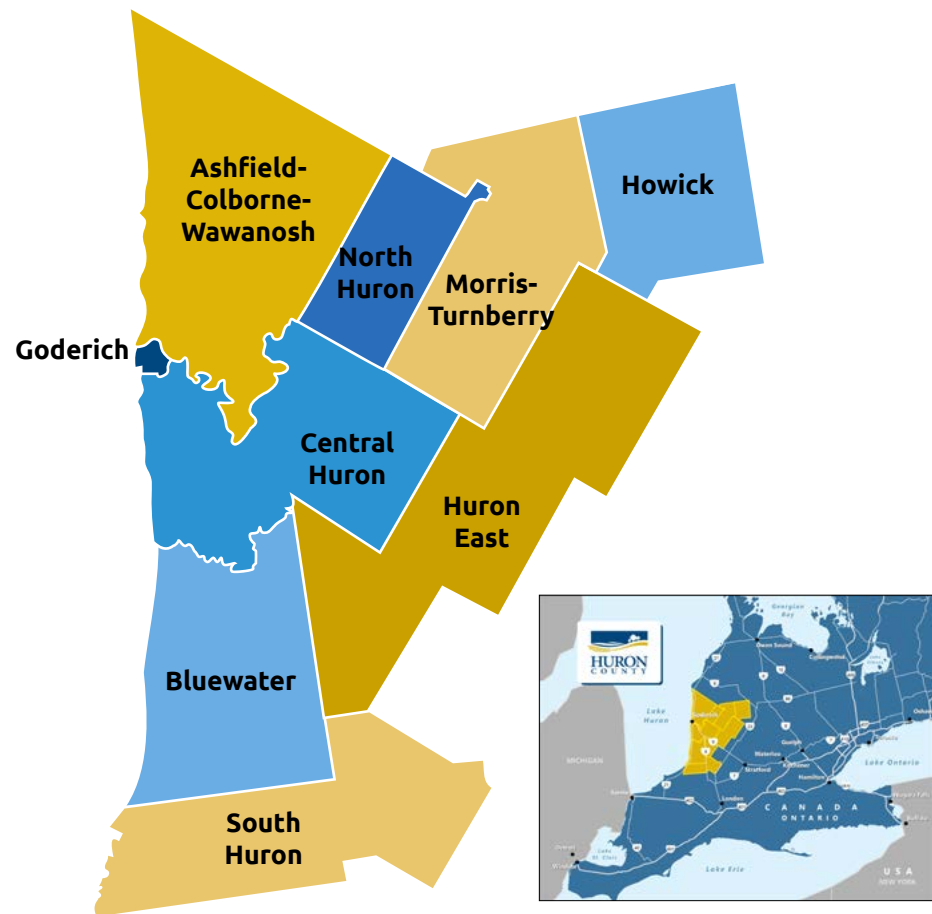
Setting the Context

The County of Huron is an upper tier municipality home to approximately 61,366 residents in nine member municipalities located along the east coast of Lake Huron, bordered by Bruce, Grey, Wellington, Perth, Lambton, and Middlesex Counties.

Its nine member municipalities consist of:

- Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh
- Bluewater
- Central Huron
- Goderich
- Howick
- Huron East
- Morris-Turnberry
- North Huron
- South Huron

Huron County is a *fantastic place to live*. It exudes rural charm with many small and mid-sized settlement areas dotting the region, complemented by urban pockets in Exeter and Goderich. It boasts many recreational amenities, such as 155 km of trails and 100 km of coastline.



Huron County's economy has a significant agricultural base, complemented by a strong manufacturing sector. Tourism-related sectors, health care and social assistance also make up a large portion of the employment base.

As of December, 2021, Huron County was home to approximately 9,094 businesses (Statistics Canada 2021), and over half of those were small, having 1-4 employees. With its over 100km of stunning coastline, the world's largest salt mine, land, air and water transportation networks, industrial land available for development and thriving urban villages, Huron County is well-positioned to grow and capitalize on the many assets within its borders and the surrounding areas.

Careful and considered growth is a priority. It is important to conserve the assets that make Huron County an appealing place to live, work and play while encouraging responsible growth that ensures our most vulnerable people, assets, and natural environment are not exploited.

There are a number of existing efforts within the department that support responsible growth and maintain important relationships with our community. For example, through the Small Business Enterprise Centre, we support small business in the region on an ongoing basis. Our work there keeps us abreast of small business trends, opportunities, and challenges so that we can react with additional supports in a timely manner. Through our work there, combined with other forms of engagement, we identified a need to support small business succession planning as business owners retire.

Similarly, our Local Immigration Partnership efforts keep us connected with settlement services as well as newcomer trends and needs in the County. This has helped us respond to waves of newcomers, as we did recently with Ukrainian newcomers in 2022.

To quote the 2018-2022 Chair of the Economic Development Board, John Marshall, "The societal issues are the economic development issues". This realization demands a new way of looking at economic development, community development and growth. For example, our largest sector, agriculture, is experiencing unprecedented levels of mental health concerns (CMHA, 2022). It is impossible to be resilient, innovative and grow a business when mental health issues are not addressed through access to supports and changing the conversation around the mental health crisis.

Additionally, with 57% of households in Huron County earning under a living wage (Statistics Canada 2021), being strategic about the types of jobs attracted and created in the region is important. A focus on sectors and opportunities that will create high-value employment opportunities for residents is essential to ensure they can participate fully in the economy and community.

Another consideration will be in development of the tourism sector, where it is important to be mindful of not overtaxing existing assets such as beaches and trails to the point where they are not appealing. We have seen this alarming trend happen in neighbouring communities during the pandemic from a surge of regional visitors. To drive increased business to our tourism infrastructure and businesses, it is important to look at shoulder and off season activities which grow the sector but offer “surge” protection.

As with other rural communities around the world, youth outmigration continues to be a trend that needs reversing. Youth (15-29), not only contribute to the workforce, they enhance the fabric of Huron County. They add energy and creativity as well as a unique perspective on the future. Making sure youth are engaged in a meaningful way before they leave for travel, work or education vastly increases the likelihood of their return to Huron County. Evaluating all economic development priorities with a youth lens as well as offering specific youth programming will lead to better youth engagement, attraction and retention.

Huron County Council has long been conscientious stewards of the environment. Be it agricultural or water conservation programs, energy initiatives or the maintenance of County forests, the message is clear; the environment is important. Huron County is one of the three counties that make up the Clean Energy Frontier (CEF) alongside Bruce and Grey. It is a natural step in economic development to become more focused on the clean energy sector and the complimentary Agricultural Tech sector. Huron is in the unique position in Ontario of having lands for industrial development. A strong investment attraction program is feasible in the region in collaboration with the Partner Municipalities.

A New Direction for Economic Development

Economic development broadly refers to the process of community wealth creation and well-being. Essentially the field seeks to support existing businesses, sectors and the economy to enrich Huron County.



**Huron County
Economic Developers**

Economic Developers support the economy and business through:

- Community health and wellbeing
- Business and sector support
- Investment, resident, workforce and business attraction
- Marketing the community as a great place to visit, invest, live, work and play
- Relationship management
- Connection to information, expertise, resources and capital
- Infrastructure development



**Successful Huron
Businesses**

Successful businesses and a thriving economy provide:

- Local tax revenue
- Employees in the community
- Stronger social fabric
- Growth potential for residents
- Livable communities



Huron Community

Business tax revenue supports these community assets:

- Quality of life
- Parks and amenities
- Roads and infrastructure
- Public safety
- Housing funding
- Public employees
- Volunteers

The County of Huron's Economic Development Department was created in 2014, and it has been working to establish itself as a leader in regional economic development since. Given new departmental leadership and rapidly changing market conditions due to the onset and outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is necessary for the department to refocus their work.

The County of Huron's Economic Development Department includes the County's economic development function, the Small Business Enterprise Centre (SBEC), the Local Immigration Partnership (LIP), the Digital Service Squad (DSS), Tourism (Ontario's West Coast) and Local Food (Taste of Huron). This strategy considers each area and the unique clientele they serve. It's also important to note that funding derived from other government sources supports a number of positions in the department. These funding relationships do partially dictate the type of work that staff is contracted to undertake, and at times they may need to take on additional tasks and activities to fulfill contractual obligations.

The Role of Staff

This Economic Development Strategic Plan has laid out four clear and attainable goals. These goals were developed to address economic and community needs, opportunities, and limitations that were identified as part of the planning process. Staff were deeply engaged in the process to ensure the department had the capacity and resources to undertake any proposed actions, and metrics were proposed to enable the department to monitor their progress and ensure that the activities they were undertaking are both effective and efficient.

The Role of the Board

The Huron County Economic Development Board (HCEDB), formed in 2015, functions as a trusted advisor to County Council. They analyze data and details of proposed projects, foster partnerships and advise on strategic direction. HCEDB provides sound business and societal advice, strategic guidance and recommendations to County Council and County Administration through the Director and/or CAO. The HCEDB will practice advocacy and lead collaboration amongst internal and external stakeholders and key influencers, including other levels of government to advance the mission and vision of the department. Due to the new societal and economic realities exacerbated by COVID-19 and world events, HCEDB will now include members skilled in immigration, mental health, and systems change as well as business leaders from our key sectors.

The Strategic Planning Process

To better appreciate the needs of the community, this strategy utilized the findings of a *Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) study* conducted in 2021, which undertook an in-depth survey process with businesses in the community. All Huron County businesses were mailed a copy of the survey with a postage paid return envelope and 723 responses were returned, accounting for an impressive 21.5% rate of return. Furthermore, facilitated discussions were conducted with sector-related groups to validate the findings of the study and discuss future strategic opportunities and challenges in more depth.

In-depth interviews were also conducted with all 13 Economic Development staff members to understand outcomes of the previous strategy and the current activities they were involved with. These discussions included a SWOT and PESTO analysis for the municipality, operations, and any areas of the economy they were specialized in supporting. Members of the Economic Development Municipal Roundtable were also engaged in the development of the strategy to ensure our municipal partners were involved and aware of the department's strategic planning.

This strategic plan also drew on:

- Huron Immigration Partnership's 2021 *Discrimination Report*
- *Community Safety and Well Being Report*
- Libraries Transforming Communities research
- *Be Well, Work Well* research
- Economic Development *Data Dashboard*
- *Roger Brooks Report 2022*
- County of Huron *Modernization Plan*.

This Strategic Plan is based on the findings in these documents, as well as a consultation process with external stakeholders, and discussions with staff and the HCEDB. These discussions led to the development of a new vision, mission, goals, objectives, and actions. The proposed strategy was further validated by the Economic Development Municipal Roundtable team that provides insight from local nine municipal partners.

Consultation Findings and Considerations

From consultation with businesses and stakeholders, some key considerations for the strategy have emerged. These considerations represent both environmental factors, as well as opportunities and challenges facing the business community.

Environmental Factors

A Changing Economy

The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruption to the global economy, with supply chains interruptions and permanent changes to the workforce, including the broader adoption of remote working environments and shifts in employment away from sectors that were more vulnerable to pandemic restrictions. Those impacts have driven up input costs leading to inflation and rising interest rates as the government seeks to manage it. These mark a significant shift in the direction of the economy and threaten those businesses struggling to remain sustainable, as well as those who invested heavily into their operations during the pandemic.

A Shifting Political Landscape

The PC Party of Ontario received a mandate for four additional years to lead the province

in a majority government. No doubt, this government will seek to follow through on some of the issues they explored in their previous term, most recently enacting new legislation to facilitate the development of over a million new homes in Ontario. In October, 2022, municipal elections were held in Ontario. Much of Huron County's Council will remain the same, there are some new faces who could provide unique perspectives amongst County Council and the 9 municipal partner Councils. County Council 2022-2025 will participate in a strategic planning exercise in spring 2023, which could influence elements of this plan. At which time, changes will be incorporated into the Economic Development Operational Plan 2023.

Changing Demographics

As preventative measures stemming from COVID-19 dictated that people should maintain 2m of distance between others and office-based jobs moved to a remote work environment, many urbanites took stock of their densely populated environment and chose to move to more rural areas. As a result, Huron County has seen an influx of new residents. From 2016 to 2021, Huron County saw the addition of over 1,000 new residents in the region, bucking the trend of low or negative growth that had been seen through recent census.

As a result of the Russian-Ukrainian war, 2022 has seen Huron County welcome an influx of Ukrainian newcomers. Consideration must be given to enable new residents to maximize their impact in the community, be it starting businesses, contributing to workforce needs, volunteering their expertise, or simply spending into the local economy.

Youth

With an influx of new residents, it is important to bear in mind the importance of engaging our region's youth and young adults into our local economy and community. Youth (15-29 years old) are looking for new ways to engage in their community, and we need to ensure their voices are heard and the valuable contributions they can provide are realized. Research shows that when youth are meaningfully engaged by their community, retention and return increases significantly.

Youth programming is not one size fits all as the 15 – 29 year old age bracket has 3 distinct life phases.

Phase 1: 15-18 years of age, secondary school participation and living with parents;

Phase 2: 19-25 years of age, rite of passage time marked by post-secondary education, trades training, travel or living independently; and

Phase 3: 25-29 years of age, are moving into career

development, marriage and children, often seeking to return to their birth community.

If we engage youth well in Phase 1, it is far easier to attract them back in Phase 3.

Mental Health

Economic and social pressures have been coming to a head and when coupled with the stresses of a global pandemic, many people across the region and the globe are facing mental health challenges. The community must be prepared to address these challenges head on, with the right supports to ensure our community members remain healthy, productive and engaged in the community. Our largest sector faces notable mental health challenges with primary producers ranking #1 for suicide amongst all professions. It is impossible to sustain, grow or innovate in your business if you are not healthy both mentally and physically.

Technology

The utilization of automation and technological solutions is becoming increasingly critical for today's businesses. These tools are being used to enable businesses to compete in a global marketplace, deliver better products more efficiently, create higher value employment opportunities, and better serve their customers.

Regional Opportunities and Issues

Workforce

Huron County has an unemployment rate of 2.7%, compared to the Province's 5.8%, indicating full employment (Four County Labour Market Planning Board, 2022). Feedback from the BR&E and roundtable consultations consistently highlighted the significant challenges employers were facing in terms of attracting and retaining the workforce they require to operate and grow. This challenge was across all sectors, and included skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labour, although the need for skilled and semi-skilled labour was more pronounced. Challenges finding the required workforce ranged from simple supply issues (there were not enough workers), to issues like access to housing, transportation, and childcare, the need for reskilling, and workers not having the soft skills they need to function in the workplace. With the influx of new residents, and more newcomers to Canada exploring the region as a place to live, there are opportunities to ensure the community and its employers are welcoming to new residents to ensure they come, stay, and contribute to the economy.

Buy Local – Supply chain, residents, and tourists

Since the onset of the pandemic there has been increasing interest in buying and supporting locally. In the case

of industry, much of that interest has stemmed from disruptions to global supply chains, which made it challenging if not impossible to source goods from regular overseas suppliers that were impacted by the pandemic. This encouraged consumers to look inwardly to enhance their local supply chain, and many found new suppliers in the region or surroundings that they were not previously aware of, bolstering local sales of goods that may normally be bound for an export market.

Beyond industry, both residents and tourists have displayed increasing interest in purchasing goods locally, particularly from the agriculture sector (local food). Much of this may have stemmed from shoppers seeking new, unique, and safer shopping experiences during the pandemic, and consideration must be given as to how to maintain this momentum in the face of the removal of pandemic travel and in-store restrictions. The reinvigoration of the Taste of Huron brand began in 2022 and will be focused on through the Local Food Strategy, 2023-2026.

Green Energy/Technology

As the effects of climate change are becoming increasingly clear, the world is looking for new energy and technology solutions that will have a minimal impact on the environment. Huron County is ideally positioned to explore how it can leverage this emerging sector, with

several large projects for example: Bruce Power's Major component Replacement (MCR) focused on hydrogen production, storage and transport) expected to bring benefits to the region. Huron County is part of the Clean Energy Frontier and it is time to participate more fully in this sector.

Tourism

The tourism sector (hospitality and food) had been waning in the years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic local tourism saw an increase in visitors but a decline in staff, causing hardships for this sector. There is an opportunity to grow the sector by keeping the momentum experienced in the last two years. There is also an opportunity for shoulder season development through the addition of a film office in the County. Most film shoots take place during the tourism shoulder seasons yet make use of tourism infrastructure and business services. This opens a tremendous development opportunity that won't over tax our natural and built assets in the busy summer season, yet increase the flow of financial capital for Huron's accommodations and food service operators.

Site Selection/Investment Attraction

Huron County is one of the few areas of Ontario that still has industrial land which can be developed. Most other areas have exhausted their supply of available land and there is little appetite to develop farm land. This puts

Huron County in the position to lay the foundations in collaboration with our municipal partners, to start an site selection program, carefully targeting the right business mix to build upon existing value chains.

Awareness

Communication and awareness of both departmental activities, and programs and services to support the business community was frequently discussed during consultations. Many businesses struggled to keep up with the flood of information during COVID-19, and were not aware of the types of resources and programming the County or broader partners could provide. The department needs to give further consideration to how best to target the business community to promote events and opportunities that will help them remain sustainable and grow.

Collaboration

Collaboration was another theme that frequently arose during consultation. Many sector groups discussed the need for more collaboration within and between sectors, for example more shared learning and training opportunities, supply chain events that help identify local suppliers, and more formal networking opportunities to identify opportunities for more intentional partnerships. These partnerships could be as simple as a supplier-buyer relationship, or more complex, such as creating

tourism packages, or a distribution network for goods. Collaboration, however, was not just discussed as a tactic to apply directly to the business community. Consultation also indicated opportunities to improve collaboration and coordination of regional initiatives, resources, and partnerships in Huron County for maximum client impact and efficiency.

Infrastructure

Many sectors also discussed the importance of having the right infrastructure in place to enable further business growth. The most common form of infrastructure discussed was the need for improved high-speed internet, however natural gas and EV charging infrastructure were also highlighted as important for industry, especially the agriculture sector, going forward.

Technology

During consultations, businesses also consistently noted the importance of technology to the future of their sector. This was particularly true for agriculture, a sector where automation has increasingly been applied to enhance production tactics, and the retail sector, many of whom had to pivot to operate online during the pandemic, and now see the long-term benefits to growing their business in a virtual setting.

Succession Planning

Business transitions and succession planning have been increasingly common in our work at the Huron Business Centre, and these are echoed in national trends. In 2017, Business Development Canada noted that close to 60% of Canada's small and medium-sized businesses are aged 50 and older; many of them were planning to transition out of or sell their business at the time. Many small businesses looking to sell require our coaching services to ensure their business is set up for success.

In the agricultural community, family succession planning is common, and complex. Many of the mental health struggles seen in the farming community are intrinsically tied to succession planning challenges.

Entrepreneurship

During the pandemic, many individuals pursued "side-hustles" or home-based entrepreneurship for the first time. This renewed interest in entrepreneurship and interest in scaling these businesses is an opportunity that will be pursued led by the Huron Business Centre.

The Economic Development Strategy

The mission, vision, values, and principles lay out the guiding foundations of this Economic Development Strategic Plan. The mission statement describes what the Huron County Economic Development Department does, and why. The vision statement describes the desired end state the strategy is working to achieve. The values and principles form the foundation of how the Economic Development team will approach the implementation of this strategic plan.

Mission Statement

Offering support and leadership to enhance the economy and quality of place in Huron County.

Vision Statement

A diverse, thriving, and sustainable economy and rural community.

Values

The following values will guide the County of Huron’s Economic Development Department as they implement this strategic plan:

- Respectful
- Collaborative
- Progressive
- Responsive
- Knowledge driven
- Prosperity

Principles

The following principles will guide the County of Huron’s Economic Development Department as they implement this strategic plan:

- Sustainable
- Accountable and
- Customer Focused

Strategic Goals

Goals, objectives, and actions contribute to the success of the Economic Development Strategic Plan. Goals broadly describe the result we want to achieve, and they provide overarching guidance on the key priorities to focus on to realize the strategy’s vision. The objectives reflect the desired outcome that we want to achieve from each goal. Actions are the specific, measurable steps required to achieve the goals and objectives.

As a whole, the goals, objectives and actions provide guidance on the outcomes we are striving to achieve and the specific steps to get there. The following section provides a summary of the goals, the rationale for each goal, their related objectives, and a high-level overview of the proposed actions and metrics under each goal. A separate Operational Plan was developed for the department to reference details on the specific steps required under each goal.

This Economic Development strategy includes the following four strategic goals:



GOAL 1 | INCLUDE

Huron County offers an inclusive and high quality of place for living, working, and running a business.



GOAL 2 | COLLABORATE

The Economic Development Department is the go-to leader on regional economic and community development activity, playing a key role in sharing information and coordinating initiatives to create alignment amongst partners.



GOAL 3 | SUSTAIN

Huron County sustains a thriving business community that has access to high-quality, responsive support which enables resilience, growth, and innovation.



GOAL 4 | COMMUNICATE

Increase understanding of the work the County of Huron’s Economic Development Department is undertaking and opportunities available to support economic development in the region.



Goal 1 | Include

Huron County offers an inclusive and high quality of place for living, working, and running a business.

The 2021 BR&E indicated that one of the top reasons for doing business and living in Huron County was quality of life (82%). While many enjoy this high quality of life, there are still many opportunities for improvement. Research highlighted areas for focused effort include:

- Workforce attraction and retention in all sectors
- Reduction of high levels of discrimination, especially in the workplace, against visible minorities, (LIP Discrimination Report 2021);
- Improvements to infrastructure that does not fully meet the needs of businesses (2021 BR&E)
- Reduction in the number of households earning under the living wage (57%) (2021 Census).

Note: In November 2022 the living wage jumped dramatically. It is anticipated this will result in the number of people earning less than a living wage will increase.)

Ultimately, the activities under this goal are driving towards the development of a welcoming and inclusive community that ensures new and existing residents feel welcome and have the resources, support and meaningful work opportunities they need to engage with the community and be productive citizens.

This goal is focused on maintaining and improving the overall quality of life for residents in Huron County, making it a desirable place to live, work, own a business and play.



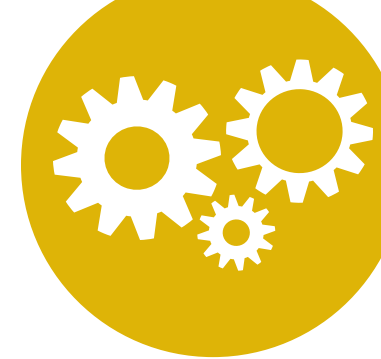
Goal 1 | Objectives

Objective A	Objective B	Objective C
Workforce, resident and youth attraction and retention, in partnership with local employers, service delivery agencies, educational institutions and all levels of government.	Enable diverse community members to feel welcome and fully participate in the community and economy.	Facilitate capacity development in both infrastructure and housing towards equitable participation in Huron County's community/economy and a high quality of place for living and doing business.

Activities under this goal will aim to attract new residents, better understand the needs of employers, job seekers, and newcomers, create new spaces for diverse people to connect, help employers better prepare to attract and retain labour, help job seekers improve their skill sets, reduce discrimination, and improve the overall quality of place in the region. These goals will be enlivened through an annual Operational Plan.

Goal 1 | Metrics

Increased employment participation rate; number of start-ups; employment in target sectors; County employers participating in EDI training; Rates of discrimination at places of employment decrease; increase in and diversity of housing options (# of units); increase # of entertainment, leisure and evening economy assets; discrimination across the community is reduced or eliminated; and access to critical infrastructure is enhanced where needed (% of County with access).



Goal 2 | Collaborate

Huron County is the go-to leader on regional economic and community development activity, playing a key role in sharing information and coordinating initiatives to create alignment amongst partners.

In an informal survey, it was noted that there were over 30 + separate groups and organizations in Huron County involved in economic development activities. This list includes our partner municipalities, Business Improvement Areas (BIA's), Chambers, Huron Manufacturing Association (HMA), educational institutions, HR association, Four County Labour Market Planning Board, to name a few. With so many players, it is important to clearly define one's role and enhance collaborations. At times, Huron County Economic Development Department should be the lead. At other times the Department should be a facilitator, a collaborator or a supporter. At all times, the Department should be a respected go-to resource demonstrating sound leadership on economic development issues and opportunities.

This goal seeks to establish the County of Huron Economic Development Department as that key partner on regional economic development opportunities and challenges, working across the County and the region to create alignment amongst partners to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of resources, supports and services delivered to businesses and the community. Consultation with businesses, partners and staff indicated opportunities to improve coordination of regional initiatives, resources, and partnerships in Huron County for maximum client impact and efficiency.

Key partnerships include by are not limited to:

Internal departments,
including Planning and
Development

Local Municipalities
Neighbouring Counties

Western Ontario Warden's
Caucus

Clean Energy Frontier

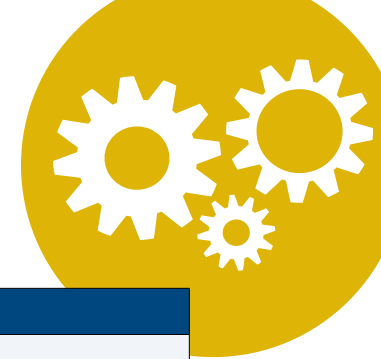
Non-Profits
Community Futures Huron
Chambers of Commerce
BIAs

Sector Associations:
Huron County Federation
of Agriculture (HCFA)
Huron Manufacturing
Association (HMA)
RTO4
Gateway

Private sector leaders

Ministry partners
including:
OMAFRA
MEDJCT
Fed Dev

Post-Secondary Institutions
including:
Fanshawe College
University of Guelph
Conestoga College



Goal 2 | Objectives

Objective A	Objective B	Objective C
Build a culture of community collaboration to support economic development in Huron County both within the corporation and with external, local and regional partners.	Explore and build new and innovative partnerships that support strategic objectives, where common values and interests align.	Host events and other avenues targeted to facilitating dialogue between businesses, stakeholders, and the broader community to foster collaboration and innovation.

This goal uses a collective impact approach. Its actions will focus on bringing partners and stakeholders together to explore new opportunities and create a culture of collaboration. We must work together and share information to solve the complex issues and opportunities facing our region.

Goal 2 | Metrics

Number of new partnerships established; number of collaborative industry events or summits held (# of participants/ attendees); number of projects executed as collaborative partnerships internally and externally.



Goal 3 | Sustain

Huron County sustains a thriving business community that has access to high-quality, responsive support which enables resilience, growth, and innovation.

The 2021 BR&E indicated that Huron County enjoys a thriving business community. Hearing this during year two of a global pandemic is very encouraging. And yet part of the mandate of Huron County Economic Development is to anticipate future trends, keep fostering leads that will attract and or grow local businesses and plan for 10-20 years from now, not just respond to today's realities.

This goal seeks to ensure that Huron County is continuing to establish a strong support ecosystem for the regional business community, driving new start-ups, exploring meaningful diversification opportunities, ensuring existing businesses continue to grow and thrive and succession planning for business owners considering retirement to reduce gaps in the Huron County business community.

Consultation with the business community and staff highlighted many opportunities to improve the service delivery model, enhance the programming offered to the business community, and attract new investment.

Objectives under this goal seek to enhance the environment in which Huron County businesses operate, particularly amongst strategic sectors.



Goal 3 | Objectives

Objective A	Objective B	Objective C
Deliver high-quality business coaching and support to help businesses start, grow and remain sustainable, with a focus on improving business planning and growth along the life cycle, including succession planning.	Develop and undertake an investment attraction program that focuses on opportunities for strategic growth, existing gaps in value chain, high-quality employment, and improved quality of place.	Engage youth in entrepreneurial opportunities.

Under this goal, activities are focused around streamlining service-delivery processes to improve efficiency and client experience, improving investment readiness from infrastructure to marketing materials, creating and maintaining impactful educational programming to help businesses start and grow, and providing sector specific supports to enhance the region’s strategic target sectors. This work will be done utilizing on-going consultations with the business community. Lastly, actions will also provide guidance on how best to utilize the Economic Development Department’s recently enhanced office space to support business and community development across the region.

Goal 3 | Metrics

Number of new businesses in the community; number of successful succession transitions; employment growth (generally, and in key sectors); growth in the number of youth run businesses; export growth; tourism visitation; business survey feedback; business expansions; external investment attracted.



Goal 4 | Communicate

Ensure there is a clear understanding of the work the County of Huron's Economic Development Department is undertaking and opportunities available to support economic development in the region.

As a discipline, economic development is multi-faceted, responsive to local economic conditions and steadily evolving. This makes it challenging at times to communicate the work and success of the department. In some instances, it can take decades to see the impact of economic development efforts. In its earliest iterations, Economic Development was exclusively concerned with the attraction of industry - factories and their smokestacks represented jobs and financial capital. Now economic development includes the consideration of a number of types of capital including human, social and environmental. The social issues of the day strongly influence the economic issues, opportunities, and challenges.

This reality of the profession increases the importance of establishing a clear understanding of and process for communications related to the Economic Development department to enable the department to better tell the story of the work they are doing.

It was clear when talking to staff and partners that the County of Huron's Economic Development Department needs to better define the work they do to enable partners and the community to understand when and how to engage with the department.



Goal 4 | Objectives

Objective A	Objective B	Objective C	Objective D
Creating a clear communications strategy that reviews and considers each of our brands and line of business.	Developing and strengthening branding so clients and the community have a clear understanding of how, when, and why to access services delivered across the department.	Engaging in an on-going, long-term performance measurement program to ensure department activities achieve maximum impact and efficiency over the short and long term. Reporting includes outputs, outcomes and impacts whenever possible.	Development of tourism marketing programs, campaigns, and products that showcase Huron County's assets.

The actions under this goal will ensure there is a clear internal process for communication, and a strategy to effectively engage partners, stakeholders, and the business community in creating awareness about department offerings as well as the outcomes of those offerings and the regional impact they are creating.

Goal 4 | Metrics

Business Survey – Awareness of services question, uptake of services, number of direct vs; secondary referrals, sub-brands may need further measurement depending on their use. Website hits, social media engagement.

The Economic Development Strategy

This strategy will be implemented over the course of 5 years with review and reassessment annually. Each year an operational plan will be created and taken to an individual staff work plan level.

The 2023 Operational Plan will be focused on building solid foundations, developing tools and resources and capitalizing on immediate opportunities.

This will include:

- Highlighting the success of the Huron Business Centre.
- Becoming investment ready.
- Accelerating the tourism sector as an element of the department's workforce strategy, in addition to growing the sector.
- A focus on workforce attraction and retention.
- Mental health coordination & collaborations for all sectors.
- Succession planning for the business community, led by the Huron Business Centre.
- Youth and newcomer engagement, attraction, and retention through welcoming community projects.
- Enhancing collaborative opportunities to support and grow the economy, reduce duplication of efforts and recognize efficient use of dollars invested.
- Enhanced communications to highlight local business and the work of the department.
- Development of meaningful performance metrics for the department.

There will be an environmental lens applied to all of the departments work and application of the ***Rural Lens*** tool.

Highlights of 2023's Implementation

Highlights of 2023's implementation will include:

- Establishment of a film office for Huron County. The majority of film production happens between October and April. This is an excellent opportunity to attract capital into the County and drive business to our hospitality and commercial assets in the shoulder seasons. Skills development opportunities for seasonal live performers will be developed.
- Working with partner municipalities to develop an investment attraction program including community profiles and an inventory of available land as well as a collaborative process for handling inquiries.
- Expanding Huron County's participation in the Clean Energy Frontier (CEF).
- Dedicating resources to workforce over the next 15 months through the Rural Economic Development (RED) program addressing the number one business barrier noted in the 2021 BR&E.
- Manage investment inquiries currently totaling over \$400 million.

Year 2's Operational Plan will focus on growth based on the foundations constructed in 2023.

Year 3 will re-evaluate priorities under each goal and objective. Adjustments will be made and opportunities capitalized on.

Years 4-5 to be determined in year 3 of the strategy.

