

COMMUNITY & CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN 2018-2028



Working Toward Sustainable Growth





All photos kindly provided by the
Municipality of North Middlesex, 2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
North Middlesex's Strategic Plan and Other Corporate Priorities	5
A Message from Municipal Council	6
A Message from Nandini Syed, Chief Administrative Officer	7
Vision, Mission and Values	8
Strategic Priorities 2018-2028	10
Priority: North Middlesex Leads	12
Priority: North Middlesex Engages	14
Priority: North Middlesex Plans	16
Priority: North Middlesex Sustains.....	18
Priority: North Middlesex Prospers.....	20
Our History, Our Future	22
Creating Our Strategic Plan	24
Making It Happen: Implementing our New Strategic Plan	28
Our Action Plan.....	29
Appendix: Themes from our Community Consultation	46
A. Community	47
B. Development and Housing.....	48
C. Economic Development and Business.....	49
D. Engagement — Community and Youth	51
E. The Environment.....	52
F. Facilities, Amenities and Recreation.....	53
G. Families.....	54
H. Governance and the Municipality as an Organization.....	54
I. Infrastructure	56
J. Location	57
K. Schools and Education	58
L. Taxes.....	58
M. Youth and Young Adults	59

INTRODUCTION

The Municipality of North Middlesex's Community & Corporate Strategic Plan sets our priorities, goals and actions for the next ten years. This plan captures more than six months of engagement with youth and adult residents, local businesses, community groups, partners, other municipalities, volunteer fire fighters, and Municipal Council and staff. More than 500 people shared their perspective. Council reflected on what citizens had to say and used this feedback to re-imagine its vision, mission and values, and decide on five strategic priorities: leadership, engagement, planning, sustainability and prosperity. These priorities are our pathway forward through 2028.

North Middlesex faces demographic and economic changes that require a strategic response. We cannot do everything. There is both fear and freedom in this acknowledgement. It challenges us to decide what we will focus on and to do these things well. It also challenges us to see obstacles as opportunities, to embrace new ideas and to work together to shape our future. That is why we have developed this strategic plan: to envision the future we want and choose the priorities, goals and actions that will get us there.

They say "If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there." This new strategic plan — our road map — is our declaration of where we are going as a community and municipal corporation. It will focus the efforts of our Council and staff on the goals and dreams of our citizens. It will be supported by and integrate with other Municipal policies. And, it will harness our strengths as a community to generate viable economic growth and tackle the challenges and opportunities we face in building our tomorrows.

NORTH MIDDLESEX'S STRATEGIC PLAN AND OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES

Our Community & Corporate Strategic Plan 2018-2028 is the guiding document for the Municipality of North Middlesex. Here is how our other policy documents connect.

LONG-TERM POLICY FRAMEWORK

Working Toward Sustainable Growth:
Community & Corporate Strategic Plan
2018-2028

MEDIUM-TERM POLICY DOCUMENTS

North Middlesex
Official Plan

Related Plans:

- Asset Management Plan
- Economic Development Plan
- Facilities Needs Assessment
- Fire Master Plan
- Long-term Financial Sustainability Plan
- Recreation Master Plan
- Roads Needs Assessment

SHORT-TERM ACTION PLANS

Senior
Management
Work Plans

Operational
Budget

Capital
Budget

A MESSAGE FROM MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

Dear Neighbours and Friends,

We are proud to put forward North Middlesex's new Community & Corporate Strategic Plan 2018-2028. As a Council, we heard the feedback of more than 500 citizens who participated in our planning process. Your insights informed our priorities, goals and actions. Our new strategic plan reflects your voice and is stronger because of your contributions. Thank you.

As a Municipality, we want to not only provide essential services but do more. We act with honesty, integrity and respect to create a sustainable, vibrant North Middlesex. We aim to be forward-thinking and innovative, investing in our present and our future. We work hard to be a positive community that takes pride in its past as it forges a better tomorrow. This strategic plan will guide us in building those tomorrows.

The work of Municipal staff makes a difference in our community. As staff and Council, we must continue to answer the call of our constituents to serve with passion, purpose and excellence. Let us continue to work hard together in building a stronger quality of life for the people of North Middlesex.

Our Municipality is committed to creating a prosperous future. We invite all community members — residents, businesses, community groups, volunteers, partners, Municipal staff, fire fighters and Council — to 'participation'. We need our combined efforts to bring this plan to life and be the community we want for ourselves and our children's children. Together, we will create a dynamic future for North Middlesex.

With thanks,

Don Shipway, Mayor

Brian Ropp, Deputy Mayor

Doreen McLinchey, Councillor Ward 1

Joan Nichol, Councillor Ward 2

Gord Moir, Councillor Ward 3

Andy Hemming, Councillor Ward 4

Adrian Cornelissen, Councillor Ward 5

Back row (left to right): Deputy Mayor Brian Ropp, Councillor Gord Moir, Councillor Andy Hemming, Councillor Adrian Cornelissen
Front row (left to right): Councillor Doreen McLinchey, Mayor Don Shipway, Councillor Joan Nichol



A MESSAGE FROM NANDINI SYED, CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Dear Friends,

I am proud to present the Municipality of North Middlesex's Strategic Plan outlining the direction of our community over the next ten years. It has truly been an honour and privilege to work alongside the dedicated Council members, staff and citizens of North Middlesex in embracing our future with a strategic focus. Our community has abundant talent, rich history, natural beauty and bountiful resources. We wish to use this strong foundation to build a prosperous and hopeful future that is sustainable both from an economic as well as an environmental perspective. Throughout these pages you will see a plan based on five strategic priorities that will guide our community's progress over the next decade.

Additionally, our Mission, Vision and Values have been refined to better present who we are as a Corporation and where we will be in the future. As an organization filled with dedicated and spirited employees, we act with honesty, integrity and respect to build on our strengths and create a sustainable, vibrant North Middlesex. We aim to be forward-thinking and innovative, investing in our present and our future. We hope this Strategic Plan will act as a road map in creating a community that is sustainable, providing opportunities that support businesses and economic growth, fostering healthy lifestyles for our residents, while ensuring the protection and preservation of our social, cultural, and economic assets.

We look forward to further strengthening our community by working closely with our diverse stakeholders like you. We invite all community members - residents, businesses, community groups, volunteers, partners, Municipal staff and Council - to "engage." Only through our combined efforts will we bring this plan to life, developing a prosperous and sustainable North Middlesex for current and future generations. Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Nandini Syed, BA, CPA, CMA
Chief Administrative Officer
Municipality of North Middlesex





VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

Our vision statement reflects the future we want for North Middlesex, while our mission statement describes what we will do to make this future happen. Our values are the defining, guiding principles of our Municipality. Together, our values, mission and vision are the foundation of North Middlesex, reminding us of who we are, what we do and the future we want to achieve.

OUR VISION:

Grounded in agriculture, growing in innovation.

OUR MISSION:

To lead, live and invest in a dynamic, inclusive community.

OUR VALUES:

- **Community** — We are connected. We acknowledge our differences and build on our strengths. Together, we are North Middlesex.
- **Integrity** — We are accountable. We strive to be honest, open and transparent with one another.
- **Innovation** — We are committed to creating an environment where ideas are welcomed, explored and developed. We are building a forward-thinking future for North Middlesex.
- **Collaboration** — We reach out and create opportunities to share resources, ideas, programs and services for the betterment of our community.
- **Stewardship** — We are entrusted with natural, financial and human resources. We use these resources efficiently, effectively and ethically for the present and the future.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2018-2028

Our Community & Corporate Strategic Plan identifies the areas we need to develop to achieve our goals. In the next ten years, we will focus our efforts and investments in:

NORTH MIDDLESEX LEADS

To create a positive, open organizational culture that builds a stronger Municipal organization.

NORTH MIDDLESEX ENGAGES

To encourage community participation that helps residents feel welcomed, informed and engaged.

NORTH MIDDLESEX PLANS

To support robust industrial, commercial and residential growth in our agricultural-based community.

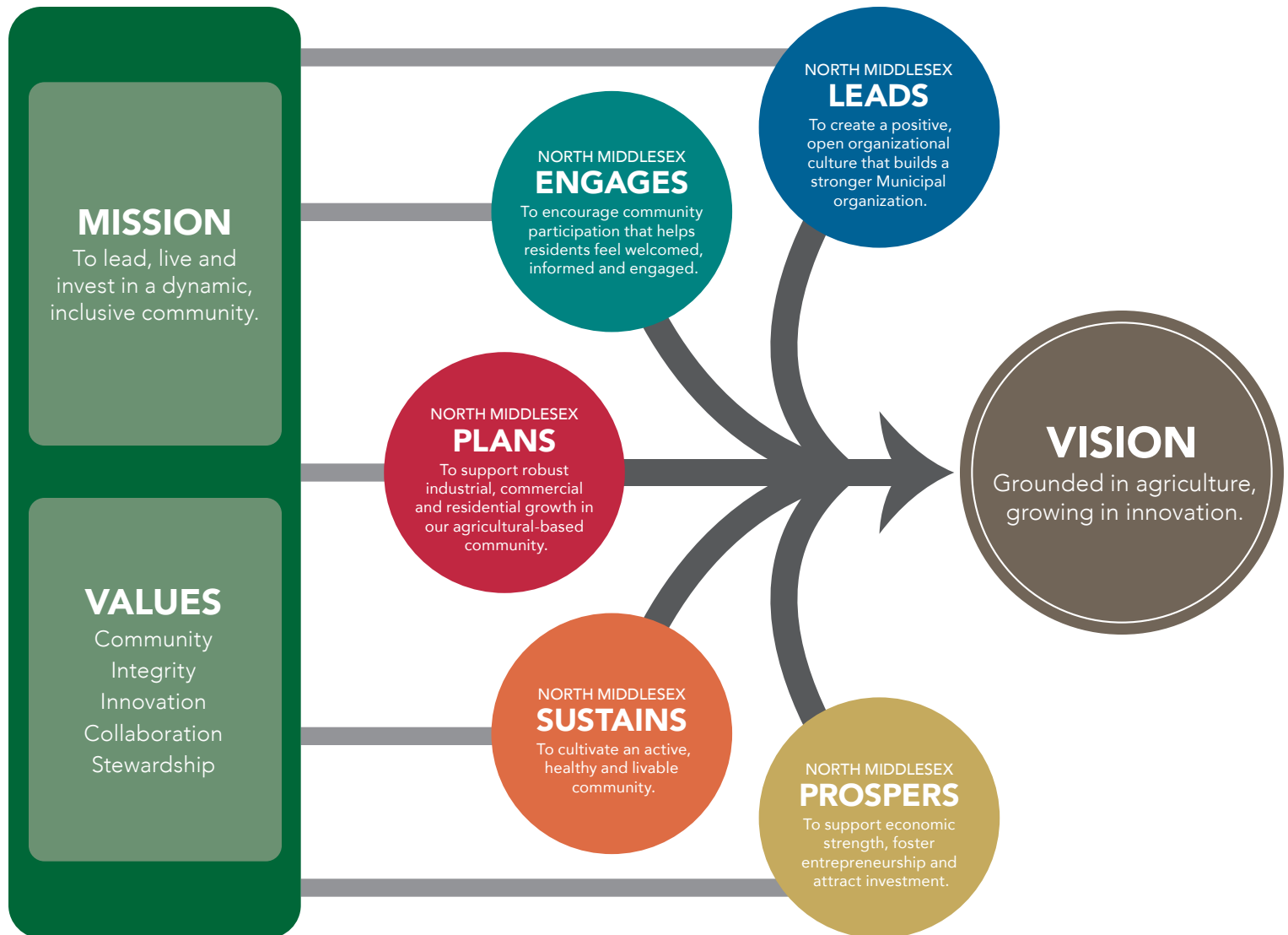
NORTH MIDDLESEX SUSTAINS

To cultivate an active, healthy and livable community.

NORTH MIDDLESEX PROSPERS

To support economic strength, foster entrepreneurship and attract investment.

These priorities are based on the feedback we received from citizens in the strategic planning process. Focusing on these priorities will help us move toward our vision.



PRIORITY: NORTH MIDDLESEX **LEADS**

WHAT WE HEARD

Leadership matters. It is important we work together as Municipal Council and staff to lead with optimism and provide the quality services our citizens expect. Our community is clear in what it wants: accountable, forward-thinking and responsive leaders who communicate their vision for the future and get things done.

GOAL

To create a positive, open organizational culture that builds a stronger Municipal organization.

STRATEGIES

The Municipality of North Middlesex will:

- 1) Provide high quality public services
- 2) Provide open, respectful and responsible leadership
- 3) Recruit, retain and support highly skilled, dedicated, and engaged staff.

HOW WE MEASURE THIS PRIORITY

Increased employee engagement.

WHY GOVERNANCE AND CORPORATE LEADERSHIP MATTERS...

We know we must work differently if we are to achieve our goals. Our emphasis on leadership is not simply about Municipal Council and staff. In building a stronger corporate organization, Council and staff are better equipped to serve the people of North Middlesex. Our workplace asks us to be bold in our thinking and visioning, to take measured risks and explore new opportunities. As an organization, we will model leadership values, embrace bold ideas, pursue innovation and work collaboratively.

Our people are our greatest asset. We will create a culture of service excellence where staff are engaged and have what they need to effectively serve. We will improve our organizational performance through professional development, training and resources, policy and procedures, governance best practices and effective communication. We know our citizens want to be heard, and for their Council and Municipal staff to be active partners in our community. We will do this by listening to what citizens have to say, communicating about Municipal plans and demonstrating that the actions we take are rooted in the community's needs. We will draw a clear line between the feedback from our community and partners to the actions we take and the results they achieve. We will be a solutions-based Municipality known for listening, being responsive to new ideas, reasoned decision-making, and accountability. Because of what we do, the citizens of North Middlesex will have access to high quality public services and confidence their Municipal leadership provides good value.

We work hard to be leaders who serve our community first. As a Municipal Council and staff, we are committed to doing our best for you.

PRIORITY: NORTH MIDDLESEX ENGAGES

WHAT WE HEARD

The citizens of North Middlesex want to be more involved and more connected. Building on its existing sense of 'community', residents seek greater outreach to families, teens, new residents and businesses, and seniors. Youth engagement was highlighted as a way to retain young people and support the community's future leaders. Reaching out to families, seniors and new residents through accessible, affordable programs and services helps build relationships and supports inclusion and connection.

GOAL

To encourage community participation that helps residents feel welcomed, informed and engaged.

STRATEGIES

The Municipality of North Middlesex will:

- 1) Develop a Community Engagement and Outreach strategy
- 2) Provide timely and relevant communication with residents, businesses and local community associations and groups
- 3) Encourage residents to be community and neighbourhood ambassadors
- 4) Support local volunteerism through recognition and capacity building.

HOW WE MEASURE THIS PRIORITY

Equal participation by residents in community and economic development.



WHY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MATTERS...

Engaged communities actively welcome residents, businesses and community groups as valued stakeholders. We strive for all residents in North Middlesex, including newcomers and young people, to feel at home and included. When new people move in to North Middlesex, we will work hard to welcome them and inform them of local opportunities, programs and services.

We are 'North Middlesex Proud.' We will build on our heritage by encouraging volunteers of all ages to become stronger leaders and neighbourhood ambassadors. We will recognize and honour those who distinguish themselves through their volunteer leadership. We will evaluate how we, as a Municipality, conduct our business to be sure that how we do things helps our community stay informed and connected. We will use recreational and cultural activities, social events and civic celebrations to deepen our sense of what it means to be 'North Middlesex'. Because of what we do, all who live and work here will feel engaged and valued, be better informed, and have a sense of connection and pride when they speak of North Middlesex as home.

PRIORITY:

NORTH MIDDLESEX PLANS

WHAT WE HEARD

The people of North Middlesex agree: our Municipality has a great location and is a “gem of south western Ontario.” Residents are proud of their natural environment, wanting to steward our resources well to support current and future prosperity. Citizens want to leverage our strengths to develop a North Middlesex that is attractive to today’s and tomorrow’s residents: affordable housing, accessible services and public spaces, economic opportunities for entrepreneurs and businesses, strong local schools, and a good quality of life.

GOAL

To support robust industrial, commercial and residential growth in our agricultural-based community.

STRATEGIES

The Municipality of North Middlesex will:

- 1) Manage growth and land use wisely
- 2) Offer high quality public spaces and places
- 3) Promote ‘aging in place’ in our community
- 4) Develop a safe and secure Municipality
- 5) Connect neighbours and neighbourhoods.

HOW WE MEASURE THIS PRIORITY

Current Municipal resources support future opportunities.

WHY COMMUNITY PLANNING MATTERS...

North Middlesex is a strong agricultural community with abundant opportunities for industrial, commercial and residential growth. As we develop, we will balance economic opportunities with preserving the character of our rural area and the quality of our agricultural land. Our natural environment — open spaces, farmland, and land resources — provide important natural functions, economic opportunities and recreation that improve our quality of life. Our approach to planning and policy development will ensure our public spaces are inviting, and our natural resources are preserved, protected and enhanced.

Focusing on community planning means our infrastructures will be in good condition, our streetscapes and downtown areas will be visually appealing and accessible, and our trail systems will be connected and well maintained. Housing will be available for young people, families, seniors who wish to 'age in place' and new neighbours who move to North Middlesex. By working with partners to provide age-friendly and affordable community services, our Municipality will support citizens across the lifespan, ensuring a safe, accessible community to call home. In fostering relationships with school Principals, Associations and Trustees, our Municipality will collaboratively identify issues and generate solutions that support the local community and provide for a stronger future for local schools. Years from now, our Official Plan will have built on the momentum we are accelerating today. Because of what we do, people will say they live in North Middlesex because it is a vibrant community that offers them an excellent quality of life where they can live, explore and invest.

PRIORITY:

NORTH MIDDLESEX SUSTAINS

WHAT WE HEARD

North Middlesex's natural, built and human environments position the community with ample opportunities for vitality, health and sustainable living. Residents appreciate the range of local recreational facilities, sports teams & associations, events and amenities. They seek even more diverse opportunities for healthy activity, cultural experiences, and harmonious living through expanded local health supports and improved natural and built resources. Citizens recognize that, as our population declines, we need to work more with school boards, community partners and community planners to creatively attract and retain young talent.

GOAL

To cultivate an active, healthy and livable community.

STRATEGIES

The Municipality of North Middlesex will:

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 1) Maintain, create and support active living opportunities | 5) Enhance and increase the diversity of cultural experiences | 8) Protect our natural resources |
| 2) Enhance local health services | 6) Expand high speed internet infrastructure | 9) Reduce the impacts of climate change |
| 3) Promote healthy eating | 7) Engage and retain youth and new young professionals | 10) Promote a sustainable way of living. |
| 4) Preserve and promote our architectural and cultural heritage | | |

HOW WE MEASURE THIS PRIORITY

Increased active living.

WHY SUSTAINABILITY MATTERS...

As a community, North Middlesex is committed to wellbeing, cultural and community renewal, and sustainable living. These commitments are founded in our belief in the dignity of each person and the importance of taking care of the resources and heritage entrusted to us.

A sustainable community is an active, healthy, livable community. Our Municipality will become more sustainable by:

- ✓ Maintaining our resources and facilities so citizens can more easily participate in indoor and outdoor activities
- ✓ Developing community and school gardens
- ✓ Establishing partnerships to address local health issues and health resource gaps
- ✓ Embracing diverse cultural experiences while celebrating our traditions and heritage
- ✓ Welcoming the ideas of younger people and new residents and businesses to help sustain the fiscal, social, environmental and cultural fabric of North Middlesex
- ✓ Informing residents how we can reduce our impact on the natural environment
- ✓ Engaging with school boards, schools and post-secondary institutions to champion rural education opportunities for youth.

PRIORITY: NORTH MIDDLESEX PROSPERS

WHAT WE HEARD

The residents and businesses of North Middlesex want a bright economic future and are willing to work hard to make this happen. They see opportunities for the Municipality to build on the area's agribusiness foundation and attract new enterprises, including large-scale employers and non-traditional entrepreneurs. Residents and businesses want to be bold, to do things differently, and build North Middlesex's profile as a good place to do business. Residents recognize the importance of having strong finances and reliable infrastructure and technologies — including the essential service of high speed internet — to support existing and prospective enterprises. Community members are keen to promote local businesses, to inventively attract new business, and to market North Middlesex as a destination for tourism and tourism investment.

GOAL

To support economic strength, foster entrepreneurship and attract investment.

STRATEGIES

The Municipality of North Middlesex will:

- 1) Promote economic growth through implementation of the Economic Development Plan
- 2) Preserve and promote agriculture and the agricultural industry
- 3) Foster local entrepreneurship
- 4) Promote North Middlesex as a tourism destination and tourism investment locale
- 5) Strengthen the Municipality's long-term finances.

HOW WE MEASURE THIS PRIORITY

Increased economic opportunity and diversity.

WHY PROSPERITY MATTERS...

The economic engine of a community is the lifeblood that creates and maintains local prosperity. North Middlesex is a strong agriculture and agribusiness community. Through our Economic Development Plan, the Municipality seeks to build on this foundation and expand its economic base to solidify and diversify its financial resources.

North Middlesex seeks opportunities to 'tell our story' as a great investment for the future. We will actively partner with educational institutions and businesses to support training and research, and will champion and attract innovative local entrepreneurs and investors. We will seek opportunities for public and private partnerships to bridge gaps (such as high speed internet access) and generate economic renewal. Our downtowns will be vibrant and thriving, and our rural areas will be economically and socially active. Tourists and residents will see our community as a fascinating destination to explore. We will develop tools and mechanisms to report back to our community, allies and partners about the status of our economic success, and the impact it has for residents and businesses.

Economic strength is not just about creating local wealth. It's about supporting creativity, building civic pride and cultivating innovation. Because of what we do, North Middlesex will be economically diverse and prepared, able to tackle challenges and support innovations to develop more local businesses, jobs and abundance for all.



OUR HISTORY, OUR FUTURE

Growing to be more responsive to our communities' needs, the Municipality of North Middlesex is home to 6,700 residents, offering both a small urban and a rural countryside experience. It is a community committed to providing an excellent quality of life that sits in close proximity to the beaches of Lake Huron and the regional urban centres of London, Kitchener-Waterloo and Windsor.

While the Municipality of North Middlesex is relatively new, it weaves together a collection of histories that make for a colorful heritage. One of the largest of eight land-based municipalities in Middlesex County, North Middlesex was created in 2001 through the amalgamation of five local municipalities: the Village of Ailsa Craig, the Town of Parkhill, the Town of McGillivray, and the Townships of East and West Williams. Prior to amalgamation, these municipalities existed independently for over 150 years. Their histories tell of communities built on mills, sawmills, cattle, lumber, farming, foundries, enterprises, private banks and other industry, much of it spurred by the arrival of the railroad in the 1860's.

Today's industry in North Middlesex is built on the heritage of our forbearers. Our economy remains primarily based on agriculture and agri-business, though has expanded to include service, commercial and transportation sector businesses. Resource-minded residents are moving into more entrepreneurial, artistic and tourism-based enterprises. Our economy continues to strengthen and grow as we strive to support entrepreneurs and attract new business and investment to our area.



In 2014, the Municipality opened a newly-built, fully accessible Shared Services Centre housing its Municipal Offices, a Service Ontario office and the Parkhill Branch of the Middlesex County library. In 2016, the Municipality celebrated its 15th anniversary by opening its first ever Town Square, a public gathering space in the heart of the community.

North Middlesex is a place of potential and connection, where families and businesses can avail of opportunities for recreation, culture, heritage, and enterprise. North Middlesex is full of industrious, innovative and involved people who are creating a dynamic future, making this community a place where people want to live, lead and invest.

CREATING OUR STRATEGIC PLAN

WHY STRATEGIC PLANNING?

In our fast-paced, changing world, it helps to step back and consider where we are, where we want to be and how we will get there. Strategic planning gives us that long view. Without it, we run the risk of wandering aimlessly and impeding potential growth as we stagnate, move in confused directions or follow opportunities with unclear outcomes. If North Middlesex is to continue to grow as a community and municipal organization, we need clear, focused direction and resources that are aligned to achieve our goals. That is why we developed this strategic plan: to identify what we are moving toward, what needs to be done to get us there and the steps we will take to achieve success.

WHY A COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN?

Our new strategic plan is unique in bringing together the community and corporate aspects of North Middlesex. Most municipalities create either a plan for their community, or a plan for their municipal corporation. In North Middlesex, we see great value in using a community-based approach that engages us as a corporate organization (staff and Municipal Council) and a community of diverse stakeholders (residents, business owners, local community groups, etc.). We have named a vision for our community and the priorities we will focus on as a corporate organization in the next ten years to bring this vision to life.

HOW IS STRATEGIC PLANNING DIFFERENT FROM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING?

While our strategic plan outlines our vision and overarching goals for the community and corporation of North Middlesex, our economic development plan focuses on the economic engine of our municipality to drive fiscal growth. It drills down on how we will create and maintain a strong local economy that supports us in moving forward. Part of our community and corporate strategic plan includes economic development as a foundational element to ensure continued prosperity in North Middlesex.

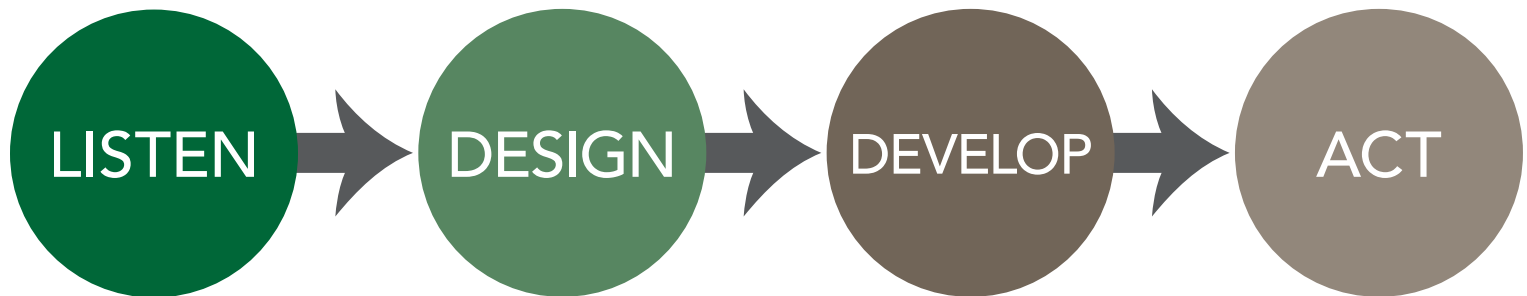
HOW IS STRATEGIC PLANNING DIFFERENT FROM ACTION PLANNING?

Developing a strategic response to the changes we face provides high-level guidance for North Middlesex for the next ten years. It helps us to choose what we will do and not do to achieve our goals. We know resources are limited. We chose to focus on five priorities areas through 2028: leadership, engagement, planning, sustainability and prosperity. The action plan included in this document translates these five priorities and goals into specific actions that will help us stay on target.

HOW DID WE DEVELOP OUR NEW COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN?

North Middlesex's new strategic plan was collaboratively developed and is rooted in the insights and feedback of our community members. It included a six-month engagement process that 'tapped into' the ideas of the people of North Middlesex. The Municipality hired Platinum Leadership Inc. to facilitate our strategic planning. Hiring a consultant allowed Council and staff to be more present to the community at public focus groups; the consultants focused on the process so we could focus on what we were hearing from community members.

Our planning process included four stages:



1) LISTEN TO COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Extensive community consultation grounded the development of our new strategic plan. We launched the planning process at a Town Hall Meeting in Ailsa Craig in June 2016. A Strategic Planning Steering Committee consisting of members of Council, staff and local residents guided the process. We met with more than 500 community members through one-on-one interviews at community events, focus groups, surveys and telephone interviews.

Young people, adult residents, business owners, community associations and partners, volunteer fire fighters, members of Municipal Council, staff, and representatives of other municipalities participated in public consultation events, including:

- Town Hall Meeting in Ailsa Craig to Launch Strategic Planning: June 04, 2016
- Municipal Council Workshop: June 20, 2016
- Strategic Planning Steering Committee Meetings: June 22, July 04, August 03 & 18, September 07, 2016
- Community interviews at Parkhill Fall Fair: September 17 & 18, 2016
- Youth Focus Groups: September 19, October 16 & 17, 2016
- Municipal Staff and Senior Leadership Focus Group: September 28, 2016
- Ailsa Craig Public Focus Group: September 28, 2016
- Parkhill Public Focus Group: September 29, 2016
- Municipal Council Focus Group: October 12, 2016
- Online Surveys: September and October 2016
- Paper Surveys: September and October 2016
- Telephone Interviews: September and October 2016
- Town Hall Meeting in Parkhill to update on strategic planning: November 05, 2016

Community members shared generously, and we were inspired, challenged and humbled by what they had to say. Their responses were analyzed and organized into themes. This information was used to support Council and Senior Staff in making evidence-informed decisions about North Middlesex's future.

Please see Appendix A for themes identified in the community consultation. A copy of the full Community Consultation Report is available on the Municipality's website.

2) **DESIGN OUR FUTURE**

Members of Municipal Council and Senior Staff met on October 27 and November 01, 2016 for two days of focused dialogue to map the direction of North Middlesex. Their discussions considered the needs of the community, what they heard from community members through the consultation process, and what community members hope for North Middlesex. With this in mind, Council and Senior Staff identified the Municipality's priorities, goals and strategies for the next ten years.

3) **DEVELOP OUR PLAN**

The results of the strategy sessions were honed into our strategic plan. A small team of Council members, staff and local residents met in November and December 2016 to guide the writing. They developed and edited the document to ensure cohesive priorities, goals and actions.

4) **ACT**

With a map to build our future, we will move our strategic plan from theory to action. The strategic plan will help Council and staff be attentive to our vision while the action plan will ensure we are accountable to take the steps that will help us realize our goals.

North Middlesex's Community & Corporate Strategic Plan 2018-2028 is the framework that will guide our decisions and actions for the next ten years. This document now takes pride of place as our roadmap in building North Middlesex's future.

MAKING IT HAPPEN: IMPLEMENTING OUR NEW STRATEGIC PLAN

The Municipality of North Middlesex is proud of our new strategic plan and committed to making it happen. This plan is not intended to 'sit on a shelf' but to move us to action as we build the future we want for North Middlesex. Our planning process generated interest and momentum among community members who shared their time, talents and insights. Moving forward, we will harness this positive energy and use this plan as a tangible tool guiding our efforts.

To support our success, the Municipality of North Middlesex will:

- ✓ Proudly communicate our new strategic plan
- ✓ Integrate our Municipality's vision, priorities and goals into day-to-day operations, including existing organizational structures, work plans and policy frameworks
- ✓ Implement our action plan (described below)
- ✓ Develop a monitoring framework with progress indicators to ensure we are on target
- ✓ Make decisions that align with our strategic directions, demonstrating how our decisions and actions lead us to achieve the targets we have set
- ✓ Collaborate with allies and partners to ensure initiatives are well resourced and appropriately implemented
- ✓ Engage citizens — residents, businesses, community associations — to play an active role in realizing our community's vision
- ✓ Update our action plan to ensure we continue to move from strategy to action
- ✓ Regularly review the strategic plan and monitor progress
- ✓ Regularly communicate with community members, staff and other stakeholders so all are informed of our progress, including what is working well, what is challenging and what we are doing to keep us on target.

We will move forward together, and are confident that disciplined implementation of this strategic plan will help us be a community grounded in agriculture and growing in innovation.

A wide-angle photograph of a lush green agricultural field, likely a wheat or barley field, stretching towards the horizon. In the background, a farm complex is visible, featuring several large metal silos, a tall grain elevator, and a white barn. A line of trees separates the field from the farm buildings. The sky is a clear, bright blue with a few wispy clouds. The text "OUR ACTION PLAN" is overlaid in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters in the lower right portion of the image.

OUR ACTION PLAN

NORTH MIDDLESEX LEADS

GOAL: To create a positive, open organizational culture that builds a stronger Municipal organization.

STRATEGY	EXISTING OR PROPOSED ACTIONS
Provide high quality public services	Provide efficient and effective customer service.
	Work to ensure that all municipal facilities are accessible.
	Encourage partnerships to provide better services that are fiscally responsible.
	Ensure affordable and convenient access to services.
	Regularly evaluate municipal services to ensure responsiveness to residents' and visitors' needs.
Provide open, respectful and responsible leadership	Research best practices pertaining to municipal governance.
	Participate and collaborate in County of Middlesex's initiatives to protect and promote North Middlesex's interests.
	Monitor external issues that could affect the Municipality, and ensure our best interests are at the forefront of initiatives affecting the Municipality.
	Foster citizens' increased understanding of the roles and responsibilities of elected Municipal officials and staff.
	Improve communications through the website, social media, newsletter, media releases, newspaper ads, information boards, electronic signage, banners, etc.
	Ensure by-laws, Codes of Conducts, policies and procedures are up-to-date and followed at the Council, Committee and staff levels.
	Offer training opportunities to candidates, elected officials, staff and volunteers regarding advisory committees on legislation, policies and procedures.

STRATEGY	EXISTING OR PROPOSED ACTIONS
Recruit, retain and support highly skilled, dedicated, and engaged staff	Support training to enhance the learning opportunities of employees and management.
	Resource the continuous improvement of staff through a library of products, access to best practices and professional development.
	Support effective succession planning, including internal and external advertising to attract and retain highly skilled staff.
	Conduct comparative salary studies and salary market analysis.
	Develop an Employee Policy Manual, Health & Safety Policy Manual, and Operational Policy Manual.
	Ensure a safe and healthy workplace that looks out for the well being of staff through training, Joint Health & Safety Committee, inspections, etc.

HOW WE MEASURE THIS PRIORITY:

Increased employee engagement.

NORTH MIDDLESEX ENGAGES

GOAL: To encourage community participation that helps residents feel welcomed, informed and engaged.

STRATEGY	EXISTING OR PROPOSED ACTIONS
Develop a Community Engagement and Outreach Strategy	Establish a Community Engagement Committee.
	Determine the current level of community engagement in North Middlesex.
	Develop innovative outreach strategies that connect with residents of all ages.
	Set targets and indicators for enhanced community engagement.
	Launch outreach initiatives, including community development activities, social activities, and cultural events.
	Develop partnerships with local agencies and community groups.
	Evaluate community engagement and outreach efforts.
Provide timely and relevant communication with residents, businesses and local community associations and groups	Develop a Corporate Communications Strategy and Plan (including a branding and marketing plan for North Middlesex).

STRATEGY	EXISTING OR PROPOSED ACTIONS
Encourage residents to be community and neighbourhood ambassadors	Encourage residents' leadership in community events and initiatives.
	Partner with local agencies and organizations to support local leadership development training.
	Encourage volunteers and community leaders to implement appropriate aspects of the action plan.
Support local volunteerism through recognition and capacity building	Determine the current level of volunteerism in North Middlesex.
	Develop a Volunteer Strategy for each age group and for core sectors to encourage volunteerism at all ages.
	Set targets and indicators for enhanced volunteerism.
	Develop a bi-annual volunteer recognition and appreciation event.
	Support funding to build volunteer organizational capacity and networks (i.e., Community Development Fund Program and Community Vibrancy Funds).
	Partner to support existing Hall of Fame Program.
	Develop an annual Municipal Awards Program.
	Develop a strategy to increase volunteer activities in the Municipality.

HOW WE MEASURE THIS PRIORITY:

Equal participation by residents in community and economic development.

NORTH MIDDLESEX PLANS

GOAL: To support robust industrial, commercial and residential growth in our agricultural-based community.

STRATEGY	EXISTING OR PROPOSED ACTIONS
Manage growth and land use wisely	Continue to preserve, protect and enhance open space, farmland and significant land resources including features, systems and areas providing important natural functions and economic and recreational opportunities.
	Maintain Official Plan policies that preserve the character of the rural area and quality of agricultural land.
	Undertake an Official Plan Review to ensure appropriate land is set aside for development.
	Maintain and expand trail connections throughout the Municipality and into neighbouring municipalities that build on existing trail systems through use of road allowances, widened road shoulders, conservation authority lands, etc.
	Continue to seek fiscal sustainability by balancing service needs, demands and growth.
	Adopt community design guidelines with the Official Plan to address the form and character of communities ensuring growth meets sustainability and servicing.

STRATEGY	EXISTING OR PROPOSED ACTIONS
Offer high quality public spaces and places	Invest in streetscapes through the preservation, maintenance and replacement of street trees, provision of high quality streetlights in the downtowns, and the provision of high quality signposts, signage, furniture, plantings and pavement materials.
	Develop two downtown Community Improvement Plans.
	Develop a rural community plan.
	Develop community design guidelines.
Promote 'aging in place' in our community	Undertake an age-friendly study.
	Consider implementation of an assistance program for older adults to age-in-place.
	Provide incentives for affordable assisted housing in specific areas.
	Advocate for additional funding for assisted housing.
	Work with partners to provide aging-friendly community services for aging population.
	Increase opportunities for door-to-door transportation or offer mobile limited programs.
	Improve sidewalks, road conditions and walkability to services.

STRATEGY	EXISTING OR PROPOSED ACTIONS
Develop a safe and secure Municipality	Continue to provide proactive, certified and up-to-date fire prevention, inspection and investigation services.
	Continue to maintain and refine reactive fire prevention strategies through the use of modern emergency response equipment, technology and communications.
	Support a new fire services facility.
	Continue to provide training and development opportunities to all fire and by-law enforcement staff.
	Continue to work with municipal Fire and OPP services to enhance safety, crime prevention and enforcement.
	Develop a Fire Master Plan for fire and emergencies.
	Evaluate existing traffic signage and make improvements where needed.
	Undertake to update a Roads Needs Assessment.
	Work with the County to implement traffic-calming techniques in challenging areas.
	Ensure planning policies and practices promote safety and security.
	Promote safety awareness for fire, carbon monoxide and personal safety for staff and through the schools.
	Provide accountable Clean Yards and Property Standards By-laws along with accountable by-law enforcement.
	Undertake regular emergency management exercise and review and revise the Emergency Management Plan as required.
	Undertake a corporate-wide risk assessment to proactively determine possible issues.

STRATEGY	EXISTING OR PROPOSED ACTIONS
Connect neighbours and neighbourhoods	Create more walkable and exercise supportive communities.
	Connect rural trail systems with settlement sidewalks.
	Wherever possible, consider and implement sidewalks, parks and pedestrian connections to schools, stores, services and other amenities in neighbourhoods.
	Include connectivity map on Municipality's website.
	Undertake proactive public education and implementation of safety programs.
	Improve access to local information and services.
	Encourage more participation in community events through the use of event venues throughout Municipality.
	Investigate and encourage youth and older adults to become involved and connected.
	Continue to improve servicing including drinking water, waste water, roads and ditch drainage.

HOW WE MEASURE THIS PRIORITY:

Current Municipal resources support future opportunities.

NORTH MIDDLESEX **SUSTAINS**

GOAL: To cultivate an active, healthy and livable community.

STRATEGY	EXISTING OR PROPOSED ACTIONS
Enhance local health services	Attract more doctors and alternative health care professionals to the Municipality.
	Establish new community partnerships to address health issues.
	Appoint a champion to organize community leaders to develop a vision for improving health care in North Middlesex through a rural health care hub / improved medical facilities.
	Create an opportunity in the North Middlesex Medical Centre for specialists and doctors to attend on-site several days per month.
	Work with the County's Land Ambulance Service to develop mobile health clinics for residents with limited mobility to address issues such as diabetes, arthritis, foot clinics, heart health, healthy eating etc.

STRATEGY	EXISTING OR PROPOSED ACTIONS
Maintain, create and support active living opportunities	Maintain existing recreational resources and facilities, plan for capital replacement of aging facilities and for new facility development.
	Develop a Facilities, Parks and Recreation Master Plan.
	Develop a Trails Master Plan and identify key properties to gain access to as a means to bolster year-round connectivity.
	Develop and enhance partnerships in order to maximize the benefit to the community in a cost-effective and responsive manner.
	Provide quality parks and open spaces that offer active and passive activities and opportunities.
	Develop a Tree Health and Replacement Plan to enhance the street trees in our settlements and roadside trees in our rural areas.
	Increase awareness of the Municipality's recreational facilities and activities.
	Promote physical and mental activity through community design, programming and libraries.
	Designate routes in North Middlesex as cycling friendly and post "share the road" signs in appropriate locations.
Promote healthy eating	Increase the number of healthy food and drink choices in the Municipality's facilities.
	Encourage access to programs and information on healthy eating and local food sources.
	Raise awareness of local foods by advertising in local papers and media.
	Support development of community or school gardens.

STRATEGY	EXISTING OR PROPOSED ACTIONS
Preserve and promote our architectural and cultural heritage	Identify our cultural heritage landscapes and architectural heritage (i.e. historical markers).
	Work with partners to provide driving, cycling and walking tours of cultural heritage resources that are of historical, architectural and archaeological value.
	Encourage preservation and enhancement of the historical characteristics of North Middlesex's communities (i.e. establishment signage).
Enhance and increase the diversity of cultural experiences	Provide increased opportunities to showcase the skills and talents of local artists and performers.
	Identify existing and new opportunities for public events and programming for art exhibits, festivals, fairs, shows and events.
	Provide hands-on learning experiences and programs for youth and seniors.
	Encourage community arts programs and experiences.
	Promote arts, culture and heritage resources as tourism attractions.

STRATEGY	EXISTING OR PROPOSED ACTIONS
Expand high speed internet infrastructure	Work with internet infrastructure providers to enhance service levels to and within the Municipality.
Engage and retain youth and new young professionals	Encourage youth initiatives, engagement, learning, employment and housing.
	Develop a plan for youth retention and attraction.
	Work with the school boards, schools and post-secondary institutions to develop opportunities to communicate and engage with youth.
Protect our natural resources	Undertake a Municipal-wide inventory of natural heritage and resources.
	Develop education and promotional tools to inform residents, stakeholders and visitors of our natural resources and issues affecting them (i.e. Emerald Ash Borer).
	Undertake a tree-planting program.
	Work with OMAFRA, Middlesex Soils and Crop Association and ABCA to develop a soils protection program with tools to lessen erosion.

STRATEGY	EXISTING OR PROPOSED ACTIONS
Reduce the impacts of climate change	Establish idle-free zones with signage at Municipal facilities.
	Develop and promote a marketing campaign to communicate about how we can reduce our impacts on climate change or how to adapt to climate change.
	Investigate options and implications of converting municipal vehicles to hybrids or electrical.
	Explore how a rural and agriculturally-based Municipality can play a role in cap and trade economy.
	Protect existing trees and promote the planting of new trees.
	Require carpooling for training opportunities and telecommuting options for staff.
	Conserve energy through community design, land use planning and the building or retrofitting of Municipally-owned buildings.
Promote a sustainable way of living	Engage community partners in environmental initiatives (e.g. adopt a garden, section of trail, park or tree-planting project).
	Develop a speaker series to educate the community on various environmental issues such as climate change, air quality etc.
	Include an environmental category in the annual municipal awards.
	Apply for external funding to support the cost of an energy audit on Municipally-owned facilities.
	Continue to investigate opportunities for renewable energy projects.

HOW WE MEASURE THIS PRIORITY:

Increased active living.

NORTH MIDDLESEX **PROSPERS**

GOAL: To support economic strength, foster entrepreneurship and attract investment.

STRATEGY	EXISTING OR PROPOSED ACTIONS
Promote economic growth through implementation of the Economic Development Plan	Partner with the Province, South West region, County, education institutions and industry to become a more attractive place for entrepreneurs, home-based businesses and light industry.
	Implement the North Middlesex Economic Development Strategy according to its established timeline.
	Build one brand for the Municipality to attract and keep both business and people.
	Focus support for small and home-based businesses through advertising, inclusion in training opportunities, etc.
	Support the development of local entrepreneurship, innovation hubs and business growth.
	Support the development of Ailsa Craig and Parkhill downtowns as vibrant and thriving areas.
	Develop a strategy for the agricultural and rural areas outside of Ailsa Craig and Parkhill that will address economic, social, cultural and environmental factors.
	Support rural economic activity, including production of agricultural and agriculture-related products, and rural recreational activities.

STRATEGY	EXISTING OR PROPOSED ACTIONS
Preserve and promote agriculture and the agricultural industry	Educate newcomers and visitors about agriculture, agricultural businesses, local food and normal farm practices.
	Provide training opportunities for agricultural innovation and business development.
	Explore the development of a local Farmer's Market.
	Support opportunities to diversify on-farm income.
	Encourage value-added and technology research opportunities in partnership with secondary and post-secondary institutions.
Foster local entrepreneurship	Raise awareness of the economic impact of entrepreneurial activities to industry, Council and residents.
	Participate, partner and support the Middlesex Business Help Centre and other partners who promote entrepreneurial activity.
	Develop a North Middlesex Business Centre/Small Business Hub.
	Create a speaker's series to promote selected initiatives.

STRATEGY	EXISTING OR PROPOSED ACTIONS
Promote North Middlesex as a tourism destination and tourism investment locale	Promote North Middlesex to ensure recognition of being a community that is friendly, innovative, welcoming to newcomers especially of families, inclusive, open to business, etc.
	Create and develop tourism opportunities (i.e. quilt block trail etc.).
	Encourage development of appropriate infrastructure in support of the tourism sector.
Strengthen the Municipality's long-term finances.	Undertake a long-term Strategic Financial Plan; revise and update annually as appropriate.
	Continuously pursue funding from Federal, Provincial and County governments, industry and philanthropic organizations.
	Implement actions from this strategic plan into the Capital Budget process.
	Partner with other local municipalities to share resources and cost-sharing initiatives.
	Maintain sound administrative procedures and due diligence pertaining to the Municipality's assets and public funds.
	Undertake a life-cycle asset management replacement program for all Municipal assets.
	Integrate all municipal documents (i.e., Strategic Plan, Official Plan, Master Plans, Servicing Plans, etc.) into a timely budget allocation.

HOW WE MEASURE THIS PRIORITY:

Increased economic opportunity and diversity.

APPENDIX: THEMES FROM OUR COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

During September and October 2016, Platinum Leadership Inc., on behalf of the Municipality of North Middlesex, gathered information from more than 500 stakeholders to inform the development of North Middlesex's new strategic plan.

Youth and adult residents, business owners, community associations, volunteer fire fighters, community partners, members of Municipal Council and staff, and representatives from other municipalities participated in focus groups, online and paper surveys, telephone interviews and one-on-one interviews at local community events. Participants offered a wide breadth of perspectives. This is to be expected given their diversity of roles and experiences. While there is a sense of optimism and recognition that North Middlesex is "thriving compared to other communities," there are also elements of concern.

This Appendix identifies the main themes derived from the collected data, listed alphabetically. Each theme includes highlights of stakeholders' key ideas as well as where stakeholder perspectives converge and diverge. A copy of the full Community Consultation Report is available on the Municipality's website.

A. COMMUNITY

All stakeholder groups recognize the people of North Middlesex as being a key asset for the community. Stakeholders note there is a strong sense of community spirit and a general desire to build on this sense of community and deepen the sense of community pride. Stakeholders identify the people of North Middlesex as having a strong 'pride of place' in their community; residents enjoy living in North Middlesex and take great pride in their properties; the community is well maintained, "pretty" and scenic with lots of amenities to enjoy. Visitors and residents alike enjoy the flowerbeds, hanging gardens, 'curb appeal' of the downtown areas and residential homes, and the beautification of the town in general. North Middlesex is seen to be a safe, close-knit, friendly community that is clean and quiet. There are social and service clubs that support community building (e.g., Lions Club, Optimist Club, Knights of Columbus, Masons, Eastern Star, Horticultural Society, etc.), though it was noted that many of these clubs focus on adult residents rather than young people.

There were many comments of "Everyone knows everyone" and "It's a great place to raise a family."

Residents disagree about their sense of being a unified community. Some residents still identify strongly with their original town/village (e.g., "I am from Ailsa Craig" or "I am from Parkhill"), while others note the need to move forward as one cohesive community with a singular identity: 'We are the community of North Middlesex.'

North Middlesex's close-knit nature is generally seen as a benefit, though it can be a challenge for some. While many think of North Middlesex as being very welcoming, other residents do not share that perspective. Some residents (particularly those who are new to the community and some young people) feel they are not welcomed and lack a sense of belonging within the community. There is a sense of 'otherness' for those who do not feel accepted in North Middlesex. A particular concern was shown for residents who are new to the community, young people who may feel marginalized, and members of the LGBTQ community. A number of stakeholders (notably adult and youth residents and some community partners) identified outreach to the LGBTQ community as a needed support.

Community partners also identified supporting residents and developing the sense of community through better promotion and awareness of local community supports. For example, there is support for a community hub model for families to have a 'one stop shop' for accessing needed local supports and services. Business owners also noted the need for expanded, affordable, accessible community services. It was identified that the local aging population will likely shift community services toward seniors, requiring greater services in areas associated with aging and disability (e.g., accessibility issues, inclusivity issues, engagement of seniors, greater need for health services and outreach, etc.).

B. DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING

Housing in North Middlesex is generally seen to be more affordable than in other areas, particularly compared to larger centres such as London. Housing and development is a priority for many stakeholders, including businesses. Many stakeholders want more housing developments in North Middlesex, seeing this as a way to increase the population, support local school enrollments, increase the tax base and increase the potential client base for local businesses. Concerns were raised that housing developments have not been attracted to the local area because of the large volume of 'red tape' and the length of time it takes to move forward with such initiatives. Important elements to support an effective housing and development strategy includes having land available to develop, working with a real estate agent who is connected to developers to attract them to the local area, having efficient municipal processes to support housing developments in the local area- this would help support population retention and growth.

Stakeholders identified affordable housing (especially housing options for small families and apartments for seniors) as important areas to be developed. As well, many stakeholders expressed a desire for land to easier to sever (i.e., allow more acres) and noted it is increasingly difficult for many family farms to be passed on and for those who want to begin farming to enter the market due to the high cost of farm land.

C. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS

Stakeholders said much about economic development and business, with a great diversity of perspectives expressed in this theme. Key points include:

- Developing North Middlesex as a tourist destination
 - Consider generating tourism by creating a signature event (or event series, such as a music festival) for the Municipality
 - The idea of developing a craft beer brewery was discussed by a number of stakeholders
- Marketing and branding
 - There is a need to market North Middlesex to North Middlesex, as well as to outsiders
 - Some business owners suggested local residents do not always know the variety of businesses available in North Middlesex
 - Branding North Middlesex as a good place to do business
- Employment
 - There is a desire to increase both the number of local jobs as well as the quality of those jobs
 - Some stakeholders (adult residents, in particular) noted that employment is available locally. However some of these jobs (e.g., farm workers) are not positions being sought by local workers, leading to temporary foreign workers/migrant workers moving into the area for employment
 - Recognition that agribusiness is an important foundation of the local business community
- Hours of operation
 - Visitors provided an interesting perspective, noting many local businesses (such as restaurants, retail stores) close early thereby limiting available opportunities to 'shop locally' and support local businesses in North Middlesex

- Attracting new business and employment to North Middlesex
 - There is strong interest to attract a large-scale employer such as a factory
 - Stakeholders (such as businesses, adult residents and some youth) expressed interest to encourage young people and entrepreneurs to set up business in area, especially given the availability of non-traditional small businesses that can be operated from a home environment
 - There is a strong desire to be innovative and do things different, and to develop the associated infrastructure, such as reliable internet capability to encourage smaller home-based businesses with a broader provincial, national or even international reach
 - There is a desire to consider creative ways to incentivize business development. For example, grants/funding to support new businesses, promoting local businesses on Municipal website and social media, videos about local businesses, etc.
- Changing the business environment and attitude toward business
 - While some residents describe local businesses as viable, others note a need for local support of these businesses
 - Business owners would like to see a strong emphasis from the Municipality supporting residents to 'buy local', to 'stop and shop in your own town'
 - Residents and business owners want a more pro-business or business-friendly environment
 - Some young people emphasized the need to support local businesses, especially family businesses
 - Many local businesses indicate they do not feel supported by the Municipality, that there is a lot of 'red tape'
 - Businesses indicate they would appreciate more support from the Municipality with attracting potential employees to North Middlesex

D. ENGAGEMENT — COMMUNITY AND YOUTH

Engagement was an issue raised in several ways by stakeholders: engagement of the community, of employees and of young people.

While North Middlesex is generally regarded as having a strong sense of community, it is acknowledged work needs to be done to deepen and develop a cohesive sense of community among residents. Currently, community engagement is supported by numerous local events, as well as some programs and services. Community partners suggest community engagement could be enhanced through door-to-door campaigns to elicit resident feedback. Several noted that online surveys privilege those who have access to computers and are technologically literate, “skewing the results to those who get around to doing the survey.” Survey completion is typically higher among those who have a strong opinion. Associations and groups suggest community engagement could be enhanced by municipal investment in local groups for local events. Many stakeholders (youth residents, adult residents, community associations & groups, businesses) mentioned they would like to see greater support for family-focused events that welcome people of all ages. Some residents wanted more programming for children and young families (e.g., mom/baby programs) and to keep program fees low (i.e., more no cost/low cost programs for children, youth and families).

Youth engagement was also identified as an area of concern for many stakeholders (adult residents, youth residents, Council, staff, business, community partners). “Early intervention” and engagement of young people is seen as a long-term strategy for retaining young people. Young people specifically identified they want to be more engaged in their community, to have a greater voice in community decisions and to be actively involved in community processes and leadership. For example, some young people are interested in being mentored, creating inter-generational connections; others want to know more about the political process and how municipal decisions are made and enacted; many directly expressed a desire to know their political leaders more and to be engaged with them “in ways other than meetings”. As well, youth want to see more youth-focused events (such as youth dances, dancing lessons, etc.) and mentioned that, while there are quite a few programs and services for adults and young families (babies and children), not much is offered locally for teenagers and young adults.

E. THE ENVIRONMENT

North Middlesex's natural environment is an important feature of the community. It is seen to be an asset to be conserved and respectfully leveraged. Many residents emphasize the importance of the natural environment — North Middlesex's walking trails, parks, green spaces, conservation areas, being close to natural habitats and sought after natural environments such as beaches and campgrounds. The community is seen to be quite scenic, with opportunities for many outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, etc. Many residents suggest North Middlesex could become a destination for ecotourism, and should be marketed with an emphasis on the area's natural, outdoor environment.

Adult residents and business owners, raised specific issues and ideas, including:

- The lack of wind turbines in North Middlesex as an asset
- The unwanted/feral cat issue is problematic for a number of residents; some community associations suggest working humanely to address this issue
- Some business owners and residents see the community as having a history of making poor choices on environmental and ecological issues. For example, the introduction of needed mosquito control has led to further upsets in the ecological system
- Promoting active living and active transportation options (bicycling, walking) is suggested as a viable alternative for a healthier lifestyle; this transportation alternative could be included in a branding strategy for North Middlesex

F. FACILITIES, AMENITIES AND RECREATION

North Middlesex has a wide range of recreational facilities (e.g., YMCA, parks, trails, libraries, sports fields and sports teams/associations (hockey, soccer), playground, splash pad, green spaces, skate park, community centres), local events (e.g., Parkhill Fall Fair, Gala Days, local dances, parade) and amenities (e.g., grocery stores, churches, food bank, convenience stores, family restaurants, LCBO, Tim Horton's, etc.).

Building on their appreciation for existing facilities and amenities, residents have specific ideas about needed facilities, amenities and recreational opportunities:

- More restaurants; young people especially would like to see more fast food restaurants in the area
- A public pool
- Developing the Parkhill Dam and conservation area; young people discussed the opportunity to develop this area as a fishing destination of zip line attraction
- Develop dirt bike trails
- Lower fees to access local physical fitness/health facilities
- More winter activities; e.g., skating rink in Ailsa Craig, snowshoeing trails
- Develop the old library building into a youth centre
- While there are some local health resources, there is a need for more local health services; in particular, local mental health resources was identified as a specific gap and need in the community

G. FAMILIES

Participants across almost all stakeholder groups identified North Middlesex as a family friendly, family-oriented community. Families are seen as a bedrock of the local community. Inter-generational relationships are supported with some young people expressing a desire to build stronger inter-generational relationships in the community. While stakeholders note that young families are beginning to buy homes locally, there is a desire to encourage more young families to move into the area, highlighting that North Middlesex is “a great place to raise a family.” Some stakeholders expressed encouraged municipal leadership to focus on the family as the basis for its decision-making.

With respect to services and supports for families, stakeholders note there are many services for children and young families, but few supports and services for families with teens. As well, with the local population aging and a shifting demographic, there is a real possibility North Middlesex could become a more retirement-focused community, with the associated changes in community needs and community supports.

H. GOVERNANCE AND THE MUNICIPALITY AS AN ORGANIZATION

Overall, there is a sense that the governance and leadership of the Municipality as an organization is off course. Some stakeholders (residents, community associations & groups, businesses) were pleased with the Municipal Council and Municipality. One respondent indicated North Middlesex has a “responsive and engaged Council”. This, however, seems to be the minority view from respondents, with a number of respondents indicating a lack of confidence in the current municipal leadership.

Feedback received from stakeholders suggests:

- Municipal leadership does not respond quickly, things are slow to change and get done. For example, one resident mentioned bylaws that were intended to change several years ago but have not yet been changed
- More transparency from Council and staff is needed
- Greater appreciation is needed of local volunteers, especially volunteer fire fighters
- Greater attention to fiscal responsibility, accountability and transparency
- Council should be more positive and optimistic in its outlook

- Council and Councilors are not seen to be in touch with their community; they are described as “not having enough focus on the future”
- Some residents see Council as “an old boys club”. These respondents want change, for new people to run for office, and to have a vision for their community.
- Respondents want more communication between Council/the Municipality and the community; community members want to be listened to, and for Council to be active partners in the community
- Stronger political leadership is needed
- New residents should be encouraged to seek political office; this was suggested by North Middlesex’s community partners
 - One community partner suggested the Municipality could do much to engage and support new residents by adding an extra Council seat specifically designated for new residents in North Middlesex
- Some community partners expressed frustration at doing surveys that do not result in clearly implemented actions. They suggest there is “top heavy management” that needs to “listen to the people” more and generate a shared ownership among community members
- North Middlesex is generally seen as an effective/slightly effective partner
 - The Municipality can be more effective by enhancing its communication with partners, including partners in program development, and focusing on shared goals and outcomes
 - Regular, consistent communication with partners and other municipalities is seen as a key action to be a better collaborative partner
- Organizational stakeholders (Municipal Council and Staff) suggest:
 - There is a disconnect between Council and staff and a desire for a greater sense of unity, cohesion and a shared vision between them
 - Efficiencies in municipal processes are needed; they do not want actions and decision to be ‘bogged down in red tape’, and want to be more responsive to their community

- A stronger and more positive organizational culture is needed
- A desire for municipal leaders to be more positive and willing to listen to community members and respond to their needs
- To be a rural leader, the Municipality needs to focus on business and economic development, land/housing development, advocate and work hard to keep the local school open, and become more forward-thinking and progressive in its ideas.

I. INFRASTRUCTURE

This theme surfaced divergent opinions regarding specific aspects of North Middlesex's infrastructure, such as the condition of local roads, the water system, natural gas, etc. While some residents and community leaders think the roads are generally well maintained with good snow removal in the winter and clean streets, other residents felt strongly that side roads in particular need regular maintenance and better grading procedures. While the Lake Huron water system reaches most residents, water lines in some areas of the municipality need to be updated.

Residents identified many infrastructure improvements they would like to see, including:

- Reliable high speed Internet
 - For home users and local businesses. This would encourage more home-based businesses and entrepreneurship and give the Municipality a greater ability to attract businesses to the area if there is reliable high-speed Internet access. Technology is seen to be a potential avenue for innovation and economic growth, with local tech infrastructure needed to support this option.
 - Increase the efficiency of existing sewer plants and water systems
 - Offer more recycling
 - Install more crosswalks and sidewalks
 - Encourage greater use of natural gas

J. LOCATION

North Middlesex is “the gem in southwestern Ontario”. It’s location is a strong, positive asset: it is centrally located to larger centres (such as Strathroy, London, Sarnia, Stratford), cottages, beaches, and other nearby destinations, it is close to major highways, local health facilities (e.g., physicians, dentists, massage therapy, long term care facilities) and hospitals in Strathroy and London. It has good, arable, fertile farmland, and the necessary infrastructure to support industry and business development. Highlighting North Middlesex’s proximity and location in advertising and marketing materials is a ‘selling feature’ of the community. Developing tourism (and its associated businesses, including retail, hospitality, etc.) is seen by many to be a viable option to support economic development and local growth. Ecotourism was named as a path to pursue, as well as developing a signature event for North Middlesex and marketing and branding North Middlesex and its location around that event.

A related challenge and benefit of North Middlesex’s location is the issue of rural transportation. On the plus side, North Middlesex has less traffic than larger centres. However, the lack of affordable, accessible public transportation is a challenge to many who do not have access to personal transportation (notably seniors and young people). Residents would like to see a public transportation or community ride sharing service to help people get from place to place; young people were keen to see Uber or another ride sharing service become popular in the local area. Residents also suggested initiating public transportation options for community events (e.g., bus service between communities during the Parkhill Fall Fair, Gala Days, Ailsa Craig Car Show, etc.) and developing a regular bus schedule to go to larger centres such as London for appointments and entertainment.

K. SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

Adult and youth residents, businesses, Council and municipal staff all expressed appreciation for the local elementary schools and high school. They recognize school enrollment is declining, particularly in the high school. This is impacting students who have a more limited variety of courses offered, and cannot access or have difficulty accessing more advanced courses that are not offered locally. Keeping the high school open is an important goal for adult and youth residents, businesses, Council and staff. One ray of hope is the shift toward rural migration, with stakeholders recognizing more young families are moving to smaller towns that offer more affordable housing, have local amenities and infrastructure (health care, recreation facilities, grocery stores, high speed internet), good schools, a strong sense of community, and can offer young entrepreneurs or those in non-traditional, home-based jobs a supportive, balanced lifestyle.

Some stakeholders (youth, Council, municipal staff, business) brought forth the idea to develop a post-secondary satellite campus in the area with either Fanshawe or UWO. This site could be customized to offer courses and programs with a local interest (e.g., areas associated with agriculture, rural business, etc.). This would help local young people remain at home during their studies, and may attract young people from other rural areas to come to North Middlesex for their studies.

L. TAXES

As to be expected, the issue of taxation raised many negative comments. In general, homeowners and businesses believe residential and business taxes are too high, and that lower business and property taxes would spur economic growth. Feedback from residents and businesses included:

- Property and business taxes are too high; lower these taxes
- North Middlesex taxes are higher than other local municipalities
- A stronger business tax base would make it more likely that residential taxes could be reduced
- Water bill is seen by many as being too high
- Hydro rates are too high; lower the utility rates
- There is limited to no control over decision-making at local level; decisions are made at county level
- Rising costs overall and precarious economic environment make financial concerns a priority for many stakeholders; taxes are seen to be part of this bigger economic picture affecting residents, businesses and families.

M. YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

Youth and young adults are part of the demographic shifts affecting North Middlesex and many other rural communities. While some young families are moving into North Middlesex, many young people move away. Attracting and retaining young people is seen as a key strategy for community development, business development and sustaining/expanding the local tax base. While there are many reasons for youth migration from small communities, employment and lifestyle choices are key drivers. Creating more opportunities for young people is a significant priority for many stakeholders: youth employment, long-term employment opportunities, educational opportunities, support for youth/young adult entrepreneurship, etc. Young people themselves highlight the need for local jobs and educational opportunities, but also opportunities for mentoring, supportive lifestyles for young people, youth-focused entertainment and events, programs and services that are youth-focused (e.g., a curling rink, basketball court, martial arts program, dances, outdoor activities geared to youth, etc.) and support for youth entrepreneurship and self-employment opportunities, including mentoring, grant supports, business promotion, etc. Some adult residents, as well as youth residents, want the Municipality to invest more in young people, including developing youth-specific programs, youth infrastructure and building a local youth centre.

Many young people speak to a sense of marginalization among youth. Young people expressed they do not feel valued by their community, and feel on the outside. They want to be included and have their voice heard, they want to participate and take stronger leadership in their community. Bullying was raised as a local issue with young people stating they want to feel safe and connected to their community. As well, young people raised concerns about the sense of isolation, lack of welcome and acceptance and lack of resources and supports for LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning) persons. Outreach and support for the LGBTQ community is important to many local young people.

Attracting and retaining young people is seen as a priority for building North Middlesex's future. As some young people expressed, "Help young people to know and understand political and decision-making processes. Young people want to know what is going on and be involved" but do not want to simply sit at meetings. They want to be engaged in an active way. The young people of North Middlesex want to be engaged; they want to be known by their community and their community's leaders. They do not simply want to be invited to attend a meeting, but want to be engaged in a more interactive way. They want to be seen not just as the leaders of the future, but leaders of today.



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