Centre Wellington

TOWNSHIP OF CENTRE WELLINGTON
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM STRATEGY

PUBLISHED: FALL 2025

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The lands we know today as the Township of Centre Wellington have been home to Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. We acknowledge that we are on the treaty lands and traditional territory of the Anishinaabe and the Haudenosaunee.

With increasing encroachment by non-Indigenous settlers in the Township of Centre Wellington, the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee could not continue their traditional lifestyle and settled in their villages along the Credit River and in the Grand River Valley. These Indigenous nations uphold their Treaty Rights within our jurisdiction.

Today, the Township of Centre Wellington remains home to Indigenous peoples from across Turtle Island. We are grateful to have the opportunity to share and respect Mother Earth and are committed to building constructive and cooperative relationships with Indigenous nations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

iv Glossary of Terms

7 Executive Summary

14 Section 1: About This Report
15 Overview
17 Summary of Community Engagement
18 Economic Development and Tourism Alignments
19 Guiding Principles

20 Section 2: Local & Situational Context
21 Situational Context
24 Economic Development & Tourism Today
27 Centre Wellington By The Numbers
30 Community Engagement Themes
32 SOAR Analysis

34 Section 3: The 20-Year Vision

38 Section 4: Recommendations & Actions
41 Strategic Pillar 1: Capacity
48 Strategic Pillar 2: Economic Growth & Resilience
57 Strategic Pillar 3: Workforce & Livability
66 Strategic Pillar 4: Investment Readiness & Infrastructure
74 Strategic Pillar 5: Destination Development & Visitor Management
84 Strategic Pillar 6: Placemaking
91 Strategic Pillar 7: Brand Identity, Marketing & Communications

101 Section 5: Implementation Plan

124 Appendices:
125 Appendix A: Understanding the Project Approach
132 Appendix B: Community Engagement Overview
142 Appendix C: The Present State
149 Appendix D: Strategic Pillar 1 - Capacity
162 Appendix E: Strategic Pillar 2 - Economic Growth & Resilience
176 Appendix F: Strategic Pillar 3 - Workforce & Livability
180 Appendix G: Strategic Pillar 4 - Investment Readiness & Infrastructure
187 Appendix H: Strategic Pillar 5 - Destination Development & Visitor Management
196 Appendix I: Strategic Pillar 6 - Placemaking
201 Appendix J: Strategic Pillar 7 - Brand Identity, Marketing & Communications
207 Appendix K: Peer Review: Economic Development Strategy
210 Appendix L: Economic Development Asset Map
214 Appendix M: Tourism Asset Map

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Automation: Automation is the use of technology to perform tasks without human intervention. It involves the application of machines, control systems, and information technologies to optimize productivity in the production of goods and delivery of services.

Brownfield: In industrial and urban planning, a brownfield is a property that has been previously used and may be contaminated by hazardous waste or pollution but has potential for redevelopment. Brownfield sites often require remediation before they can be repurposed for new industrial uses or public projects.

Capacity: With regard to Section 5.7, "Capacity," this is used as an overarching term to refer to resource capacity (team, financial, etc.).

Customer journey: Refers to the various points of contact a visitor has with a destination prior to visiting, while in-destination, and after returning home. It considers components such as trip research, booking accommodations or experiences, and being engaged by a destination (i.e., via targeted social media ads, newsletters, etc.) following a visit.

Community economic development: This is a community-driven process that mobilizes local resources (people, capital, etc.) to meet local needs with solutions to economic, social and environmental issues identified and initiated by community members in pursuit of health and economic viability. This grassroots approach aims to:

- Create employment;
- Renew, stabilize and/or improve the community and local economy;
- Develop local economic links; and
- Improve the physical environment of the community.[1]

Community-based tourism: This refers to tourism experiences that are owned, hosted and managed by local communities. These experiences:

- Give authentic insights into the daily life of communities;
- Create opportunities for visitors to engage and interact with community members;
- Are managed according to sustainable principles, with actions that are visible, measurable and transparent; and
- Are owned and managed directly by the community, so financial benefits remain local (vs. benefiting external or non-local investors).[2]

Community land trust: These "are community-led, non-profit organizations which acquire and hold land in the interest of their local community."[3]

Destination brand: The unique identity and perception of a place shaped by its culture, experiences, people and storytelling to attract visitors and investment. It reflects the destination's values, personality and competitive advantage, influencing how it is perceived by prospective residents, investors, businesses, and visitors.

Digital economy: The digital economy encompasses all economic activities that result from the billions of online connections among people, businesses, devices, data, and processes. It is characterized by the extensive use of digital technologies, including the internet, mobile devices, and digital platforms, to conduct business transactions and operations.

Earned media/marketing: Publicity a brand receives organically (without paying for it), coming from outside sources such as journalists, customers, influencers, or the general public. Examples include news coverage, product reviews, social media shares, user-generated content, and word-of-mouth recommendations. The "earned" part means the attention was gained because of the brand's reputation, story, or actions; not because of direct payment..

Economic resilience: Economic resilience is the ability of an economy to withstand or recover quickly from external shocks, such as financial crises, natural disasters, or pandemics. It involves the capacity to reduce vulnerabilities, resist shocks, and recover swiftly, thereby maintaining stable growth and development.

Economic sustainability: Economic sustainability involves practices that support long-term economic growth without negatively impacting social, environmental, and cultural aspects of the community. It emphasizes the efficient use of resources to provide lasting benefits and maintain economic health over time.

High-value visitor: As it is used in the Centre Wellington Economic Development and Tourism Strategy (EDTS), refers to visitors who:

- Invest in local experiences—including with shops, restaurants and tourism product, contributing to the local economy;
- Respect the local community, demonstrated through responsible behaviour, engagement with locally-led initiatives, and cultural sensitivity in their interactions with residents and businesses; and
- Engage in eco-friendly practices such as "leave no trace" when using natural spaces and reducing waste.

Industry 4.0: Industry 4.0 refers to the fourth industrial revolution, characterized by the integration of advanced digital technologies into manufacturing and industrial processes. It involves the use of technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, big data analytics, cloud computing, cyber-physical systems, and automation to create smart, connected, and efficient production systems.

Innovation: Innovation refers to the process of translating new ideas, inventions, or methods into goods or services that create value or for which customers will pay. It involves deliberate application of information, imagination, and initiative in deriving greater or different values from resources, and includes all processes by which new ideas are generated and converted into useful products.

Innovative: Being innovative involves introducing or using new ideas, methods, or products. It denotes creativity and the willingness to change traditional practices in favor of more effective solutions.

Internet of Things (IoT): The Internet of Things refers to the interconnection of everyday physical devices via the internet, enabling them to send and receive data. This network includes everything from household appliances to industrial machines, allowing for enhanced monitoring, control, and data analysis.

Location Quotient (LQ): This is a statistical measure used in economic development to assess the concentration of a particular industry, occupation, or demographic characteristic in a region compared to a larger benchmark—in this case the Province of Ontario. It helps identify industries or sectors in which a region has a competitive advantage or specialization, those with a LQ above 1, often informing strategic planning and resource allocation.

Paid media/marketing: Any marketing effort where a business pays to promote its message or content. This includes advertising such as Google Ads, social media ads, display banners, sponsored posts, influencer partnerships, paid search engine placements, radio or newspaper spots, etc. The brand controls the message and audience targeting because it is a transactional arrangement.

Place-based activations: Focus on leveraging a destination's unique physical, cultural and social assets to enhance community engagement and visitor experiences. These initiatives may range from small-scale placemaking projects to large-scale infrastructure developments, all designed to reflect the identity and values of the community.

Program-based activations: Create structured, recurring initiatives—such as events, entrepreneurship programs or community investment opportunities—that drive ongoing engagement and achieve specific outcomes. While often location-specific, these activations are defined by their repeatability and thematic focus, whether educational, cultural or recreational.

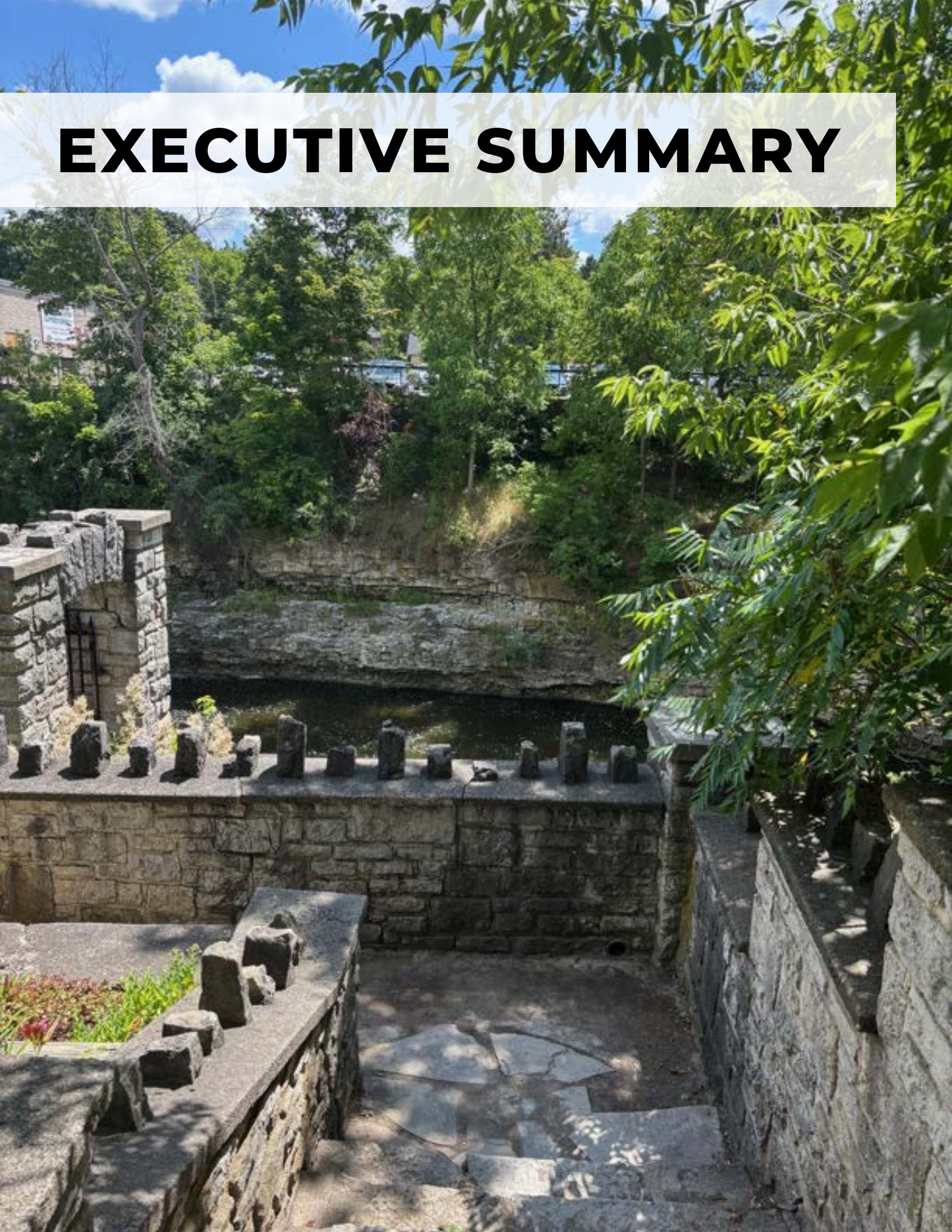
Regional Value Chain (RVC): Refers to the interconnected production, processing, and distribution activities within a specific region, where businesses and industries collaborate to add value to goods and services before reaching consumers. RVCs enhance regional competitiveness, economic integration, and resilience by leveraging local strengths, fostering job creation, and reducing dependence on global supply chains.

Tariff: A tariff is a tax imposed by a government on imported or exported goods. Tariffs are used to restrict trade, as they increase the price of imported goods and services, making them less attractive to domestic consumers.

Township (capital 'T'): Refers to the municipal organization

township (small 't'): Refers more broadly to the area

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Overview

The Township of Centre Wellington's Economic Development and Tourism Strategy ('EDTS,' 'the Strategy,' 'the Plan') defines a 20-year vision and an implementation plan to support sustainable economic growth, attract meaningful investment, enhance livability, and position Centre Wellington as a four-season destination. It is a roadmap that integrates community perspectives, demographic and economic data, and best practices in economic development and tourism to guide the Township through a period of change and future ripe with opportunity.

The EDTS builds on the goals of the Township's 2023–2026 Strategic Plan and responds to a shifting landscape that considers various factors, such as provincial growth mandates, a nationwide housing crisis, shifting geopolitical and economic relations, climate change, and inflation. It is also rooted in the understanding that economic development and tourism are deeply interconnected, with the potential to elevate local quality of life, strengthen business retention and attraction, and amplify Centre Wellington's distinct identity to the benefit of residents, businesses, entrepreneurs and visitors alike.

A Community-Guided Approach

The EDTS is grounded in robust engagement with residents, businesses, investors, youth, community organizations and municipal leaders. People from across the community participated in pop-ups, surveys, workshops, roundtables, and interviews to shape the Strategy's direction. From their insight, five core themes emerged:

- **Quality of Life:** Residents value small-town character, natural spaces, and inclusive public amenities, with a call for more recreational opportunities, youth spaces, and support for belonging and accessibility.
- **Connection & Communication:** There is a strong desire for better communication between the Township and community, improved newcomer supports, and stronger collaboration across Elora, Fergus, and the business community.
- **Infrastructure:** Concerns focus on housing affordability, transit, digital access, and the need for better infrastructure to support growth.
- **Business & Employment:** Businesses face workforce shortages, high costs, and red tape, with calls to strengthen local jobs and youth-employer connections.
- **Tourism:** There is a desire for improved visitor management, fostering a sustainable, year-round tourism industry, and more direct benefits for the community from tourism.

See Section 2.4 for a more in-depth look at Community Engagement Themes.

These findings, as well as quantitative data, were reviewed and considered to inform a SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results) Analysis, which reveal the following:

Strengths

Centre Wellington is defined by its historic downtowns, vibrant arts and culture, strong volunteerism, prime agricultural land, and natural assets. Additional strengths include its moderately diverse economy, trail networks, and proximity to GTA, Guelph and Kitchener-Waterloo, as well as major post-secondary institutions.

Opportunities

Among the opportunities identified include growing key sectors, improving infrastructure, supporting entrepreneurship, enhancing placemaking, creating year-round tourism experiences and investing in visitor management strategies. There is also potential to better connect youth to local career opportunities, and expand public understanding of planning and tourism policies.

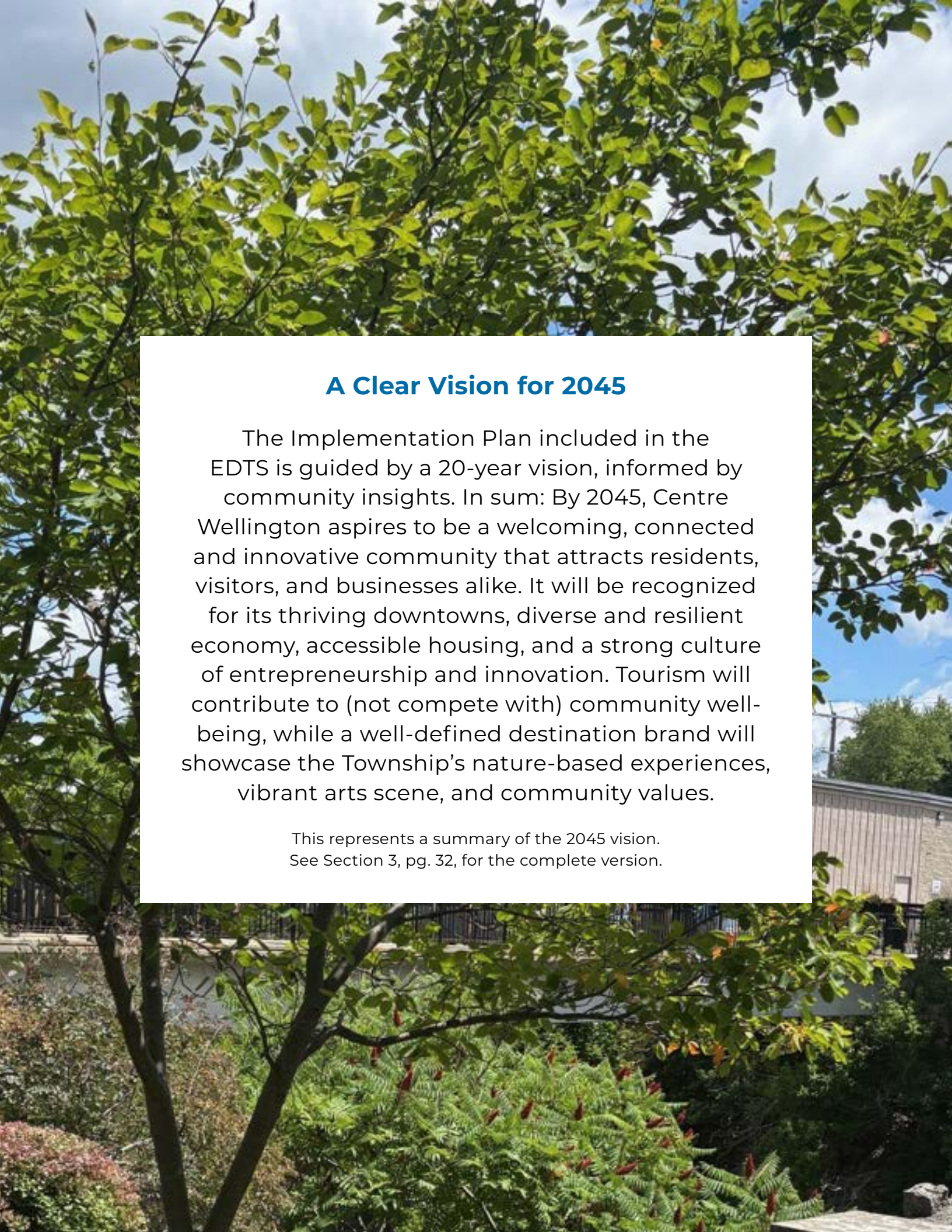
Aspirations

The community aspires to see improved transit and active transportation networks, expanded health services, new experiences and amenities for youth & visitors, and more employment land & business-ready spaces. Preserving natural and agricultural lands, leadership in green development, and achieving balance between tourism and everyday life are some of the other key takeaways.

Results

Desired outcomes include a clear growth strategy, stronger collaboration across sectors & the community more broadly, improved Township capacity, a more diverse employment base, increased revenues from business and tourism, and a unified community brand.

Analysis of community engagement findings and other research forms the backbone of the EDTS's strategic pillars, recommendations and actions.



A Clear Vision for 2045

The Implementation Plan included in the EDTS is guided by a 20-year vision, informed by community insights. In sum: By 2045, Centre Wellington aspires to be a welcoming, connected and innovative community that attracts residents, visitors, and businesses alike. It will be recognized for its thriving downtowns, diverse and resilient economy, accessible housing, and a strong culture of entrepreneurship and innovation. Tourism will contribute to (not compete with) community well-being, while a well-defined destination brand will showcase the Township's nature-based experiences, vibrant arts scene, and community values.

This represents a summary of the 2045 vision.
See Section 3, pg. 32, for the complete version.

Strategic Pillars

To guide implementation, the EDTS identifies seven strategic pillars. Each pillar is supported by recommendations with defined rationale, concrete steps, and measurable outcomes tied to the complete 20-year vision, as well as high-level "next steps" as the Township looks further ahead. The pillars and top-level recommendations are as follows:

1. Capacity: Equipping the Municipal organization with the team and financial resources to support impactful, sustainable economic development and tourism initiatives and foster an attractive, connected and welcoming community that is a desirable destination for new businesses, workforce and visitors.

1.1 Invest in expanding organizational capacity for economic development and tourism initiatives, including staffing, tools and financial resources.

1.2 Establish an Internal Working Group ('EDTS Working Group'), including leadership from various Township departments, to foster ongoing collaboration, align efforts and maximize the impact of EDTS implementation.

1.3 Implement a Municipal Accommodation Tax.

1.4 Enhance economic development and tourism data collection.

2. Economic Growth & Resilience: Supporting small businesses and entrepreneurship, developing innovation networks, and fostering economic diversity. Recommendations include:

2.1 Work with partners to raise the profile of small business and entrepreneurship opportunities available to the community.

2.2 Undertake a regular business visitation program to monitor the health and needs of the business community.

2.3 Work with partners to enhance and promote virtual and in-person resources to help businesses in Centre Wellington start, grow, thrive, and innovate.

2.4 Establish a meaningful relationship with the Elora Research Station and the University of Guelph to capitalize on student interest in the agricultural sector, research activities and the desire to better connect to the local and regional community.

3. Workforce & Livability: Addressing housing, transportation, youth engagement, and equity-focused initiatives to advance an attractive, connected and welcoming community that is a desirable destination for new businesses, workforce, and visitors.

3.1 Work with partners to expand and advocate for increased local, regional and inter-urban transit connections, and into Guelph and Kitchener-Waterloo.

3.2 Dedicate resources to support the development of workforce attainable-housing, through the promotion of financial incentives and education.

3.3 Implement strategies that foster equity and belonging within the community.

3.4 Invest in creating paths and spaces for youth to build tangible connections to the community and employers, as well as contribute to a leadership role in developing the Centre Wellington of tomorrow.

3.5 Create and enhance connections to post-secondary institutions to encourage employers to utilize cooperative education (co-op) and internship talent.

4. Investment Readiness & Infrastructure: Improving infrastructure provision and developing business-ready spaces to support a thriving and diverse business base.

4.1 Explore and advocate for mechanisms to improve industrial and commercial infrastructure provision within the township. This includes the internet, cell signal, hydro, roads, bridges and natural gas.

4.2 Facilitate the development of spaces for new and expanding commercial and industrial businesses to locate, including the development of commercial and industrial malls. Base these decisions on the identified needs of the business community.

4.3 Improve communications on planning and building processes and the Community Improvement Plan (CIP) to the business community.

4.4 Undertake targeted retail, service and entertainment investment attraction to meet community needs.

5. Destination Development & Visitor Management: Enhancing experience development and implementing creative visitor management solutions that build Centre Wellington's market positioning as a complete, four-season destination where residents and visitors enjoy the community in harmony.

5.1 Explore opportunities to expand the Elora-Fergus Downtown Shuttle Program, and pilot shuttle service connecting the downtowns to primary visitor markets.

5.2 Implement creative visitor management tactics to curb overtourism and mitigate the challenges tourism brings to Centre Wellington's urban centres.

5.3 Dedicate resources to enhanced tourism experience development, in partnership with local stakeholders in urban and rural areas.

5.4 Activate the Fergus Grand Theatre as a tourism asset while enhancing its role as a driver of arts and culture in the community.

5.5 Continue to invest in regenerative and sustainable tourism initiatives.

6. Placemaking: Activating public spaces and building community through events, art, and design.

6.1 Implement a strategy to define and pilot placemaking projects to activate public spaces, helping to strengthen the social fabric, highlight local entrepreneurs, and provide platforms for storytelling and connection to a culturally diversifying community. (See also 5.5.)

6.2 Define and pilot placemaking projects to foster a sense of connection between Fergus, Elora and Belwood downtowns.

6.3 Continue to invest in Township support for local festivals and events.

6.4 Invest in a Placemaking Strategy for Centre Wellington.

7. Brand Identity, Marketing & Communications: Strengthening Centre Wellington's profile through targeted storytelling, destination branding, and community-based communications by activating a place brand/narrative that embraces a welcoming and connected community vibe and its nature-based positioning.

7.1 Investigate developing a destination brand, separate from the Centre Wellington corporate brand, to promote the destination for economic development and tourism purposes.

7.2 Invest in enhancing Centre Wellington's tourism-focused storytelling, visitor information and marketing assets & resources.

7.3 Invest in dedicated economic development storytelling and marketing assets.

7.4 Develop and implement comprehensive economic development and tourism marketing plans on an annual basis, relying on earned and paid tactics.

7.5 Invest in community-focused communication initiatives & marketing campaigns to foster understanding and buy-in to key Township initiatives, strengthen communication channels and nurture welcoming environments.

A Strategy to Grow With

The EDTS is intended to be a flexible framework to guide decision-making and community-led growth. It positions Centre Wellington to take advantage of the opportunities available, while thoughtfully balancing the needs of today with a sustainable vision for future generations.

Its success depends on continued collaboration, innovation, and shared leadership to bring it to life.

Section 1

ABOUT THIS REPORT

1.1 **OVERVIEW**

This Centre Wellington Economic Development and Tourism Strategy ('EDTS', 'the Strategy', 'the Report') defines a 20-year vision for the community, supported by an initial Implementation Plan, to guide economic development and tourism priorities in the community. The EDTS provides a roadmap for the Township of Centre Wellington ('the Township,' 'the Organization') to navigate the complex economic, demographic and environmental changes outlined in the report analysis. The economy and tourism have been growing steadily within the community, presenting a range of prospective opportunities.

A focused approach, as provided with this EDTS, positions Centre Wellington to take advantage of investment and business development opportunities, address workforce and housing challenges, and maintain the quality of life that makes it an attractive place to live, work, visit and invest. This Strategy further seeks to realize goals and priorities cited in the 2023-2026 Township Strategic Plan, specifically:

Economic Prosperity

- Make our downtowns vibrant.
- Support agriculture and agri-food businesses.
- Ensure people working in our community can afford to live here.
- Welcome and accommodate tourism/tourists.
- Support and attract business development, retention, and expansion.

Activity, Health & Wellness

- Support and encourage arts and culture.
- Create an inclusive, equitable, and accessible community.

Environmental Stewardship

- Develop proactive climate change strategies.

The vision, objectives and guiding principles of the EDTS are shaped based on thorough background research and community perspectives gathered through in-depth engagement initiatives. As a result, the Report defines new directions, ideas and approaches to: enhance economic growth; attract investment; develop Centre Wellington as a sustainable, four-season visitor destination; and position tourism as a contributor to improved local quality of life.

The Report, including appendices, aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Conduct a comprehensive analysis of Centre Wellington's current economic and tourism landscape, including asset mapping, SWOT analysis, and review of existing policies and plans.
- Develop a 20-year vision for Centre Wellington's economic development and tourism sectors that aligns with the Township's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan and addresses key elements identified in the vision.
- Create a detailed implementation plan with specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) actions and priorities for economic and tourism development.
- Identify innovative solutions and strategic initiatives to address economic development fundamentals such as business retention, expansion, and workforce development.
- Identify innovative solutions and strategic projects to support tourism development and visitor management, in the best interest of community well-being and with sustainability top of mind.
- Analyze and provide recommendations on the potential implementation of a Municipal Accommodation Tax, including best practices, pros and cons, and implementation steps.

Strategy approach

This strategy utilizes both **community-centred and data-driven practices** to inform its development. Community-centred practices in economic development and tourism ensure that local voices, needs, and assets shape the future of Centre Wellington. Through approaches like **community economic development** (CED) and **community-based tourism** (CBT), residents help drive decision-making and manage initiatives that directly affect their lives, fostering greater ownership, equity, and long-term sustainability. These practices leverage existing local strengths, preserve cultural heritage, and ensure that economic benefits remain in the community.

A **data-driven approach** to economic development and tourism applies quantitative and qualitative insights to guide decision-making, monitor progress, and measure outcomes. This evidence-based practice informs strategies by real-world trends rather than assumptions, enhancing the effectiveness of planning, resource allocation, and program implementation. Integrating data from multiple sources allows communities and organizations to make informed choices that drive sustainable growth.

Using both community-centred and data-informed approaches set-up economic development and tourism efforts to be both meaningful and effective. Community input supports relevance and equity, while data provides objective insights to guide planning and measure success. This balanced approach results in strategies that are visionary, responsive, and inclusive—anchored in local values while aligned with broader economic and tourism trends.

More details about these approaches and how to leverage them to support ongoing strategy implementation can be found in Appendix A.

Further, the EDTS is situated within a number of related background reports, documents, and strategies previously undertaken by the Township. A summary of the reports investigated and key themes that were utilized to help frame the EDTS can be found in Appendix C.

1.2 SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

To live out the community-informed vision for this Plan, extensive community engagement took place to inform its contents, including:

Table 1: Community engagement summary

Online survey • Centre Wellington residents: 487 • Centre Wellington business owners: 122 • Past or prospective visitors: 122 • Prospective residents: 11 • Prospective business owners: 2 • Prospective investors: 3	**747** respondents
Community pop-ups • Elora Farmers Market • Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) • Fergus Fall Fair	**3**
Pop-ups at Township-led community event • New Resident Reception • Key Township Open House	**2**
Facilitated discussion at community and/or Committee meetings • Healthy Communities • Diversity, Equity and Inclusion • Belwood Community Development Meeting	**3**
Workshops • Economic Prosperity and Growth Advisory Committee • Tourism Partners • Council	**3**
Virtual, sector-specific roundtables • Retail/Service • Professional Services • Manufacturing • Construction and Development • Agriculture • Tourism	**6**
Student-focused workshops • Including 2 groups of approximately 50 students each from Grades 9, 10, 11 and 12	**2**
One-on-one interviews	**20**

1.3 **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM ALIGNMENTS**

Economic development and tourism are deeply interconnected, sharing common goals to foster vibrant economies, enhance quality of life, and create sustainable growth. These key intersections include:

Economic development seeks to expand workforce opportunities. Investments in tourism generate jobs in hospitality, retail, transportation and cultural sectors.

Tourism supports economic diversification by raising awareness of the destination. It attracts visitors and introduces them to local resources, opportunities, and lifestyles, helping position the community as a place to live, work, and invest. Beyond short-term visits, tourism can spark longer-term investments in businesses, property, and community projects..

Economic development and tourism efforts **rely on strong place branding and strategic marketing** efforts to elevate the community's profile.

Economic development efforts include business support, education and enhancement initiatives, **lending to improved tourism readiness** throughout the township.

Aligning economic development and tourism strategies allows for **mutual benefits** and **avoids resource competition**, promoting **balanced growth** that supports **residents' quality of life** and **visitor satisfaction**.

Economic development efforts result in an expanding tax base and positive impacts on local economies, which provide financial resources for infrastructure improvements, and cultural & recreational developments. These efforts improve livability and appeal, **creating value for residents and drawing visitors.**

Transparent communication with the community about economic development and tourism efforts and investments **fosters community buy-in and engagement** with shared goals.

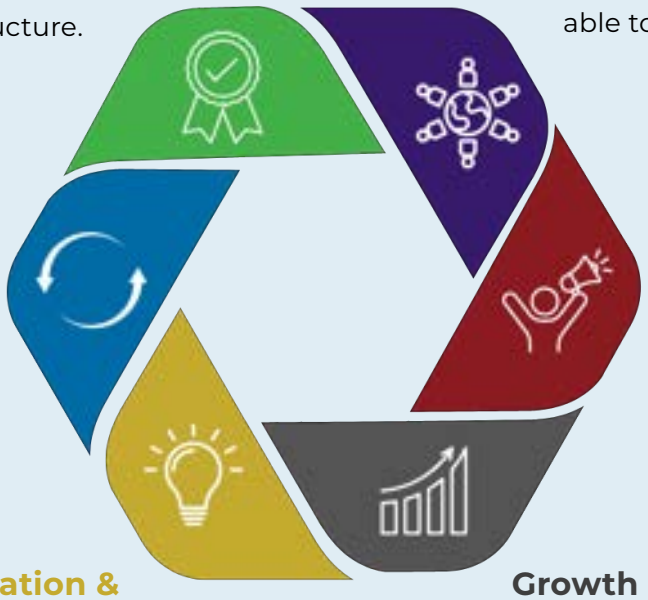
These factors are considered in the final EDTS Implementation Plan.

1.4 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Six guiding principles are considered in the development of the EDTS, and further intended to guide the Township in the implementation phase. These guiding principles are derived from identified community needs and are essential to aligning growth with community values and long-term sustainability. Applying these principles in policy development and decision-making works toward maintaining inclusive, sustainable economic growth, and alignments with community values. They are as follows:

Quality over quantity:
Prioritize attracting high-value, low-impact visitors, fostering a tourism sector that enhances community well-being and visitor experiences while minimizing strain on local resources and infrastructure.

Diversity, equity & inclusion:
Cultivate equitable opportunities and inclusive spaces where all individuals feel welcomed, respected and able to thrive.

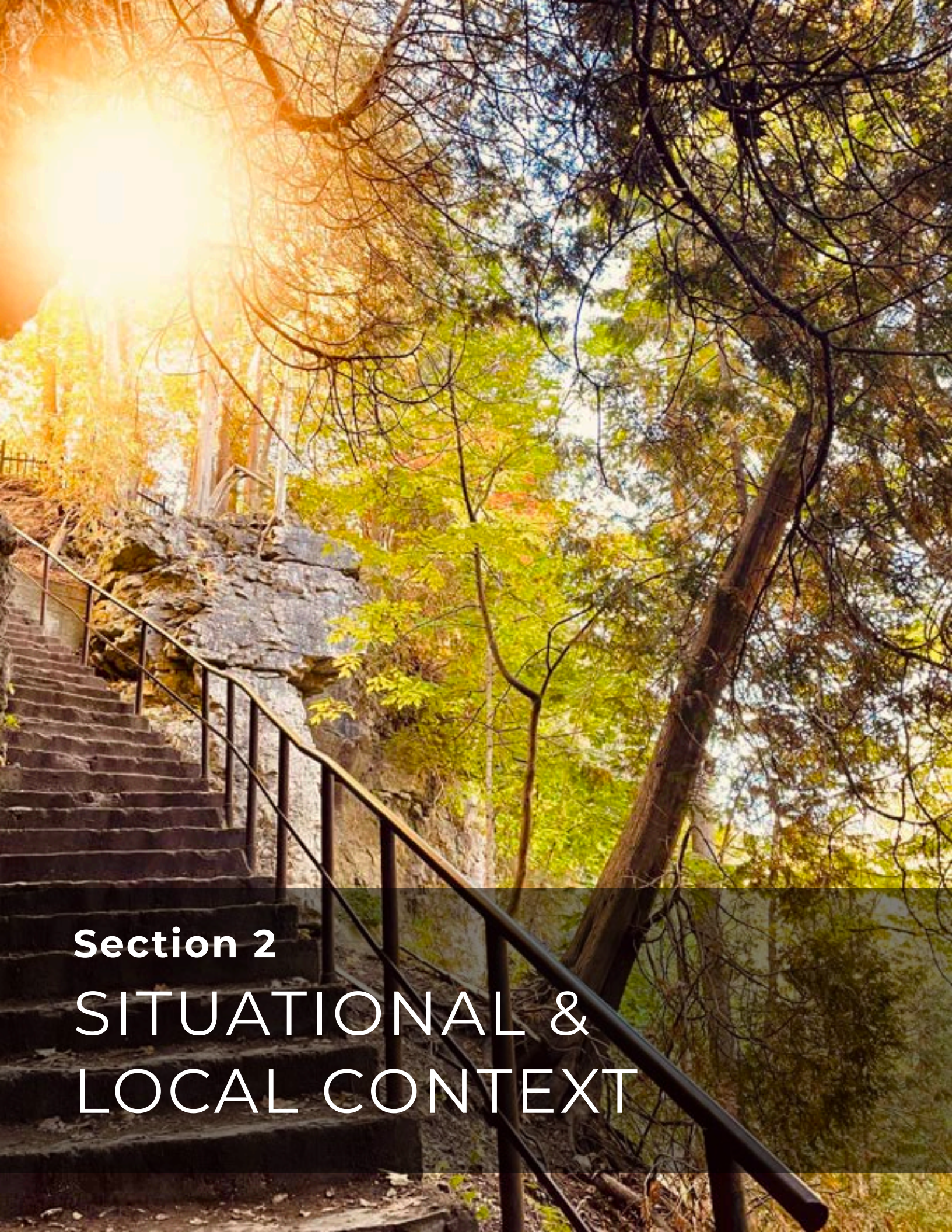


Reciprocity:
Encourage investment and visitation that adds value to the community's quality of life.

Community leadership & well-being:
Place the needs, values and quality of life of the community at the forefront of economic development and tourism initiatives.

Innovation & entrepreneurship support:
Foster a culture of innovation, establishing a landscape to attract new investors while providing resources to support local entrepreneurs and small businesses.

Growth management:
Carefully manage growth to balance economic benefits with the maintenance preservation of community character and natural resources.



Section 2

SITUATIONAL & LOCAL CONTEXT

2.1 **SITUATIONAL CONTEXT**

Rooted in the community's aspirations, this Centre Wellington Economic Development and Tourism Strategy addresses current challenges and emerging opportunities to help Centre Wellington thrive. Here are a few of the factors of the current moment, which influence perspectives and recommendations presented:

Shifting landscapes

Rooted in the community's aspirations, the Strategy addresses current challenges and emerging opportunities to help Centre Wellington thrive in an ever-changing landscape. It has been developed in a time of significant challenge and change—within the community and across Canada more broadly. Inflation, geopolitical instability, provincially-mandated growth, a nationwide housing crisis, climate change, and shifting best practices in economic and tourism development are all factors that must be kept in mind and provide a foundational context through which to review economic and tourism development in Centre Wellington. New private investments locally also add a unique layer of consideration for the EDTS.

Inflation

Rising costs of goods, services and materials impact household budgets, business operations and visitor spending. According to Statistics Canada, "In spring 2024, nearly half (45%) of Canadians reported that rising prices were greatly affecting their ability to meet day-to-day expenses, 12 percentage points higher than what it was two years earlier (33%)."[4] The pressures that come with inflation affect the affordability of daily life for residents and pose challenges for local businesses striving to maintain profitability while retaining employees and meeting customer demands. The implications of inflation must be considered through thoughtful strategies that support local businesses, enhance economic resilience, and position the community to remain a desirable place for residents, investors, workers and visitors alike.

Provincially-mandated growth

Centre Wellington is expected to grow to a population of 58,200, with total employment of 25,100 by 2051. The majority of this growth is expected in the Fergus and Elora-Salem Urban Centres ('settlement areas').[5] This growth brings opportunities to attract new businesses, expand and enhance infrastructure, and strengthen community assets. Simultaneously, this projected growth underscores the importance of thoughtful planning, with the present *and* future community in mind. It is critical to preserve natural spaces, unique spaces and the overall essence of the community, while supporting infrastructure, housing, and servicing initiatives that adapt to the needs of a growing and diversifying population and fostering a sense of place. By addressing growth now, Centre Wellington can create a future where economic opportunities, environmental stewardship, and quality of life coexist in the interest of fostering a vibrant and resilient community for generations to come.

Housing affordability

"Canadian house prices on average have increased by more than 30% since April 2020 while interest rates soared by 4.75 basis points until they started coming down in June [2024]," reports Reuters, and the story in Centre Wellington is similar.[6] The rising cost of housing far outpaces wage increases, making it increasingly difficult for many to afford homes. Additionally, demand often exceeds supply, driving prices higher. The crisis contributes to increased homelessness, financial stress, and economic inequality. It also impacts businesses, as workers struggle to find housing in proximity to employment centres. Housing affordability is an important consideration when evaluating the current local labour force, and is a key concern when evaluating the role and impact of short-term rental accommodation within the township.

Climate change

From shifting weather patterns, to the rising costs of maintaining infrastructure, to the access to and use of natural spaces, the impacts of climate change are profound. Incorporating climate considerations into economic development and tourism strategies positions communities to mitigate risks. Further, environmental care is important for community safety and stability for investment and viability. For the tourism sector, climate considerations include adapting to seasonal changes, protecting natural assets that are core to resident and visitor experiences, and reducing the environmental footprint of visitor activities.

Global uncertainty

Political and economic instability, both domestically and globally, can profoundly impact local economic development. Recent geopolitical tensions, such as shifting trade policies, tariff uncertainties, and political instability in key markets, pose significant risks to industries that rely on stable supply chains and export markets, including manufacturing and agriculture. For businesses dependent on imported goods, geopolitical disruptions may lead to delays, price increases, and reduced market access, further complicating the economic environment. Economic uncertainty can also dampen investor confidence. Potential investors may hesitate to commit to long-term projects in smaller municipalities because of fluctuating economic conditions, including increased interest rates. Additionally, fiscal tightening at higher government levels can delay crucial infrastructure investments, hindering Centre Wellington's growth prospects. The tourism sector, a vital economic driver for the township, is not immune to these challenges as economic downturns and geopolitical instability can reduce consumers' propensity to invest in travel experiences.

Shifts in economic development best practices

Over the past decade, the field of economic development in Canada has undergone substantial transformation, driven by global trends, evolving domestic priorities and increasingly complex economic challenges. Municipalities across the country have responded by establishing dedicated economic development roles, expanding teams, and tailoring strategies to meet local needs. In parallel, there has been a notable shift towards regional collaboration, with municipalities partnering with neighbouring

communities, post-secondary institutions, and other stakeholders to address common challenges and leverage shared opportunities. This includes initiatives focused on investment attraction, workforce development, business innovation and talent retention, particularly in small business support and entrepreneurial growth.

Economic priorities have also evolved, with a stronger emphasis on the development of knowledge-based and digital economies, economic diversification, integrating technology, innovation and green energy. This includes fostering sustainable economic growth, supporting communities that are facing barriers and investing in workforce development.

Leveraging evolving economic development best practices presents an opportunity to guide growth in a strategic manner that maximizes the impact of future investment.

Shifts in tourism best practices

Over the past few years, and largely accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, mindsets and best practices in the tourism industry have shifted, bringing to the forefront approaches that prioritize community welfare and environmental sustainability over traditional visitor-centric models. Two key concepts have gained prominence in this new paradigm: community-based tourism (CBT) and regenerative tourism. CBT—as the name suggests—emphasizes community involvement in tourism activities and decision-making, while regenerative tourism aims to enhance destinations through tourism rather than merely sustaining them. These frameworks represent a fundamental change in perspective, by centering the community in tourism decision-making, rather than visitors. Leveraging tourism to enhance social, cultural, environmental and economic well-being is directly connected to fostering sustainable, community-oriented tourism development.

New local investments

Historically, there has been a gap in tourism visitation in Centre Wellington during the winter months, which requires many local establishments to operate with skeleton teams to make it to the next season, relying almost exclusively on local patrons. 2024 represents a marked change with the introduction of the Elora Christmas Market by a local investor, which also offered subsidies to downtown businesses in Elora that were interested in “lighting up” their storefronts. This private organization invested $300,000 in marketing its initiative and the destination overall. The Market—which took place Thursdays through Sundays in November and December—drew visitation numbers surpassing those of summer months. This led to an overwhelm of visitation, with unexpected impacts on local businesses and infrastructure. Though the Township was able to react effectively in 2024, this comes at a time when proactive initiatives are needed to manage the local impact, looking ahead to winter 2025 and beyond.

2.2 **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM TODAY**

Economic Development

Centre Wellington has made significant strides in enhancing its economic development efforts in recent years to align with the substantial growth transforming the community. The Township has focused on fostering an investment-ready environment, including the development and promotion of a business park to catalyze industrial growth and address the growing imbalance between residential and business development.

One of the Township's greatest economic development opportunities lies in the significant residential growth anticipated in the coming years. With an influx of new residents, Centre Wellington is poised to attract more resident-centric retail and service businesses, while also expanding its labour force—a critical need for local employers as the township's population is slightly older than the Ontario average.

The township boasts several key assets that position it as a prime destination for new investment. These include the strong partnerships with stakeholders such as the Business Centre of Guelph Wellington, Wellington-Waterloo Community Futures, and the Centre Wellington Chamber of Commerce. The township is also home to the Elora Research Station, owned by the Province of Ontario and operated by the University of Guelph. The research station, one of the world's largest agricultural research facilities, is undergoing a refurbishment that promises to create a community connection and potential innovation space. Finally, Groves Memorial Community Hospital is based within the community and provides accessible, high-quality healthcare for residents, contributing to a better quality of life, and providing meaningful employment to the community.

To inspire investment, Centre Wellington's updated 2023 Community Improvement Plan (CIP) encourages private investment and revitalization across the township, with financial incentive programs targeting areas such as façade and building improvements, housing supply, economic diversification, agri-business and environmental sustainability. Active 2025 programs include the Study Grant Program, Building Improvement Grant Program, Rental Housing Grant and Development Charge Programs, Tax Increment Equivalent Grant (TIEG), the Brownfields Tax Assistance Program, and the Façade and Property Improvement Grant Program.

However, economic development efforts face several challenges: The growing demand for space to rent or own, particularly for small and expanding manufacturing and commercial enterprises, has outpaced the township's current supply of desirable spaces for growth. Even with the development of a new industrial park, limited availability of suitable move-in ready units has forced some growing businesses to relocate to neighbouring communities such as Guelph or Wellington North, where there is a ready supply of appropriate prefabricated units. Many businesses also struggle with access to appropriate and functional infrastructure, such as natural gas, high-speed internet, and cell service. This space shortage is compounded by housing affordability and availability challenges, as well as the absence of a robust public transportation system. These factors hinder workforce accessibility, with significant two-way commuting patterns emerging; residents often leave Centre Wellington for employment elsewhere, while a workforce commutes into the Township to meet the needs of local businesses.

Another hurdle is the Township's limited economic development team capacity. With only 1.33 staff members managing a broad array of activities—ranging from investment attraction to business retention and workforce development—resources are stretched thin. A considerable portion of team time is dedicated to supporting businesses through planning and building processes, leaving limited capacity for strategic initiatives that could enhance the local business environment and lead to further business expansion and investment.

Additionally, Centre Wellington's geography—while offering an exceptional quality of life— presents challenges in connectivity. Its distance from major urban centres and lack of direct access to the 400-series highways can deter potential investors. Moreover, "Centre Wellington's" limited brand recognition means many investors may remain unaware of its location and assets.

Despite these challenges, the economy remains moderately diversified, underpinned by strong sectors and a high quality of life that continues to attract residents and investment. By addressing infrastructure, branding and resource capacity, the Township is well-positioned to further unlock its economic potential and strengthen its role as a thriving community for businesses and residents alike.

Tourism

Centre Wellington's position as a tourism destination is primarily because of its two main urban centres—Elora and Fergus. While Elora itself has strong brand recognition, efforts are being made to promote Elora & Fergus tourism as a unified entity and disperse income generated via tourism across the two communities more equally.

Leveraging existing brand recognition, the public-facing tourism brand is "Elora & Fergus Tourism," which is used in the Township's consumer-facing tourism marketing efforts (i.e., Instagram, visitor guide). This approach is a result of a 2017 report by Regional Tourism Organization 4 (RTO), the regional tourism organization in which Centre

Wellington falls. The intention of this strategy was to "develop, enhance and re-engineer Elora & Fergus Tourism as a high-impact Destination Marketing and Management Organization," noting this "is essential for the Township to preserve and grow the economic contribution of tourism, and to ensure the survival and health of many Township-based businesses and jobs directly linked to the tourism economy."[7]

RTO4 is a key partner, as its mandate is to provide support to destinations in its assigned region. They work with Centre Wellington's tourism team on product development, workforce and marketing initiatives.

As for Wellington County's tourism development efforts, they primarily focus on connecting rural spaces and activities in the County at large to those urban experiences in the township. The BIAs are also key stakeholders, animating Elora and Fergus downtown areas respectively through programs, events and festivals.

Currently, Centre Wellington attracts a significant number of day-trippers, particularly to Elora. Main visitor drivers include its natural beauty (the Grand River and the Gorge, in particular), charming downtowns, and festivals, events and activations. Notably, the majority of festivals and events are led by external stakeholders, who report capacity restraints and over-reliance on volunteer support.

The tourism sector has historically experienced a strong seasonal imbalance, with peak visitation during the summer months and a significant drop during winter. This challenge was turned on its head in 2024 with the introduction of the Elora Christmas Market, led by a local investor. For the first time, concerns of overtourism extended later into the year and Centre Wellington (Elora, in particular) continues to grapple with balancing tourism growth with community needs. The large presence of visitors impacts residents' interest in visiting the downtown areas, who cite parking as a primary concern, as well as access to restaurants because of long lines and wait times, as well as generally large crowds in public spaces.

A shortage of diverse accommodations is another barrier to attracting longer-staying visitors, with four primary options along a broad spectrum of rates, which also vary based on supply and demand, pointing to a lack of mid-range hotels and motels. This shortage perpetuates a demand for short-term rentals, which, while serving a purpose, also contribute to various challenges for residents and seasonal workers such as access to housing, as well as concerns around visitor misbehaviour.

There is a growing focus on sustainable and regenerative tourism practices in Centre Wellington. Initiatives such as the Township shuttle service between Elora and Fergus, which also serves residents, demonstrate a commitment to reducing environmental impact and enhancing community benefits from tourism.

There is currently one full-time Township team member dedicated to tourism efforts, reporting to the Manager of Community Development and supported by four part-time visitor services team members. Tourism efforts are currently focused on four general areas, including:

- Building relationships and leaning on stakeholder input to understand the work being done, challenges they're facing, and goals & objectives;
- Data collection, to inform decision making;
- Addressing historic seasonal imbalances in tourism distribution, as well as distribution of tourism impact across the community; and
- Regenerative destination management and sustainability.

2.3 CENTRE WELLINGTON BY THE NUMBERS

Key demographic and economic trends are highlighted in this section. A full review and assessment of Centre Wellington's demographic and economic trends can be found in Appendix C.

Centre Wellington is growing quickly

The township grew at a rate **10.3%** since 2016, compared to the Province of Ontario as a whole, which grew at a rate of **5.8%**.

Employment grew by **6.6%** in same time period vs province **6.1%**.

In 2020, the average total income of households was **$122,400** compared to **$116,000** in Ontario.

Leading sectors in Centre Wellington

In 2024, based on Lightcast data, Centre Wellington displayed a specialization via location quotient (LQ) in the following sectors. *(Note: LQ above 1 indicates specialization in the sector - see Glossary for full details.)*

- Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting: LQ of 2.26
- Manufacturing: LQ of 1.90
- Construction: LQ of 1.43
- Accommodation & Food Services: LQ of 1.29
- Health Care & Social Assistance: LQ of 1.03

CENTRE WELLINGTON'S LARGEST EMPLOYMENT SECTORS

According to Lightcast labour market data, in 2024, Centre Wellington's largest employment sectors included:

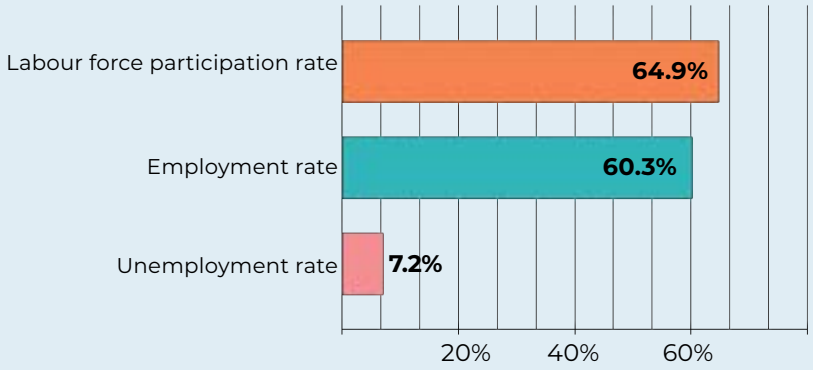
- 2,480 individuals Manufacturing
- 2,146 individuals Healthcare & Social Assistance
- 1,743 individuals Construction
- 1,557 individuals Retail Trade
- 1,446 individuals Accommodation & Food Service
- 1,154 individuals Educational Services
- 1,130 individuals Professional, Scientific & Technical Services
- 702 individuals Public Administration
- 623 individuals Other Services (except Public Administration)
- 613 individuals Finance & Insurance
- 604 individuals Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting

Data source for demographic information: Statistics Canada[8]

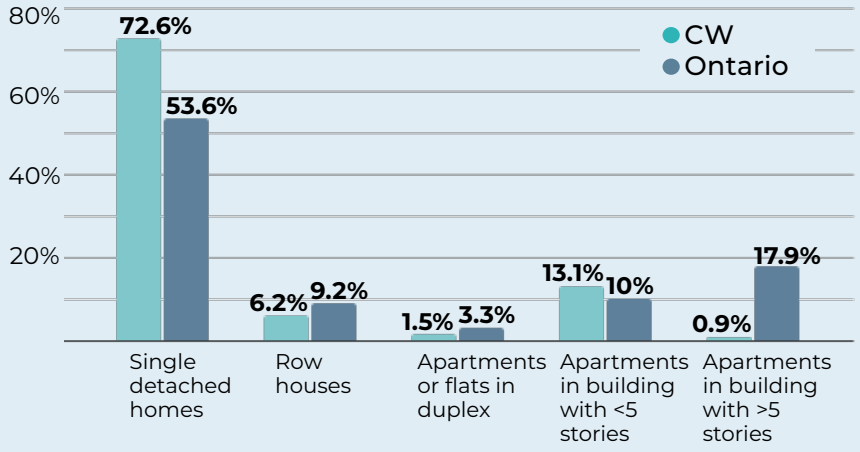
SUSTAINING & ENHANCING **LOCAL WORKFORCE**

LABOUR FORCE

The labour force in Centre Wellington consists of **16,425** people. In 2021:

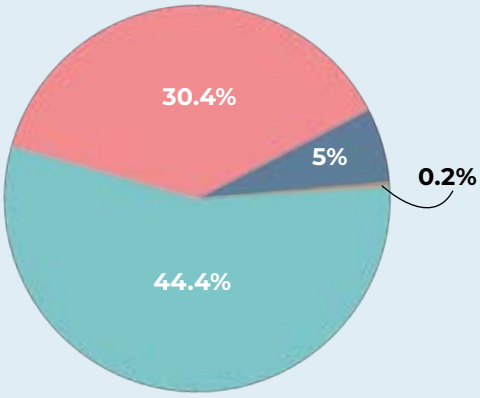


HOUSING



COMMUTE

- Commutes within the census subdivision
- Commutes to a different census subdivision within the same census division
- Commutes to a different census subdivision & census division within the province
- Commutes to a different province or territory



FASTEST GROWING SECTORS SINCE 2015

Sectors in Centre Wellington that have experienced the greatest growth since 2015 include:

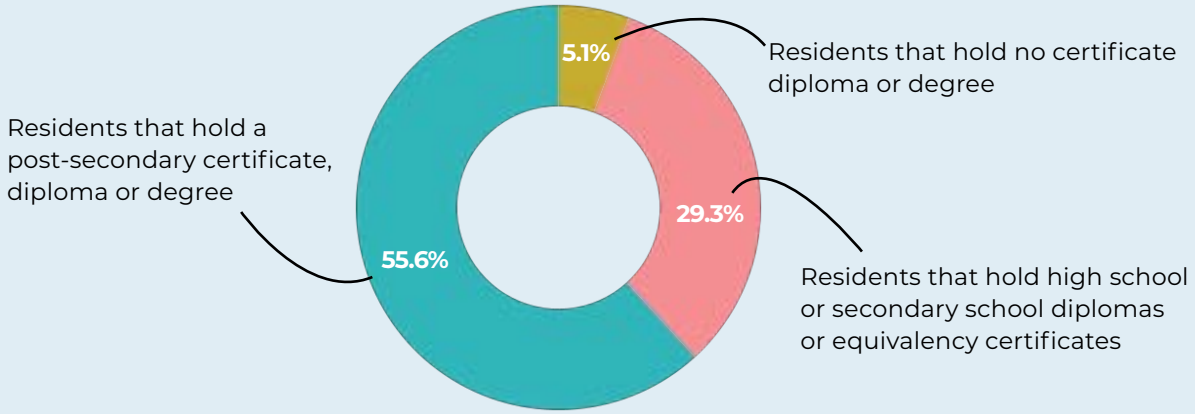
Mining, Quarrying, & Extraction	235% or 25 positions
Utility	211% or 49 positions
Information & Cultural Industries	108% or 158 positions
Public Administration	86% or 324 positions
Accommodation & Food Service	83% or 657 positions
Finance & Insurance	93% or 296 positions
Educational Services	76% or 499 positions
Construction	54% or 611 positions

During the same tenure, three sectors declined:

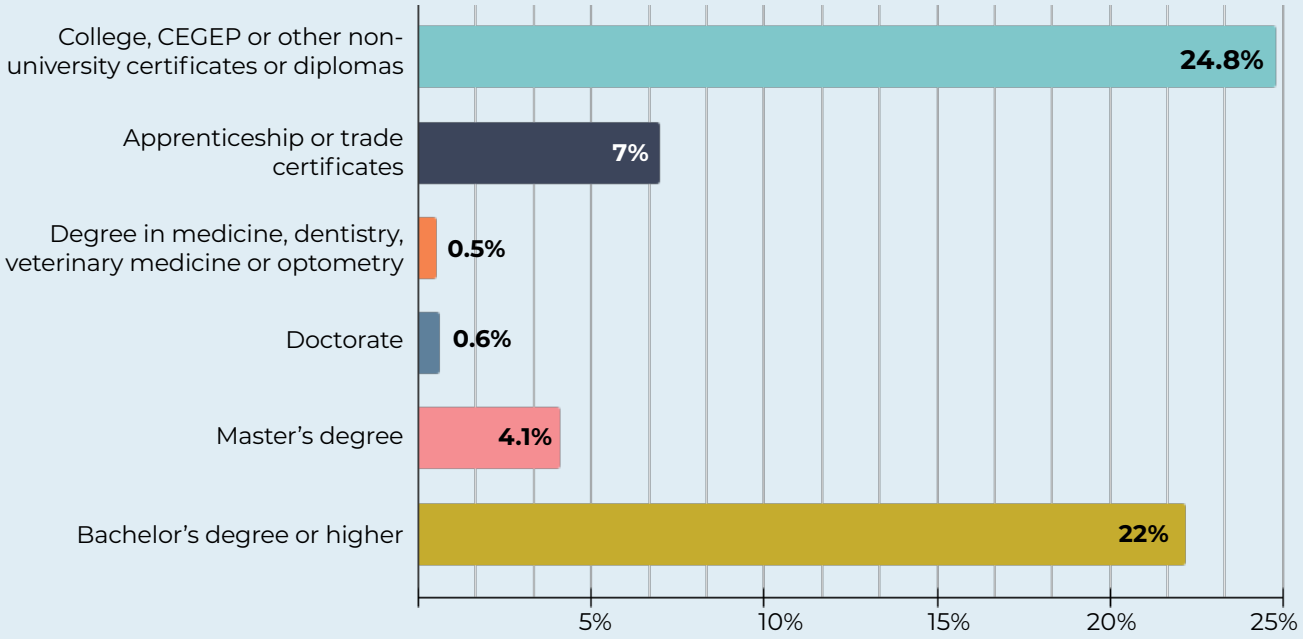
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	43% or 178 positions
Transportation and Warehousing	17% or 51 positions
Agriculture, Forestry and Hunting	13% or 92 positions

Data source: Lightcast 2025[9]

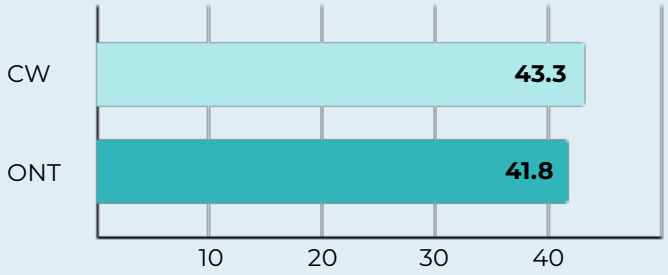
EDUCATION



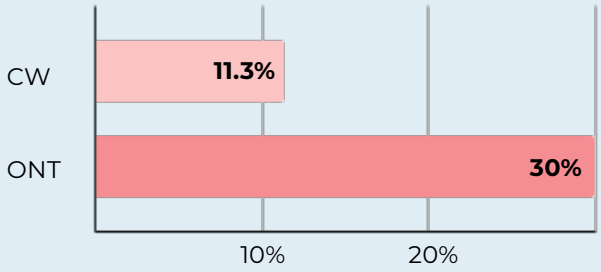
POST-SECONDARY



AVERAGE AGE



IMMIGRATION



Data source for 'Local Workforce' information: Statistics Canada[10]

2.4 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THEMES

Extensive community engagement took place to ground the EDTS in the needs of the Centre Wellington community. The full scope of data was analyzed and a complete summary of sub-themes can be found in Appendix B. Five overarching themes were identified from the community engagement. The following summary highlights these themes and provides a summary of the community's desired vision for economic development, including businesses, partners, stakeholders, and residents.

Connection & Communication

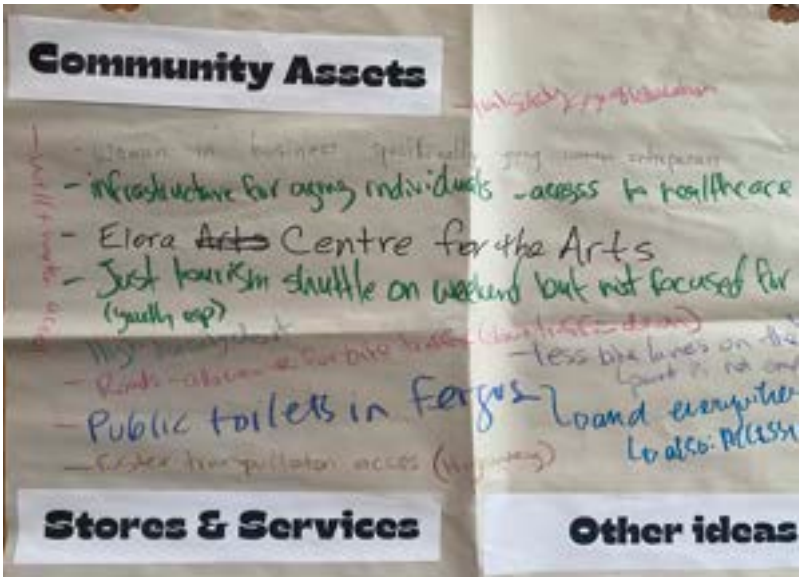
The overarching theme of connection and communication emphasizes the Township's role in fostering stronger links within the community and between its various stakeholders. Improved communication channels, inclusive engagement and educational initiatives bridge gaps between new and existing residents, businesses and the Township, enhancing collaboration and shared growth. By celebrating distinct identities, activating shared spaces, and positioning the area as a cohesive hub for local and regional attractions, Centre Wellington can strengthen the community fabric while increasing its appeal as a destination for visitors and investment.

Quality Of Life

The overarching theme of quality of life points to balance growth while preserving Centre Wellington's unique character, inclusivity, and community values. Protecting natural and cultural heritage, fostering diverse and welcoming spaces, and enhancing recreational and placemaking opportunities are central to maintaining a high quality of life for residents. By addressing local needs, supporting volunteer-driven initiatives, and working to provide equitable access to resources, the Township can sustain a thriving community while managing growth responsibly.

Infrastructure

This theme highlights the critical role of accessible, reliable and sustainable systems in supporting Centre Wellington's EDTS. Addressing gaps in affordable housing, transit connectivity, parking and essential utilities is essential to enhanced livability for residents, and attractiveness for businesses and visitors. Investments in natural space preservation, environmental initiatives and improved commercial & industrial facilities can position the community to further balance growth with long-term sustainability, economic opportunity and quality of life.

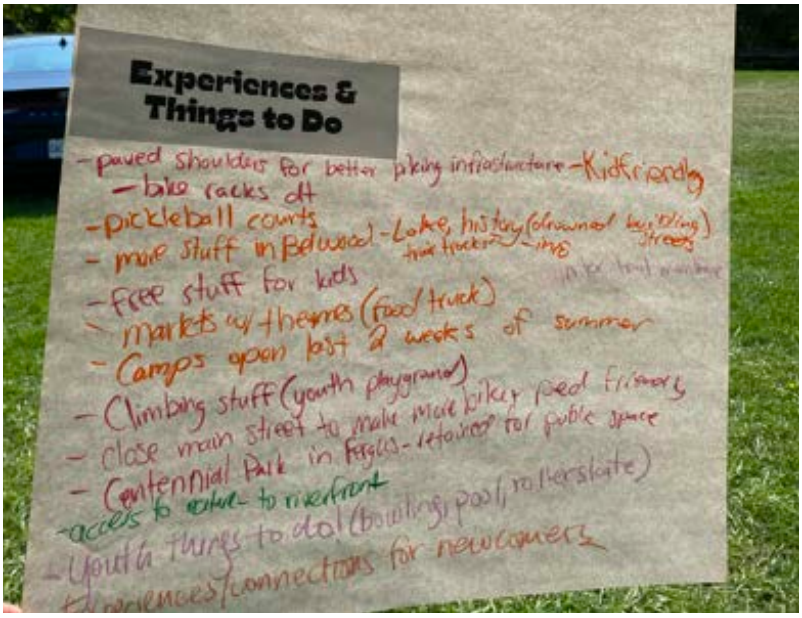


Business & Employment

The theme of business and employment underscores the importance of fostering a thriving local economy. Addressing challenges such as workforce availability, high operating costs, and bureaucratic hurdles is essential for business retention, expansion and attracting new enterprises. By leveraging opportunities in key sectors like agriculture, manufacturing, and healthcare, while also enhancing connections between the Township, businesses and youth, Centre Wellington can create a more balanced and sustainable local economy, reducing reliance on external job markets and enhancing community vibrancy.

Tourism Development

The theme of tourism development emphasizes the need for a balanced approach to enhancing Centre Wellington's appeal while managing visitor impacts on the community. Key priorities include: expanding tourism revenues (including through experience development & increasing accommodation options), improving marketing and trip-planning resources, and implementing visitor management initiatives. By activating public spaces, supporting events, and ultimately thinking of tourism as a tool to benefit residents, Centre Wellington can strengthen its tourism economy while addressing community concerns and working toward sustainable growth.



2.5 **SOAR ANALYSIS**

A Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results (SOAR) Analysis provides a focused framework for understanding the strategic strengths, opportunities, aspirations and results that shape the direction of the EDTS. This section examines the key elements that inspire growth, align with community aspirations, and deliver meaningful outcomes, setting the foundation for actionable strategies that drive long-term success. It is informed by in-depth analysis of community engagement findings, data, background research and observations.

STRENGTHS

- Charming, historic downtowns create a unique and appealing sense of place.
- Strong volunteer culture.
- Elora Research Station is a hub for agricultural innovation and research.
- Location along the Grand River, lending to unique views and outdoor experiences.
- An existing network of trails for self-propelled activities (i.e., hiking, cycling, running, etc).
- A vibrant arts and culture scene, including the Grand Theatre, Elora Centre for the Arts, and local festivals & events.
- Prime agricultural land, within and around the township, that supports sustainable farming and agri-tourism.
- Proximity to the GTA, Guelph and Kitchener-Waterloo, to leverage infrastructure and higher-order services (roads and airports), industry concentrations, and labour, as well as prospective visitor market.
- Strong partnerships between Township and local stakeholders, including BIAs, PPCs and community organizations.
- Over 100,000 post-secondary students based within a half-hour drive.
- Moderately diverse economy with particular strength in manufacturing, construction, accommodation and food services, and agriculture.
- Growth potential through increased industrial and commercial tax assessments.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Development of spaces for businesses of all types, fostering local entrepreneurship.
- Improved communication processes between businesses and the Township.
- Enhanced access to information about living and working in Centre Wellington, to appeal to prospective residents, investors and entrepreneurs.
- Balanced growth to address the ratio of residents to retail & service businesses.
- Expansion of key sectors such as agri-food, advanced manufacturing, health and wellness, and senior care.
- Improved community understanding of building and planning processes.
- Road and bridge, natural gas, and cell & internet infrastructure improvements to support growth and connectivity.
- Prepare and connect youth to local employers and career paths.

- Investments in placemaking initiatives to activate public spaces, connect communities within Centre Wellington, and bridge rural-urban experiences.
- Activation of public spaces through arts, culture and recreational initiatives.
- Visitor management strategies to disperse tourism more evenly throughout the community, and throughout the year.
- Experience development to improve visitor spending and appeal to visitors year-round appeal.
- Enhanced trip planning resources, such as an improved events calendar, itineraries and local business features.
- Education campaigns focused on community care, the value of tourism, and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI).
- Transit and active transportation networks to improve local and regional mobility.

ASPIRATIONS

- Increased availability of employment land and business-ready spaces.
- Addressing workforce and commuting patterns to support local employment.
- Expanded parking and improved management to meet resident and visitor needs.
- Improved community understanding of the Municipal Accommodation Tax.
- New opportunities and amenities for youth and visitors to enhance engagement.
- Greater collaboration between Elora and Fergus.
- A recognized and established brand that represents Centre Wellington's identity.
- Expanded health services, including childcare, dental care, doctors, senior care, and mental health support.
- Leadership in green development and agricultural technology innovation.
- Preservation of agricultural land and protection of natural spaces for future generations.
- Reduced barriers and increased Municipal support for community-led initiatives.
- Retail, services and recreational options that serve an ever-growing population.
- Expanded accommodation options to attract diverse visitor profiles.
- Tourism that operates in harmony with the community's values and quality of life.
- Year-round tourism and activities are distributed more broadly across the community.
- A shared vision and roadmap for Centre Wellington's long-term growth and sustainability.

RESULTS

- Stronger communication and collaboration among residents, businesses and the Township.
- Enhanced organizational capacity to deliver impactful and sustainable initiatives.
- A more diverse employment base.
- Increased revenue streams from industrial and commercial taxes, and tourism and visitor management strategies.
- A well-balanced destination brand and community identity that reflects the essence of Centre Wellington, and can be leveraged for economic development & tourism promotion.

Section 3

THE 20-YEAR VISION

A 20-year vision serves as a guiding light for the EDTS, and establishes a direction for forthcoming recommendations and actions. It reflects aspirations of the community, rooted in the values and opportunities identified through extensive engagement with residents, businesses and municipal leaders.

It is further informed by demographic and economic data, research and analysis, and intertwines the direction of this strategy with other existing plans and directives connected to the Township's economic development and tourism outcomes.

The 20-year vision merges themes of livability—critical for workforce attraction and retention—with business and tourism development, which ultimately results in a desirable community for businesses, residents and visitors.

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2045...

Centre Wellington is an attractive, connected and welcoming community that is a desirable destination for new businesses, workforce and visitors.

- Vibrant downtowns are accessible and serve as community hubs. They are easy to access for all user groups, as it relates to both general use of the downtown and physical access to downtown businesses and amenities.
- Elora, Fergus & Belwood are leveraged and activated as complementary assets, to enhance the overall Centre Wellington community essence and appeal.
- Existing and new residents feel a sense of safety & belonging.
- Youth are actively engaged and eager to contribute their skills to the community and build a life in Centre Wellington as they think ahead to adulthood.
- The community maintains an active volunteer culture, supporting a high quality of life, recreation opportunities and robust events scene.
- There is the right amount and mix of thriving retail, services, entertainment, and recreation to meet the needs of the growing resident base.
- There are spaces and resources to/through which businesses and at-home workforce can connect.
- There are strong physical and geographic connections throughout Centre Wellington, demonstrated through pedestrianized, activated and connected public spaces; local and external transit connections; and robust active transportation networks/infrastructure.
- There are diverse housing options to support the resident and workforce base.
- Robust data informs economic development and tourism decision-making.

Centre Wellington has a thriving and diverse business base.

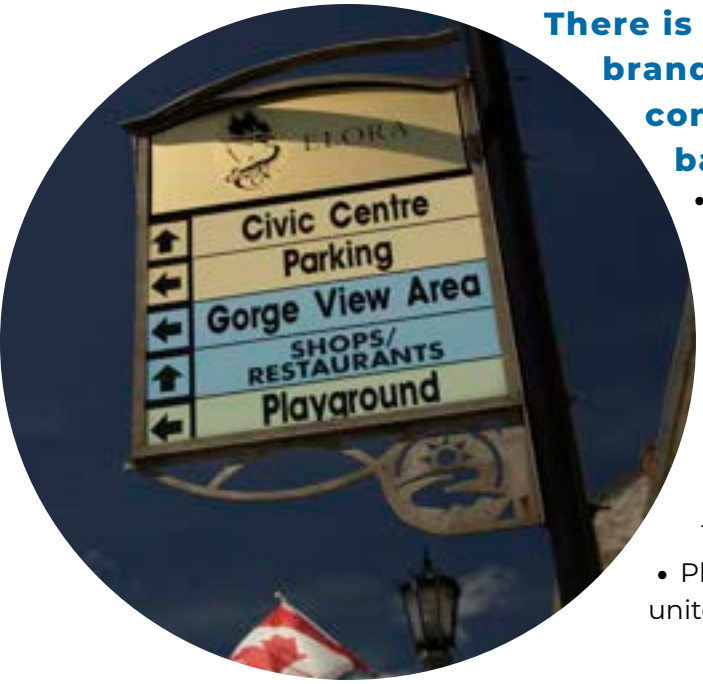
- There is a culture of entrepreneurship to fill community opportunity gaps (retail, service, entertainment, tourism).
- People who *live* locally *work* locally.
- The community's infrastructure, roads and bridges enable the effective movement of goods and workforce.
- Businesses of all sizes have space to locate and grow within the community.
- Downtown Elora and Fergus are vibrant, filled with successful shops that service residents and visitors. Belwood serves as a thriving community hub.
- New and existing businesses have access to resources and support to launch and grow.

Centre Wellington is a complete, four-season destination.

- Experience development initiatives attract high-value visitors to stay longer and spend more throughout the year.
- There are diverse accommodation options, mitigating reliance on STRs. New accommodation providers allow Centre Wellington to capitalize on visitor spending.
- Tourism activities take place across all areas of the township. Further, Centre Wellington is an established hub for visitors seeking experiences throughout the region.
- Tourism is leveraged as a channel to foster collaboration between and activate local businesses, communities and surrounding destinations.
- Arts & culture are recognized and activated as key community & tourism assets, particularly from placemaking and experience development perspectives.

Residents and visitors enjoy the community in harmony. Residents benefit from & understand the value tourism brings to the community.

- Tourism enhances Centre Wellington's quality of life (rather than depleting residents' appeal of living there).
- Centre Wellington attracts high-value visitors who respect and lean into the local community, by supporting local businesses, participating in community events, and minimizing their visitor footprint.



There is a well-defined and activated destination brand that embraces a welcoming and connected community vibe and its nature-based positioning.

- There is a robust digital collection of information available about living in, working in and exploring Centre Wellington, which is easy to find and well-used by current and prospective community members, as well as visitors.
- Township-owned information assets are regularly maintained and updated, speaking to the needs of the community, visitors and businesses.
- There are established and well-utilized channels for communication and information-sharing between the Township and community.
- Placemaking initiatives reflect the community essence and unite the community under a common identity and experience.

Centre Wellington has established itself as an innovative community.

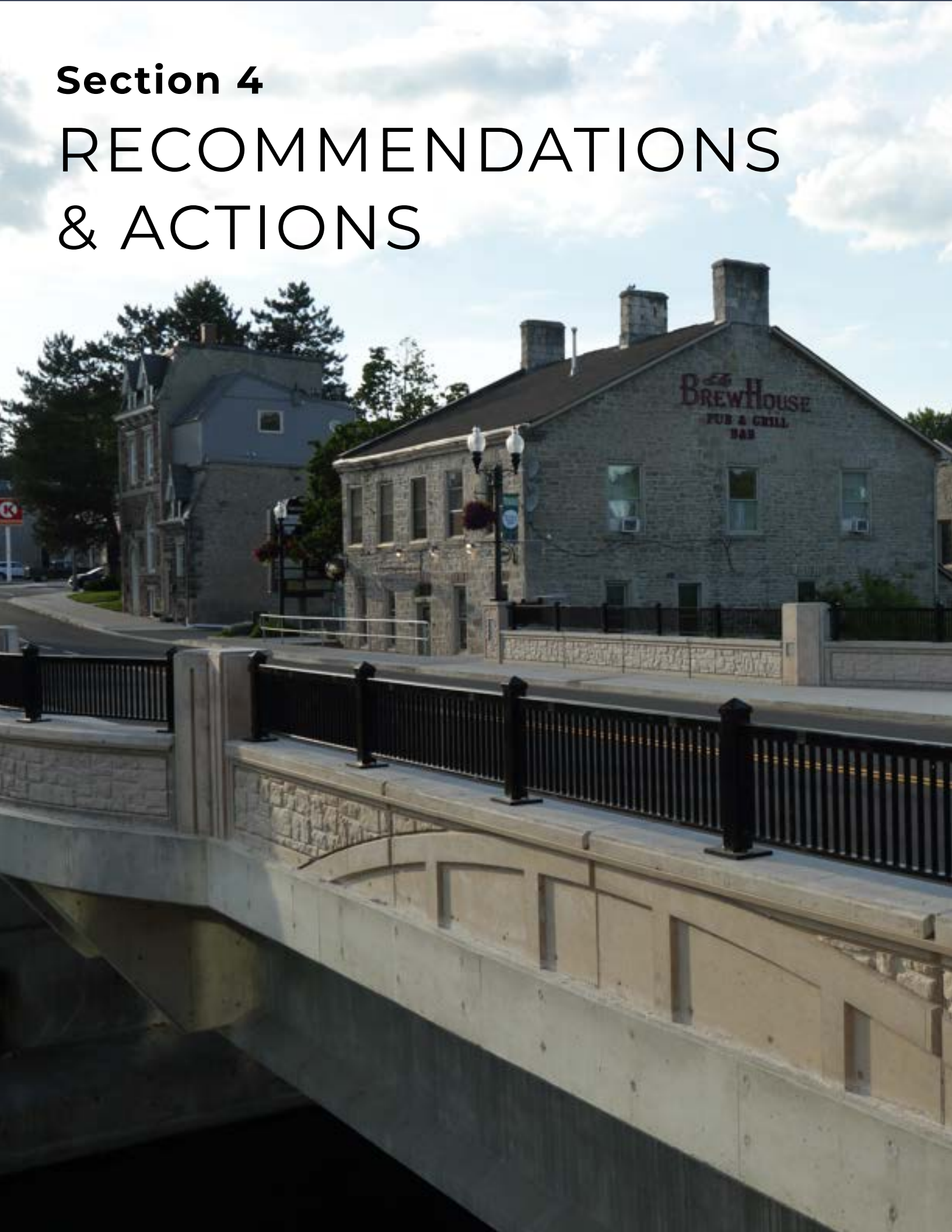
- The Township regularly receives business inquiries from investors in desirable, well-suited sectors, including the manufacturing sector.
- The green/environmental sector is established in Centre Wellington.
- The community and Township foster creativity, and are supportive of piloting ideas and experiences.
- Centre Wellington is recognized as a leader in agri-food sector innovation.

The Municipal organization has the team and financial resources to support impactful, sustainable economic development and tourism initiatives.

- There is a well-established destination management organization (DMO), supported by tourism-related revenue streams for the Township.
- There is an established structure for resource sharing between economic development and tourism teams, where responsibilities overlap.

Section 4

RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTIONS



The Centre Wellington EDTS is approached from **seven strategic pillars** ('pillar(s)'), each determined based on the current situational analysis and primary priority areas, and in pursuit of this Plan's 20-year vision. These pillars are inherently interconnected, and include recommendations and actions for the Township to consider over the next five years and beyond. Recommendations include:

Table 2: EDTS Strategic Pillars, Recommendations

CAPACITY	ECONOMIC GROWTH & RESILIENCE	WORKFORCE & LIVABILITY	INVESTMENT READINESS & INFRASTRUCTURE
1.1 Invest in expanding organizational capacity for economic development and tourism initiatives, including staffing, tools and financial resources. 1.2 Establish an Internal Working Group ('EDTS Working Group'), including leadership from various Township departments, to foster ongoing collaboration, align efforts and maximize the impact of EDTS implementation. 1.3 Implement a Municipal Accommodation Tax. 1.4 Enhance economic development and tourism data collection.	2.1 Work with partners to raise the profile of small business and entrepreneurship opportunities available to the community. 2.2 Undertake a regular business visitation program to monitor the health and needs of the business community. 2.3 Work with partners to enhance and promote virtual and in-person resources to help businesses in Centre Wellington start, grow, thrive, and innovate. 2.4 Establish a meaningful relationship with the Elora Research Station and the University of Guelph to capitalize on student interest in the agricultural sector, research activities and the desire to better connect to the local and regional community.	3.1 Work with partners to expand and advocate for increased local, regional and inter-urban transit connections, and into Guelph and Kitchener-Waterloo. 3.2 Dedicate resources to support the development of workforce attainable-housing, through the promotion of financial incentives and education. 3.3 Implement strategies that foster equity and belonging within the community. 3.4 Invest in creating paths and spaces for youth to build tangible connections to the community and employers, as well as contribute to a leadership role in developing the Centre Wellington of tomorrow. 3.5 Create and enhance connections to post-secondary institutions to encourage employers to utilize cooperative education (co-op) and internship talent.	4.1 Explore and advocate for mechanisms to improve industrial and commercial infrastructure provision within the township. This includes the internet, cell signal, hydro, roads, bridges and natural gas. 4.2 Facilitate the development of spaces for new and expanding commercial and industrial businesses to locate, including the development of commercial and industrial malls. Base these decisions on the identified needs of the business community. 4.3 Improve communications on planning and building processes and the Community Improvement Plan(CIP) to the business community. 4.4 Undertake targeted retail, service and entertainment investment attraction to meet community needs.

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT & VISITOR MANAGEMENT	PLACEMAKING	BRAND IDENTITY, MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS
5.1 Explore opportunities to expand the Elora-Fergus Downtown Shuttle Program, and pilot shuttle service connecting the downtowns to primary visitor markets. 5.2 Implement creative visitor management tactics to curb overtourism and mitigate the challenges tourism brings to Centre Wellington's urban centres. 5.3 Dedicate resources to enhanced tourism experience development, in partnership with local stakeholders in urban and rural areas. 5.4 Activate the Fergus Grand Theatre as a tourism asset while enhancing its role as a driver of arts and culture in the community. 5.5 Continue to invest in regenerative and sustainable tourism initiatives.	6.1 Implement a strategy to define and pilot placemaking projects to activate public spaces, helping to strengthen the social fabric, highlight local entrepreneurs, and provide platforms for storytelling and connection to a culturally diversifying community. (See also 5.5.) 6.2 Define and pilot placemaking projects to foster a sense of connection between Fergus, Elora and Belwood downtowns. 6.3 Continue to invest in Township support for local festivals and events. 6.4 Invest in a Placemaking Strategy for Centre Wellington.	7.1 Investigate developing a destination brand, separate from the Centre Wellington corporate brand, to promote the destination for economic development and tourism purposes. 7.2 Invest in enhancing Centre Wellington's tourism-focused storytelling, visitor information and marketing assets & resources. 7.3 Invest in dedicated economic development storytelling and marketing assets. 7.4 Develop and implement comprehensive economic development and tourism marketing plans on an annual basis, relying on earned and paid tactics. 7.5 Invest in community-focused communication initiatives & marketing campaigns to foster understanding and buy-in to key Township initiatives, strengthen communication channels and nurture welcoming environments.

See the following pages for specific action items related to each recommendation.

In the following pages, each pillar is presented within the following structure:

- **Description:** Provides background information and context, defining the value of the Strategic Pillar for Centre Wellington's economic development and tourism initiatives.
- **Key Considerations:** Synthesizes gaps identified through analysis of the current reality.
- **Recommendations, Rationale and Actions:** Presents a series of recommendations in relation to each Strategic Pillar, a rationale to justify each recommendation, and action items connected to each recommendation.
- **Outcomes:** Outcomes reference specific Vision statements (see Section 3), demonstrating a clear connection between each recommendations and how they work to achieve the EDTS's vision.
- **Looking Further Ahead:** Provides general implementation scope for the Township to consider beyond the EDTS's primary recommendations and actions.

Strategic Pillar 1:

Capacity

The capacity of Centre Wellington's economic development and tourism team is a critical factor in effectively executing this Plan. With current capacity limitations at play, it will be a challenge to effectively steward the rapid pace of growth of the community and implement the EDTS.

Successful outcomes require a comprehensive and coordinated approach to maximize positive impacts and reduce risks of inefficiencies and lost economic potential. Addressing this gap by investing in the required resources—such as the right team, budget, training, and organizational support—is essential for the Township to leverage the full spectrum of economic development and tourism opportunities available. This means finding efficiencies, developing new revenue streams, and leveraging new technologies.

By addressing capacity challenges and adopting the recommended approaches, Centre Wellington positions itself as a proactive, well-equipped community capable of fostering sustainable growth for the long term.

Appendix D provides a detailed background on economic development and tourism capacity and operations, and an in-depth look at mechanisms to enhance capacity.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- The Township's economic development and tourism teams operate with fewer resources than comparable communities, despite facing unprecedented growth mandates. This limited capacity increases the risk of missed opportunities and unaddressed challenges critical to achieving strategic goals.
- High levels of interest in investment and visitation, driven by Centre Wellington's growth, have stretched existing staff resources. Without increased capacity, the Township may be unable to comprehensively address opportunities and challenges—a gap that will widen as growth continues.
- Centre Wellington has yet to implement a Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT), resulting in missed opportunities to generate valuable funding to support economic development and tourism initiatives.

1.1 Invest in expanding organizational capacity for economic development and tourism initiatives, including staffing, tools and financial resources.

Rationale

- Centre Wellington has a smaller staff complement for economic development and tourism, compared to most similar size municipalities.
- The creation of a DMO will enhance staff capacity.
- Centre Wellington is on the brink of experiencing significant growth and would benefit from additional staff, tools and financial capacity to remain competitive compared to municipalities of a similar size.

Actions

1.1.1 Expand staff complement for economic development and tourism to align with similar-sized communities. Explore opportunities for departmental synergies.

1.1.2 Explore utilization of technology to automate work and increase efficiency to reduce workload.

1.1.3 Direct a portion of funds collected from tourism-adjacent initiatives (i.e., Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT), paid parking) to tourism investments, including expanded staff complement.

Desired outcome

- The Municipal organization has the team and financial resources to support impactful, sustainable economic development and tourism initiatives.

1.2 Establish an Internal Working Group ('EDTS Working Group'), including leadership from various Township departments, to foster ongoing collaboration, align efforts and maximize the impact of EDTS implementation.

Rationale

- Economic development and tourism efforts rely on other departments (i.e., Planning & Development, Infrastructure Services, Office of the CAO, Community Services, etc.) for success. A dedicated Working Group breaks down silos, identifies shared priorities, and fosters streamlined decision-making, preventing duplication of efforts and maximizing available resources.
- A Working Group provides a flexible structure for evaluating new opportunities, responding to challenges, and adapting strategies as needed, positioning Centre Wellington for sustainable, measured and thoughtful growth.

Actions

1.2.1 Develop a clear mandate outlining the Working Group's role in aligning economic development and tourism efforts across departments, also considering priorities with other Township strategies.

1.2.2 Create and implement a structured collaboration roadmap aligned with the EDTS's key priorities.

1.2.3 Conduct an annual review of Working Group activities, assessing effectiveness and identifying and implementing opportunities for process improvements.

Desired outcome

- The Municipal organization has the team and financial resources to support impactful, sustainable economic development and tourism initiatives.

1.3 Implement a Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT).

Rationale

- A MAT presents a channel through which visitors directly provide financial support for local tourism costs and investments, mitigating the burden otherwise perceived by local taxpayers.
- MAT has the potential to result in significant additional revenues for the Township and tourism administration, to be reinvested back into the community.
- At least 50 municipalities across the province have implemented a MAT.
- There is no evidence that MAT implementation influences the decision-making of prospective visitors.

Actions

1.3.1 Invest in a robust local education and engagement campaign regarding the Municipal Accommodation Tax.

1.3.2 Utilize findings from the education and engagement campaign to inform a MAT Implementation Strategy.

1.3.3 Establish a DMO, as recommended within the MAT Implementation Plan.

1.3.4 Develop tools, resources and education needed for accommodators to facilitate hassle-free MAT remittance.

1.3.5 Define a clear process for ongoing communication and reporting to share MAT successes and investments.

Desired outcome

- The Municipal organization has the team and financial resources to support impactful, sustainable economic development and tourism initiatives.

1.4 Enhance economic development and tourism data collection.

Rationale

- Reliable data guides both economic development and tourism policies, infrastructure investments, and business support initiatives to maximize economic and community benefits.
- Changes in the labour market, visitor spending, business investment, and broader economic performance metrics provide a lens through which EDTS actions can be adapted to support local businesses, attract visitors and investment, and drive sustainable economic growth.
- Understanding visitor and resident demographics, consumer behaviours, workforce needs, business sentiment, and satisfaction levels allows for targeted marketing, initiative implementation, and service improvements.
- Monitoring resident and business perspectives provides valuable insights into the success of a community-informed economic and tourism strategy. This data helps track progress toward fostering a local understanding of tourism's economic value while aligning economic development efforts with workforce needs, business growth opportunities, and overall quality of life.

Actions

1.4.1 Create a document to track key performance measurements and monitor outcomes of the strategy annually. Adapt tactics as necessary.

1.4.2 Complete an annual business survey to inform strategic decision-making and business-focused investments & initiatives.

1.4.3 Continue to invest in mobile data to track tourism arrivals and behaviours, via the existing RTO4 service, on an annual basis.

1.4.4 Explore options to acquire point of sale data on an annual basis, to track visitor spending habits. Use data to adapt strategies as relevant.

1.4.5 Introduce a regular Resident Satisfaction survey, to identify concerns related to tourism and economic growth and inform solutions-oriented initiatives.

1.4.6 Expand the existing Visitor Survey for scenario-based data collection.

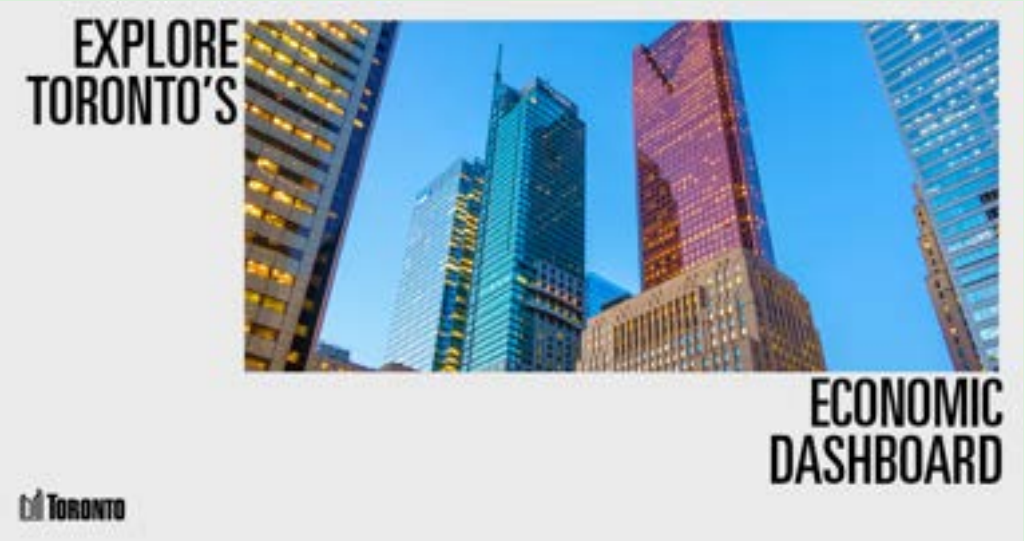
1.4.7 Invest in a Tourism Economic Impact Study, every four years.

Desired outcome

- Centre Wellington is an attractive, connected and welcoming community that is a desirable destination for new businesses, workforce and visitors.

[CASE STUDY]

REAL-LIFE DATA-DRIVEN PRACTICES



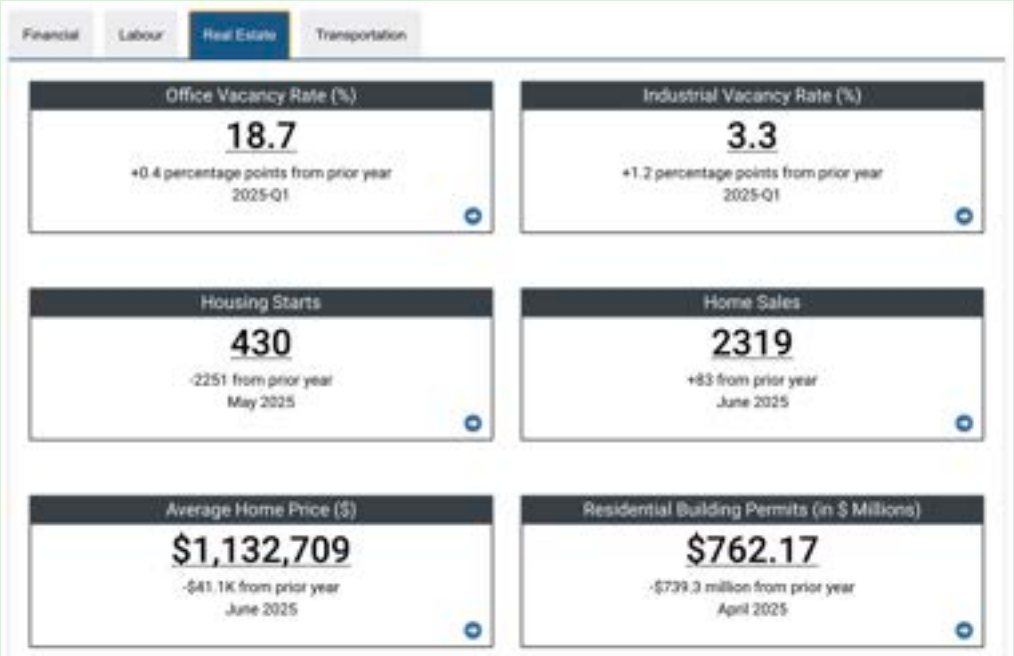


PHOTO CREDITS: City of Toronto - facebook.com/BusinessTO, Toronto.ca

The City of Toronto uses its Economic Dashboard to track indicators like employment rates, business openings, and tourism statistics. These insights guide policy decisions and program development.[11] **A data-driven approach to economic development and tourism leads to strategies that are evidence-based, responsive, and impactful.** By integrating data analytics into planning and implementation, municipalities maximize their resources, enhance stakeholder confidence, and achieve sustainable economic growth.

CAPACITY

Looking further ahead...

- Expand the team with roles that focus on innovative solutions and technology adoption, to help Centre Wellington stay competitive in a rapidly evolving landscape.
- Invest further in digital tools to streamline operations and improve decision-making.
- Continue to develop stronger collaboration among departments such as Planning, Community Services, and Communications. Plan regular cross-departmental meetings and joint projects.
- Strengthen ties with institutions like the University of Guelph and regional trade associations, for the sake of resource sharing, innovation, and access to external funding.
- Explore opportunities to create business development funds or other programs that enable businesses to directly contribute to economic development and tourism, creating a cycle of reinvestment into the community.
- Expand processes and opportunities for local entrepreneurs and small businesses in shaping economic development plans. Consider creating platforms for collaboration such as advisory councils or working groups that bring together local business leaders, community organizations, and other stakeholders.
- Evaluate the value of evolving Centre Wellington's destination management organization (DMO) to be an entity that exists external to the Township organization.
- Integrate datasets into a central intelligence platform to enable streamlined analysis and more proactive, data-driven decision-making.

Strategic Pillar 2:

Economic Growth & Resilience

Centre Wellington is poised for significant growth, both in population and employment. This growth presents a unique opportunity for existing businesses to expand and new ventures to emerge, creating jobs and addressing gaps in the local marketplace that serve the community.

Economic growth in Centre Wellington involves more than job creation; it requires strengthening the capacity of local businesses to scale, innovate, and stay competitive. The township benefits from a well-established business support network and a diverse economy, with key sectors including manufacturing, healthcare, construction, tourism, and agriculture—most of which are experiencing growth. Research shows that communities with a diverse economic base and strong innovation networks are better able to withstand economic downturns and external disruptions.

Building economic resilience is important in these uncertain times, which depends on collaboration across sectors and targeted capacity-building. External pressures—including trade uncertainty, global economic shifts, labour shortages, and climate change—underscore the need for a strategic approach to economic resilience. Given current geopolitical uncertainty, such as tariffs on Canadian exports, Centre Wellington must prioritize the expansion of local business support services, innovation, supply chain diversification, and investment attraction to reduce dependence on single markets and increase economic stability. To do so, several of Centre Wellington's key sectors—especially manufacturing—must look beyond traditional markets. As such, it is essential to support businesses in adopting Industry 4.0 technologies that enhance their productivity, leverage regional partnerships, and secure alternative trade partners.

Looking ahead, strategic investments in business support and innovation will allow Centre Wellington to remain an attractive location for business and investment, fostering a resilient economy that is positioned to withstand future challenges.

Appendix E provides a detailed background on Centre Wellington's key sectors, an overview of the partners in the business development support network, including those that could be expanded, and future economic trends to further frame and guide this pillar.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- Shifts in the economy demand change and innovation, and there are no drivers of innovation activated in the community.
- Local and regional value chain connections appear limited.
- Connection between the Township's economic development team and business community appears limited, outside of support for planning and building services, direct inquiries, and participation on committees.
- Lack of formal mechanism to gather information about business community needs.
- Lack of connections between regional post-secondary institutions and the business community.
- Existing retail, service and entertainment complement is not adequate to meet the needs of future residents, in particular youth and young adults.
- Minimal promotion of entrepreneurship in the community and amongst youth.
- Lack of control over global economic uncertainty.

2.1 Work with partners to raise the profile of small business and entrepreneurship opportunities available to the community.

Rationale

- There are many new residents moving into the community who will require new employment opportunities.
- Centre Wellington is well-positioned to support small business development due to its growth, as well as its existing and prospective support network.
- There is an increasing interest amongst youth in entrepreneurship and many youth do not currently visualize a future in Centre Wellington.
- There are a number of identified retail, service and entertainment gaps within the community that could be promoted as small business opportunities.
- The community is supportive of local businesses.

Actions

2.1.1 Encourage residents to explore entrepreneurship-related resources.

2.1.2 Develop an ongoing storytelling campaign to raise the profile of local entrepreneurship as a career.

2.1.3 Establish a consistent presence with the Business Centre Guelph-Wellington in the community.

2.1.4 Work with Business Centre Guelph-Wellington to establish a “for youth, by youth” entrepreneurship competition.

Desired outcomes

- Centre Wellington has a thriving and diverse business base.
- Centre Wellington has established itself as an innovative community.

[CASE STUDY]

BRUCE COUNTY'S SIDE GIG PROGRAM

PHOTO CREDITS: businesstobruce.com

The Side Gig Program, offered by Bruce County's small business centre, is designed to assist individuals in launching or enhancing side businesses alongside their primary employment. The program provides participants with essential skills, knowledge, tools, and incentives to effectively start, manage, and grow their ventures during their off-hours. Key components include a workshop series delivered by Fanshawe College, free networking events, and various business supports. The program is ideal for: those looking to utilize their skills to earn extra income; students or recent graduates seeking flexible career opportunities; individuals interested in project-based work; professionals transitioning to independent roles; and self-employed entrepreneurs aiming to refine their skills.[12] The program only recently began accepting applications to participate, so outcomes remain to be seen.

This program could be adapted to the Centre Wellington context, leaning on the Business Centre Guelph Wellington (BCGW) and Wellington Waterloo Community Futures (WWCF) as partners.

2.2 Undertake a regular business visitation program to monitor the health and needs of the business community.

Rationale

- No formal program currently exists to monitor business needs and inform service delivery.
- Retaining and supporting existing businesses is more cost-effective for a municipality than attracting new ones.
- Business visitation programs build relationships and form a two-way communication channel where businesses learn about programs and resources and inform the Township about local challenges and opportunities on which they may be able to assist.
- Proactively identifying challenges and opportunities strengthens the local economy and fosters resilience.
- During the EDTS engagement period, several residents and businesses note that they worked from home. However, survey results reveals very little information about this group and their needs. Given Centre Wellington's attractive lifestyle, generally good connectivity and minimal space requirements, this market is worth further investigation.

Actions

2.2.1 Finalize the design and resourcing of a business visitation program for Centre Wellington.

2.2.2 Conduct a benchmarking business visitation program to gather baseline data.

2.2.3 Establish an ongoing business visitation program with consistent metrics, prioritizing key sectors identified in this strategy.

2.2.4 Monitor and analyze data to identify trends, inform service delivery, and evaluate strategy impacts.

Desired outcome

- Centre Wellington has a thriving and diverse business base.

2.3 Work with partners to enhance and promote virtual and in-person resources to help businesses in Centre Wellington start, grow, thrive, and innovate.

Rationale

- Having access to support and resources better enables Centre Wellington businesses to grow and thrive.
- There are many business opportunities available to capitalize upon, due to the growth in residents and visitors.
- There are a number of partners within the community and region that can assist with supporting business development and growth. However, only the Community Futures office is based within Centre Wellington, at times making it more difficult to participate in opportunities located in the larger centres.
- After "infrastructure improvements," "small business support" is a top need identified by the business community in the EDTS survey.
- Local value chain development helps businesses remain sustainable during turbulent economic times.

Actions

2.3.1 Establish a bi-annual meeting with Support Network members to engage in planning for local initiatives and activities that support small business and entrepreneurship growth.

2.3.2 Develop a relationship with the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade Export team to explore the development of workshops and promotion of resources and services related to exporting in new markets.

2.3.3 Work with partners to support the hosting of sector-based networking/discussion events related to opportunities and challenges that businesses are facing.

2.3.4 Collaborate with support network partners to plan an annual series of business development events tailored to supporting business start-up and expansion needs within the community.

2.3.5 Establish a calendar of local and regional events and workshops geared to supporting business growth and development on the corporate website.

2.3.6 Establish and enhance relationships with the Universities of Guelph and Waterloo to integrate their innovation programming/support into the local business development support environment.

2.3.7 Establish a "side gig"-style program open to residents with business ideas they want to develop, with a focus on youth and young adults.

Desired outcomes

- Centre Wellington has a thriving and diverse business base.
- Centre Wellington has established itself as an innovative community.

2.4 Establish a meaningful relationship with the Elora Research Station and the University of Guelph to capitalize on student interest in the agricultural sector, research activities and the desire to better connect to the local and regional community.

Rationale

- The Elora Research Station is the largest agricultural research facility in Canada and home to world-class facilities for research across a range of crops and livestock groups.
- Agriculture is a significant sector of interest in Centre Wellington. However, no clear connection exists between the Research Station and the local agricultural sector.
- The University of Guelph, which manages the Research Station, has expressed an interest in creating a community space within the facility, which could possibly include an innovation component. Planning for this is in the very early stages, presenting an opportunity for collaboration.
- The University of Guelph is home to many students who are exploring a future that supports the agricultural sector. Staff indicate that local businesses can get involved in projects through Guelph's Research and Innovation Office. Included in the student mix are engineers who are working to expand and refine technology available to the agricultural sector.

Actions

2.4.1 Meet with University of Guelph and Elora Research Station team members to begin establishing a relationship.

2.4.2 Promote opportunities to leverage the research and innovation services of the University of Guelph, and eventually the Research Station, to the business community.

2.4.3 Act as a liaison to bring the needs, opportunities and challenges of the agricultural sector to the University and Research Station teams.

2.4.4 Explore opportunities to support and connect any development of community and innovation space at the Elora Research Station to the needs of the local agricultural sector.

Desired outcome

- Centre Wellington has a thriving and diverse business base.

[CASE STUDY]

STIMULATING ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION: DMZ INNISFIL

PHOTO CREDIT: innisfil.ca/en/business-and-employment

DMZ Innisfil is a community-driven business accelerator and incubator dedicated to supporting Innisfil entrepreneurs and business owners. It is a partnership between the Town of Innisfil and the Toronto Metropolitan University Digital Media Zone. It provides resources, mentorship, and support to help businesses succeed in the Innisfil area.

Since its inception in 2020, the DMZ Innisfil has helped over 65 companies, growing from 14 during that first year to 27 in 2023, with another 11 welcomed in during the first cohort of 2024.

Of that number, 88% are still in business. By comparison, nationally, about 20% of businesses fail within the first year. DMZ Innisfil has assisted its businesses with creating and retaining 214 full-time and 172 part-time jobs and securing more than $20 million in capital funding and $4.7 million in grants.[13,14]

They also hosted events and workshops open to the broader community with over 600 attendees.

ECONOMIC GROWTH & RESILIENCE

Looking further ahead...

- Continue to invest in strengthening regional, national and global business connections so businesses—especially in key sectors—have access to new markets and supply chains. This may include improving infrastructure, digital connectivity, and export capacity to enhance business competitiveness.
- Continue to foster a culture of innovation across industries by supporting technology adoption, automation, and smart manufacturing practices.
- Expand broadband access, smart infrastructure, and digital literacy programs, providing channels through which businesses and residents participate in a technology-driven economy.
- Continue to build Centre Wellington as a hub for agricultural innovation and technology by connecting local producers with new technology, funding, and R&D. Leverage Centre Wellington's agricultural heritage and Research Station assets to drive agri-tech innovation, including precision farming, sustainable food production, and bio-economy development. Become a hub of agricultural knowledge transfer.
- Develop policies and programs that support climate adaptation, sustainable infrastructure, and low-carbon business practices, positioning Centre Wellington to remain competitive while reducing environmental impact. Explore opportunities in the green economy including: circular economy models, renewable energy integration, and sustainable tourism.
- Create spaces that foster start-ups and entrepreneurs, such as pop-up spaces, allowing new business owners to test their marketplace. This could be part of an adaptive reuse of an existing underutilized building.
- Work with the Support Network to pilot a hackathon-style event, to assist local entrepreneurs in identifying new business opportunities, addressing challenges in existing operations, and thinking more creatively. Establish this as a regular event based on the success of the pilot. Adjust approach based on learnings.

Strategic Pillar 3:

Workforce & Livability

A sustainable local workforce is essential for Centre Wellington's business retention, expansion and long-term economic growth. In an increasingly competitive labour market, talent is drawn to communities that offer a high quality of life, including a welcoming environment, desirable employment opportunities, affordable living, and the ability to integrate and build a future.

Retaining youth and newcomers is also vital for bolstering a community's economic development. Youth often struggle to identify career prospects in rural areas and lack connection to the local community, increasing their chances of leaving with no intention of returning.[15] Newcomer attraction and retention play a key role in bolstering local workforces, but many struggle to integrate into communities and maximize the use of their skills.[16] By focusing on retaining these groups, communities encourage a dynamic workforce and sustained economic vitality. Addressing workforce and livability challenges positions Centre Wellington as a destination of choice for both residents and businesses.

Appendix F provides a detailed background on workforce trends and opportunities.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- Limited workforce availability presents a challenge for employers seeking to fill positions.
- An aging population is reducing the size of the available workforce, impacting long-term labour market sustainability.
- Youth often report a lack of connection to the community, citing insufficient entertainment, recreation and engagement opportunities. This impacts their likelihood of making Centre Wellington their home into adulthood.
- The high cost of housing creates affordability challenges for many in the local workforce, posing a barrier to attracting and retaining talent.
- Public and private transit options are insufficient to support reliable commuting for employment purposes.
- Some residents, particularly those from historically marginalized groups, experience barriers to belonging and do not feel fully welcome in the community.
- A significant portion of the workforce commutes to larger urban centres, contributing to increased housing costs, reduced local workforce availability, and a lower quality of life despite higher incomes.
- Local training opportunities are limited, and the Township lacks strong connections with regional post-secondary institutions to address workforce development needs.

3.1 Work with partners to expand and advocate for increased local, regional and inter-urban transit connections, and into Guelph and Kitchener-Waterloo.

Rationale

- Transit is considered a key piece of infrastructure to enable economic development and was identified as a significant barrier throughout the consultation for those looking to access employment opportunities and education, especially youth.
- Employers in the community note that many employees commute from outside of Centre Wellington from larger centres, such as Guelph and Kitchener-Waterloo. Transit connections would enable local businesses to leverage a larger labour-shed.
- There are public transit options that service the township but neither are effective options to support workforce and employment due to cost and wait times.
- Uber is established in Centre Wellington, however, it is still a costly option and involves long wait times.

Actions

3.1.1 Connect with third-party transportation services to explore opportunities to promote driver recruitment.

3.1.2 Leverage the business visitation program to support route mapping and provide an ongoing feedback mechanism on transit solutions for business.

3.1.3 Undertake a Community Transit Feasibility Study, with a key focus on employment and connections to education & services.

Desired outcome

- CW is an attractive, connected and welcoming community that is a desirable destination for new businesses, workforce, and visitors.

[CASE STUDY]

RURAL TRANSIT IN COBOURG

PHOTO CREDIT: cobourg.ca/home-property/public-transit/

In 2020, the Federal and Provincial Governments, along with municipal contributions, invested nearly $3 million in public transit projects across several Ontario communities, including Cobourg.[17] Additionally, in 2022, the Town received approval-in-principle for funding under Canada's Permanent Public Transit Program Zero Emission initiative, enabling Cobourg to undertake eligible project activities.

In April 2021, Cobourg began operating an on-demand bus service model that allowed residents to book rides using the Cobourg Rides app, choosing from 184 virtual bus stops. Due to increased ridership and community feedback, a pilot program for a limited fixed-route system was introduced in September 2024, operating Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. This resulted in the development of a blended transit service comprising both on-demand and limited fixed-route options. The Town's transit contract includes vehicle maintenance and operations, with the current agreement spanning three years and options for extensions. The on-demand service continues to utilize the 184 'virtual' bus stops, while the fixed-route pilot project features 35 designated stops. Information about the new fixed-route system is available on the town's website and at municipal buildings.[18]

This hybrid approach seeks to balance flexibility with predictability, catering to a broader range of transit users. Financially, the 2025 budget allocated a transit subsidy of $1,143,924, reflecting a 2.33% increase over the previous year, underscoring the Town's commitment to maintaining and enhancing its public transit services.[19] Cobourg's adaptive approach to public transit demonstrates its dedication to meeting the transportation needs of its residents while navigating financial and operational challenges. For comparison purposes, as of 2021 Centre Wellington had a population of 31,093 and a geographic size of 409.01 square kilometres versus 20,519 residents in Cobourg and a geographic size of 22.41 square kilometres. Centre Wellington's population density is skewed by the need to consider and serve a significant population based in outlying regions—a critical factor when developing future transit models.

3.2 Dedicate resources to support the development of workforce attainable housing, through the promotion of financial incentives and education.

Rationale

- Housing in Centre Wellington is more expensive than the Ontario average, making it challenging to afford for those earning lower incomes, as per feedback from the engagement process.
- Access to attainable housing is considered a critical piece of infrastructure to support the attraction and retention of the workforce.

Actions

3.2.1 Develop an engaging promotional campaign to highlight the Rental Housing Grant, which is a stream of the CIP.

3.2.2 Develop a website to promote the Rental Housing Grant campaign and other Community Improvement Plan programs that support the development of attainable housing. Include resources for employers on improving housing options for staff.

Desired outcome

- CW is an attractive, connected and welcoming community that is a desirable destination for new businesses, workforce, and visitors.

3.3 Implement strategies that foster equity and belonging within the community.

Rationale

- Some new residents and residents representing historically marginalized groups find it difficult to integrate into the community life of Centre Wellington.
- Canada, and Ontario in particular, has welcomed a record number of new immigrants in recent years who are looking to utilize their skills and build or enhance their life in Canada. The country is expected to see 500,000 new permanent residents in 2025 and another 500,000 in 2026.
- Immigrants will continue to make up a greater share of Centre Wellington's population growth and working to make them feel welcome and rooted in the community is important for long-term workforce, investment retention, and local innovation.

Actions

3.3.1 Expand the location and scope of the New Resident reception.

3.3.2 Profile and showcase newcomers' contribution and impact in the community using Township communication channels.

3.3.3 Create a peer connection program to connect new residents with existing ones, enhancing the sense of belonging while also supporting resident retention, workforce stability, and long-term community growth.

Desired outcome

- CW is an attractive, connected and welcoming community that is a desirable destination for new businesses, workforce, and visitors.

[CASE STUDY]

TRIEC NEWCOMER MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

The Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC), a peer mentorship program, was established to support newcomer professionals and entrepreneurs. The program is designed to provide tailored guidance, skill-building workshops and networking opportunities, with mentors drawn from established professionals who have successfully navigated the transition.

The program begins with a needs assessment to understand the specific challenges encountered by newcomers, such as difficulties in securing quality employment and accessing professional networks. Based on these insights, the program recruited and trained a pool of experienced mentors through a structured curriculum covering cultural acclimatization, professional networking, job search strategies and entrepreneurial skills. Newcomers are matched with mentors based on industry interests and personal goals, and the program incorporates regular check-ins, group workshops, and one-on-one sessions over a six-month period for continuous support and feedback.

Tangible outcomes

Quantitative data from the TRIEC evaluation report reveals that mentorship more than doubles a newcomer's chances of securing a good quality job compared to those without mentorship, with participants reporting an average 30% improvement in job placement rates within the first six months. Additionally, the targeted support contributes to increased entrepreneurial activity, with a significant percentage of mentees launching viable business ventures within one year. Newcomers who participated in the program are 2.5 times more likely to be in 'good quality jobs' (full-time, permanent jobs with benefits and opportunities for advancement) and almost four-times more likely to expand their network.

Qualitatively, participants note enhanced self-confidence, a better understanding of local business practices, and improved networking capabilities. These outcomes facilitate smoother integration into the local workforce and stimulate broader economic development by harnessing the skills and entrepreneurial potential of newcomers.

The program's success in accelerating the transition of skilled immigrants into productive roles contributes to a more dynamic labour market and increased local economic activity. By effectively bridging the gap between newcomers and established professionals, the mentorship initiative serves as a model for how targeted support programs drive economic growth and community resilience.

Data derived from:
1. Mentoring more than doubles a newcomer's chances of securing a 'good quality job': New evaluation report - TRIEC[20]
2. Demand for & Impact of Mentoring Newcomer Professionals: The case of TRIEC Mentoring Partnership[21]

3.4 Invest in creating paths and spaces for youth to build tangible connections to the community and employers, as well as contribute to a leadership role in developing the Centre Wellington of tomorrow.

Rationale

- Fostering positive connections, associations and memories with those who grow up in Centre Wellington could encourage them to stay in the community or move back as a young adult.
- Youth in particular note that the township lacks desired entertainment options and spaces to connect and hangout within the community.
- While increasing, there are limited roles for leadership at the community level for youth.
- The Elora and Fergus Downtown Shuttle is well-used and liked by youth, according to community research.

Actions

3.4.1 Explore the conversion of existing Township-managed spaces into teen-friendly zones.

3.4.2 Work with local schools to establish a platform for building connections between employers and youth.

Desired outcome

- CW is an attractive, connected and welcoming community that is a desirable destination for new businesses, workforce, and visitors.

3.5 Create and enhance connections to post-secondary institutions to encourage employers to utilize cooperative education (co-op) and internship talent.

Rationale

- There are 120,000 post-secondary students within a 40-minute drive of Centre Wellington, many of them interested in cooperative education, internships and employment. However, there is no formalized link to connect students to employers in the township.
- 33% of businesses surveyed indicate they have had trouble attracting the staff they require.
- There are no formal relationships established between post-secondary institutions and the Township or the Centre Wellington business community.

Actions

3.5.1 Establish a relationship between the Township and Cooperative Education and Student Success management teams at post-secondary institutions to promote local employment opportunities.

3.5.2 Work with partners to pilot a familiarization tour of the township to showcase entrepreneurship and employment options within Centre Wellington and across Wellington County to the post-secondary student base.

3.5.3 Develop a “Meet the Employers” night for post-secondary students.

Desired outcome

- Centre Wellington has a thriving and diverse business base.

WORKFORCE & LIVABILITY

Looking further ahead...

- Develop an easily accessible guide with information on local services, employment resources, cultural centres and community organizations. Make it available on the Township's corporate website, and in print at local public spaces (i.e., libraries, recreation centres, etc.). Update this resource on an annual basis.
- Improve connectivity to regional and national markets through investments in roads, rail, and air infrastructure.
- Partner with the Province of Ontario to establish transit links to Guelph, Kitchener-Waterloo, and the GTA, making Centre Wellington an integrated commuter and business hub.
- Continue to enhance linkages between township businesses and regional post-secondary institutions to anchor a workforce of the future in the community. Explore opportunities to bring relevant programming into the township, as needed.
- Continue to advocate for diverse and attainable housing options.
- Where relevant, support uptake of immigration policies and programs to attract a diverse, global workforce (i.e. Northern and Rural Immigration Pilot).
- Help employers prepare for and support newcomers in their workforce.
- Work to align business growth with community values, preserving the area's natural beauty, cultural heritage, and small-town character.
- Integrate green spaces, recreational facilities, and community services into economic plans to support a high quality of life.
- Continue supporting underrepresented groups in the local economy, including newcomer communities, women entrepreneurs, and youth.
- Concentrate growth in urban cores like Fergus and Elora, preserving the township's rural character while supporting efficient land use.
- Explore opportunities to provide free public transit access for youth under 18 on any established routes.

Strategic Pillar 4:

Investment Readiness & Infrastructure

The Township must be prepared to welcome and support provincially-mandated economic and employment growth. Positioning the community to be "investment ready," and having the needed infrastructure to support business is pivotal to economic development and tourism.

Robust infrastructure—including space for operations, utilities, transportation and digital connectivity—facilitates efficient business operations, reduces costs and enhances access to markets. Straightforward and accessible planning and building processes present a business-friendly attitude to support businesses as they invest in the community and ensure new development meets community needs. In the context of tourism, well-developed infrastructure enhances visitor experiences by providing reliable transportation, quality accommodations, and modern amenities, increasing a destination's appeal.

Attracting investment is a key component of economic development, as it stimulates job creation, enhances infrastructure and fosters innovation. Strategic investment attraction becomes particularly critical when land and space availability is limited. In such scenarios—as is true in Centre Wellington—communities must prioritize sectors that offer high economic returns and align with existing resources. Incentives found in the Township's Community Improvement Plan (CIP) could serve to stimulate investment into new and underutilized properties to support the development of an on-going supply of space to support commercial and industrial business development.

Overarchingly, taking a strategic approach to preparing the community to welcome the most impactful investment will serve the Township's interest in creating meaningful employment and generating new tax assessment.

Appendix G provides a detailed background on current growth and infrastructure considerations, information on the planning and development processes, and an overview of available CIP programs.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- Limited land and buildings to support new and existing business growth and development.
- Infrastructure and servicing are not available or unreliable in some parts of Centre Wellington limiting business development opportunities.
- The business community has the perception that planning and building processes are difficult.
- Investment attraction is not happening on a proactive basis.
- CIP uptake and allocation are limited.

NARROWING THE FOCUS: **WHO SHOULD WE TARGET INVESTMENT ATTRACTION EFFORTS TOWARDS?**

Once the Township is ready for new investment, taking a strategic approach to target sectors for investment attraction allows communities to concentrate their limited resources on areas with the highest growth potential, fostering industry clusters that drive innovation and strengthen local supply chains. Targeted investment policies leveraging local assets spur sustainable growth, and the multiplier effects of such clusters in enhancing regional competitiveness.[22,23] This focused strategy boosts job creation and productivity while building a resilient, diversified economy that attracts further investment. The target sectors represent those that have an existing strength and/or are well-positioned for growth.

Manufacturing

Attracting manufacturing investments is a priority for Centre Wellington because this sector generates high-paying jobs, supports local supply chains and drives innovation. Concentrating on manufacturing enables the Township to build specialized infrastructure and expertise, which leads to economies of scale and improves the competitiveness of local businesses. A robust manufacturing base also provides opportunities for training and skills development among residents, fostering a sustainable talent pipeline.

Cross-Sectoral Businesses (Manufacturing, Agriculture, Healthcare, and Tourism)

Targeting cross-sectoral businesses that bridge manufacturing with agriculture, healthcare and tourism—particularly those supporting the agrifood value chain—creates synergies that benefit multiple sectors simultaneously. These businesses enhance the integration of local agricultural production with value-added processing, improve healthcare technology through advanced manufacturing processes, and support tourism by offering innovative products and services. The cross-sector approach diversifies the local economy and leverages shared resources, leading to improved resilience and collaborative innovation across industries.

Agri-Tech

With the presence of the Elora Research Station and close proximity to the Universities of Guelph and Waterloo, as well as a strong local and regional agricultural sector, exploring development in the agri-technology space warrants further investigation. In particular there is an opportunity to leverage co-ops, internships, and entrepreneurial spin-offs from the local post-secondary energy in the community. Centre Wellington is positioned to build on its agricultural heritage, enhance economic resilience and position itself as a hub for innovation in sustainable farming practices.

Tourism-Related Accommodations and Entertainment

Focusing on tourism-related accommodations and entertainment is crucial, especially when these offerings also cater to residents. By developing high-quality accommodations and diverse entertainment options, Centre Wellington enhances its appeal to visitors while providing more local amenities to meet the needs of the community. This dual focus leads to increased visitor spending, supports local job creation, and stimulates economic activity through both the tourism and retail sectors. Moreover, improved amenities contribute to the overall quality of life, making the area more attractive to prospective residents and investors.

Resident-Focused Retail and Services

Investing in resident-focused retail and services is important for sustaining the local economy and enhancing community livability. By prioritizing these sectors, Centre Wellington works to foster growth that benefits existing residents by improving access to essential goods, services and recreational options. This focus helps to maintain a vibrant local market, supports small business development and encourages local spending, which in turn fosters a healthy economic ecosystem. Retail and services that cater to residents also provide valuable opportunities for entrepreneurial activity and innovation, further diversifying the economic base.

4.1 Explore and advocate for mechanisms to improve industrial and commercial infrastructure provision within the township. This includes internet, cell signal, hydro, roads, bridges and natural gas.

Rationale

- Infrastructure is ranked the most important need by 67% of survey respondents and was frequently mentioned during the engagement process, and in particular, access to internet and cell phone networks.
- Infrastructure provision is costly and, thus, likely out of the control of the Township itself.
- Advocacy and connecting with service providers and other partners facing similar challenges may enable the increased likelihood of the provision of services.

Actions

4.1.1 Work with regional partners and utility companies to quantify the need for each infrastructure element (e.g., hydro, water, sewage, natural gas, internet, cell phone network) and identify which requires enhancement.

4.1.2 Advocate for the consideration of business needs in the implementation of the Transportation Master Plan.

4.1.3 Connect with utility providers and the Provincial government, including small providers, to advocate for improved service delivery.

4.1.4 Develop an industrial land development strategy to increase the amount of available employment land .

Desired outcomes

- CW is an attractive, connected and welcoming community that is a desirable destination for new businesses, workforce, and visitors.
- Centre Wellington has a thriving and diverse business base.

4.2 Facilitate the development of spaces for new and expanding commercial and industrial businesses to locate, including the development of commercial and industrial malls. Base these decisions on the identified needs of the business community.

Rationale

- Both businesses and stakeholders shared throughout the engagement that businesses lack available space to establish themselves. This means that growing businesses often locate in larger centres or different areas of Wellington County to keep up with their operational demands.
- There is currently interest in commercial mall development, but little interest in industrial unit or site development.
- The current trend is that businesses prefer establishing themselves in prefabricated units rather than investing in new development, which is especially true for growing businesses.

Actions

4.2.1 Incorporate an investment attraction strategy around commercial and industrial mall development into the Marketing Plan (see 7.4.1).

4.2.2 Create targeted marketing materials to support investment attraction for commercial and industrial mall development.

4.2.3 Establish communications with industrial and commercial developers to promote and educate them on local opportunities for development.

4.2.4 Increase the budget allocated to the CIP program to encourage larger, transformational projects.

Desired outcomes

- CW is an attractive, connected and welcoming community that is a desirable destination for new businesses, workforce, and visitors.
- Centre Wellington has a thriving and diverse business base.

[CASE STUDY]

BROWNFIELD REDEVELOPMENT BATAWA

PHOTO CREDIT: environmentjournal.ca

The redevelopment of the Batawa Shoe Factory site in Batawa, Ontario, serves as a prime example of a successful brownfield adaptive reuse project, supported by municipal incentives. Spearheaded by the Batawa Development Corporation (BDC), the project aimed to transform the 30-acre, former industrial site into a vibrant, mixed-use community with residential units, commercial spaces, and recreational facilities. The Town of Quinte West provided substantial support through its Community Improvement Plan (CIP), offering financial incentives, tax relief, and assistance with environmental remediation.

The total cost of the redevelopment was approximately $12.8 million. Quinte West's financial commitment included over $1 million in grants and loans, aimed at environmental remediation and site preparation, which played a pivotal role in making the project viable. The private sector investment totaled approximately $7 million. In return, the redevelopment resulted in the creation of 175 new residential units and approximately 50 new local jobs. The revitalized site also attracted new businesses, contributing to the area's overall economic growth. Since its completion, the redevelopment has transformed the area into a sustainable, thriving community and demonstrates the success of strategic brownfield redevelopment supported by municipal incentives. This project exemplifies how municipalities can leverage financial incentives and CIP programs to encourage private investment, improve livability, and promote long-term economic development.

Data derived from: Canadian Brownfields Case Study[24]

4.3 Improve communications on planning and building processes and the Community Improvement Plan (CIP) to the business community.

Rationale

- Planning and building processes are daunting for many businesses, as there are multiple steps and organizations involved in the approval process, which requires additional costs, time and third-party expert support.
- 44% of business survey respondents find it challenging to understand or pursue planning and building processes. This is one of the top challenges faced by communities across Ontario and often stems from a lack of understanding of the regulatory process. At the same time, those businesses that were larger and had experience and the capacity to manage those processes found them straightforward, and the Township helpful.
- Offering opportunities to enhance understanding of the process enables businesses to be better prepared.
- A concierge service to guide businesses through the development process is helpful but time-consuming, and demand will only increase as the community grows. The Township must consider where best to allocate its resources.
- Community Improvement Plan utilization had dropped during the COVID-19 pandemic and years following, however, demand is starting to increase again.

Actions

4.3.1 Develop an online roadmap to promote understanding of, and guide users through, the planning and building processes and the CIP programs within the community.

4.3.2 Develop an evaluation process for planning and building processes.

4.3.3 Provide concierge services to businesses going through planning and building processes, eventually guided by a matrix to determine which businesses require additional support.

4.3.4 Host an annual event to inform the business community about planning and building processes.

Desired outcomes

- CW is an attractive, connected and welcoming community that is a desirable destination for new businesses, workforce, and visitors.
- Centre Wellington has a thriving and diverse business base.

4.4 Undertake targeted retail, service and entertainment investment attraction to meet community needs.

Rationale

- New residents are moving into the community and demand for related retail, service and recreation options are increasing.
- Targeting investment attraction efforts in these areas enables the Township to better-meet resident needs, and support smart growth and strategic use of the limited available space for these operations.

Actions

4.2.1 Evaluate and promote upcoming vacant properties to targeted needs and retail, service, and entertainment gaps in the community.

Desired outcomes

- CW is an attractive, connected and welcoming community that is a desirable destination for new businesses, workforce, and visitors.

INVESTMENT READINESS & INFRASTRUCTURE

Looking further ahead...

- Explore new business park development to facilitate ongoing new investment and business expansion within Centre Wellington.
- Reevaluate investment attraction target sectors and tactics.
- Invest in the ongoing monitoring of the planning and development process and CIP satisfaction.
- Proactively monitor and attract industries of the future, such as clean technology, advanced manufacturing and agri-technology. Continue to leverage Centre Wellington's proximity and newly established relationships with institutions like the University of Guelph and the University of Waterloo to support growth in target sectors.
- Focus efforts on attracting technology and clean energy companies that align with global trends and provide high-value jobs. Support existing industries with incentives to adopt green technologies and innovate.
- Develop a plan to transition industrial and business parks to net-zero operations by integrating renewable energy systems (solar, wind, geothermal) and energy-efficient design. Establish green certification programs to attract eco-conscious businesses.
- Incorporate smart city technologies into industrial areas, including Iot-based energy management, traffic optimization, and real-time monitoring for utilities and services. Ensure ubiquitous high-speed internet access and consider advancements such as 6G networks.
- Where gaps persist, identify existing businesses to target for expansion in Centre Wellington and initiate communication with the tools identified in Strategic Pillar 1: Capacity. Undertake this task on an as-needed basis, as new development and space become available, in an effort to build a complete community.

Strategic Pillar 5:

Destination Development & Visitor Management

Destination development refers to "the strategic planning and advancement of defined areas to support the evolution of desirable destinations for travellers, with a focus on the supply side of tourism, by providing compelling experiences, quality infrastructure, and remarkable services to entice visitation."[25] It aims to foster a destination where visitors are compelled to stay and spend money in exchange for authentic visitor experiences that align with their interests and meet an exceptional standard of service.

For Centre Wellington, this means addressing current gaps in collaboration, infrastructure, and experience development to promote tourism growth that is sustainable, equitable, and beneficial for both visitors and residents.

Experience development—a component of destination development—is a particular area of need in Centre Wellington. Whether supporting existing businesses, fostering entrepreneurship, attracting investors or developing new tourism products, an important priority for Centre Wellington moving forward is to expand its tourism offerings. This approach deepens the economic impact of tourism and alleviates pressure on overcrowded hotspots by distributing visitors more evenly across the township and throughout the year. The EDTS emphasizes four specific areas of focus for experience development in the township, specifically: nature and outdoor recreation, arts and culture, small corporate meetings and events, and film.

Given concerns about overcrowding, visitor congestion and the impacts of overtourism in the township, visitor management is a key component of this pillar. The term refers to initiatives aimed to "raise the profile and improve the quality of tourism products, to inform visitors of

[DEFINE]

WHAT IS A HIGH-VALUE VISITOR?

A high-value visitor, as it is used in the EDTS, refers to visitors who:

- Invest in local experiences—including with shops, restaurants and tourism products, contributing to the local economy;
- Respect the local community, demonstrated through responsible behaviour, engagement with locally-led initiatives, and cultural sensitivity in their interactions with residents and businesses; and
- Engage in eco-friendly practices such as "leave no trace" when using natural spaces and reducing waste.

facilities, services and infrastructure, to aid in the dispersal of visitors, to manage and/or modify visitor behaviour, often in order to mitigate negative visitor impacts, and to positively impact visitor experiences through guiding and interpretation."[26] Disruptions caused by tourism impact the quality of experience for residents and visitors alike, and therefore, visitor management is a requisite component of destination development in Centre Wellington.

Ultimately, destination development and visitor management are interconnected strategies that rely on one another to succeed. The EDTS aims to support Centre Wellington in striking a balance between expanding tourism's economic benefits while safeguarding the quality of life for residents. By strengthening collaboration, diversifying experiences and implementing targeted visitor management measures, the Township enhances its appeal while attracting high-value visitors who stay longer and spend more. **For the sake of the community's reputation, visitor experience quality, and quality of life for local residents, the priority here is on quality visitors ('high value') rather than aiming to attract a greater quantity of visitors.**

Appendix H provides a detailed review and analysis of Centre Wellington's current tourism assets and destination development initiatives, to provide context for recommendations and actions.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- No official process for collaboration is established between relevant destination development and tourism support networks (i.e., BIAs, Chamber, RTO, County, etc).
- Experiences available at present are not overly compelling for overnight stays.
- Lack of themed itineraries and content to showcase breadth of experiences available to be had in the township.
- Limited cross-collaboration between major experience providers throughout the community.
- Lack of visitor management tactics in place for busy seasons.
- Lack of traditional accommodation capacity.
- Over-saturation of tourism activities in Elora compared to the rest of the township.
- Limited human resource capacity at the Township level to support proactive destination development initiatives.
- Traffic congestion and parking challenges disrupt the visitor experience, and dissuade locals from engaging with their own community.
- No direct tourism revenue-generating channels established by the Township.
- Risk of developing an over-reliance on a single stakeholder to drive visitation.
- Limited data available to inform tourism decision making.

5.1 Explore opportunities to expand the Elora-Fergus Downtown Shuttle Program, and pilot shuttle service connecting the downtowns to primary visitor markets.

Rationale

- Lack of parking availability and downtown congestion are key concerns for residents, businesses and visitors during peak visitor seasons and events, and are ongoing concerns throughout the summer months. A shuttle service helps to improve local mobility, reduce traffic congestion and mitigate parking challenges.
- Providing shuttles between feeder markets alleviates the impact of cars on the downtown, provides access to car-free prospective visitors, allows visitors to more fully enjoy local food and drink, and could open up a new potential revenue stream.

Actions

5.1.1 Utilize MAT education and engagement initiatives (see 1.3.1) to explore funding for the expanded shuttle program.

5.1.2 Explore expanding and adapting Elora-Fergus Downtown Shuttle Program, based on demand.

5.1.3 Pilot expanding the existing Elora-Fergus Downtown Shuttle Program to include Fridays and expanded hours.

5.1.4 Pilot an Inter-Community Shuttle Program connecting Elora and Fergus to nearby communities (i.e., Toronto, Guelph, Kitchener, Hamilton) during shoulder season, to support year-round visitor arrivals.

5.1.5 Explore opportunities to integrate the Inter-Community Pilot Shuttle with Visitor Passes (see 5.3.5) and/or thematic experiences, such as an Elora Downtown to Raceway pilot.

Desired outcomes

- Centre Wellington is an attractive, connected and welcoming community that is a desirable destination for new businesses, workforce, and visitors.

5.2 Implement creative visitor management tactics to curb overtourism and mitigate the challenges tourism brings to Centre Wellington's urban centres.

Rationale

- Visitor management tactics address traffic congestion and parking challenges that disrupt the visitor experience quality, whilst creating new revenue streams for the Township.
- Residents indicate that they avoid going downtown during high season and major events due to overcrowding. Effective visitor management addresses the barriers that keep residents away, ideally allowing residents to enjoy the cultural happenings in their own backyard while improving the visitor experience.

Actions

5.2.1 Implement paid parking, exclusively applicable to visitors, as recommended in the Downtown Municipal Parking Strategy. Invest in free parking for residents.

5.2.2 Explore the possibility of establishing sharing agreements with owners of underutilized lots to expand visitor parking solutions during high season and major events, as recommended in the Downtown Municipal Parking Strategy. Adapt shuttle route accordingly.

5.2.3 Pilot pedestrian-only areas during high season and major events. Establish solutions for traffic management during high season and major events.

5.2.4 Invest in additional resources and capacity to manage waste and maintain public toilets during high season and major events.

5.2.5 Explore opportunities to expand the Elora and Fergus Downtown Shuttle, as recommended in 5.1.

Desired outcomes

- Residents and visitors enjoy the community in harmony. Residents benefit from & understand the value tourism brings to the community.

[CASE STUDY]

PARKING MANAGEMENT IN SYLVAN LAKE, AB

PHOTO CREDIT: Visit Sylvan Lake

In Sylvan Lake, AB, a system is in place whereby residents and property owners are eligible to access parking in pay zones without a fee by registering their vehicle. From May 15 to September 15, paid parking is enforced from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily, with an on-street pay parking time limit restricted to two hours for both residents and visitors in select areas.

The Town manages parking fees via a digital system, Hotspot. While parking falls under the Parks and Protective Services department, tourism exclusively drives parking revenues, amounting to $515,836 in 2023. While this is simply an example, it demonstrates the possibility of paid parking that is only applicable to visitors (not residents).

5.3 Dedicate resources to enhanced tourism experience development, in partnership with local stakeholders in urban and rural areas.

Rationale

- Expanding the local tourism experience portfolio enhances the likelihood of longer visitor stays and greater visitor spending, while opening up the destination to new prospective markets.
- Experience development creates new revenue opportunities for local businesses and allows the Township to more directly appeal to high-value visitors.
- There are a number of existing experiences that operate in silos. Appeal is strengthened and broadened when combined with complementary experiences.

Actions

5.3.1 Provide education, coaching and ideation services to local stakeholders, to support creative experience development.

5.3.2 Develop themed content and itineraries featuring destinations and experiences throughout the township, to appeal to various interests (see 7.2.3).

5.3.3 Develop themed Location and Resource Databases for each: 1. small corporate meetings and events, and 2. film, to support niche product market development.

5.3.4 Establish a Working Group with the Fergus BIA and Elora BIA ('BIA Working Group'), with a mandate for shared visioning, complementary experience development, and marketing.

5.3.5 Explore opportunities to create multiple thematic Visitor Passes with local and neighbouring businesses, integrating visitor experiences and services offerings.

Desired outcomes

- Centre Wellington is an attractive, connected and welcoming community that is a desirable destination for new businesses, workforce, and visitors.
- Centre Wellington is a complete, four-season destination.

[EMPHASIS]

NARROWING THE FOCUS: EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT

The EDTS recommends an ongoing focus on four primary tourism niches:

1. Nature and outdoor recreation;
2. Arts & culture;
3. Small corporate meetings and events; and
4. Film.

It is established that Centre Wellington's assets naturally lend to this direction, but what value does each bring to the community?

Nature and outdoor recreation

- Ontario attracts more nature-based tourists than any other province, meaning there is a captive audience for Centre Wellington's experience.
- 42% of travellers defined as "Outdoor Explorers" by Destination Canada prioritize sustainable travel, aligning with a desire to see visitors who respect the local community and experiences.[27]
- While hyper-local data pointing to the economic impact of nature-based tourism is unavailable, Protect Our Winters estimates Canada's outdoor recreation economy at over $101 billion annually. Given the connection between nature-based tourism and outdoor recreation, this points to the potential economic impact of this focus area.[28]
- Visiting natural settings and being outdoors are widely recognized as important for improving human health and well-being,[29] parlaying into other niches, such as wellness tourism.

Arts & culture

A 2023 report by the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) reveals that:

- The average arts and culture trip was $617.66, which is three-times greater than non-arts and culture trips ($213.31), demonstrating valuable economic impact.
- 40% of Canadian arts and culture visitors made trips of three days or more, while only 13% of non-arts and culture visitors did the same, pointing to an opportunity to attract visitors who stay longer and spend more.
- Food was the top spending category for arts & culture tourists to Ontario, accounting for 26% of trip spending, demonstrating impact across the local tourism sector.
- Three out of five arts and culture trips take place in the spring, autumn or winter, representing an opportunity for off-peak tourism development.[30]

Small corporate meetings and events

According to Tourism Industry Association of Canada (TIAC):

- Business events are an economic driver of Canada's tourism economy, representing 40% of all tourism spending.
- Business events and corporate retreats take place year-round, creating demand for local accommodators, activities and restaurants throughout the year.
- The business meetings and events sector accounted for 242,000 direct jobs and contributed $27.4 billion in direct GDP in 2019.
- Focusing on small corporate meetings and events aligns with Centre Wellington's capacity and focuses on a market with high economic impact.[31]

Film

- Production crews have the potential to contribute greatly to local economies, from using local accommodators, enlisting support from local tradespeople, shopping and dining locally, etc. In 2023, a notable film production in Stratford contributed approximately $5 million to the local economy, "underlining the potential economic benefits of on-location filming" in small towns.[32]
- Film tourism (including attracting productions for TV and film shoots) has the added benefit of providing a destination exposure to broad audiences.
- Experiences and promotional efforts can be developed to engage fans of the show/movie to visit filming locations.

5.4 Activate the Fergus Grand Theatre as a tourism asset while enhancing its role as a driver of arts and culture in the community.

Rationale

- The Theatre is a unique asset in downtown Fergus and currently underutilized outside of weekends.
- Activating the Theatre as a tourism asset supports initiatives to benefit community-focused initiatives as well.

Actions

5.4.1 Explore partnerships with existing local & regional music and film-based event organizers to host satellite performances and complementary experiences at the Theatre.

5.4.2 Explore a pilot project to host a professional theatre group for a summer run with complementary dinner packages.

5.4.3 Include the Theatre within marketing and promotional resources developed to target film and small corporate meetings & events (see 5.3.3 and 7.2.5).

5.4.4 Evaluate the feasibility of retrofitting the Theatre to screen movies. If feasible, screen when theatre is available with a focus on engaging youth.

Desired outcomes

- Centre Wellington is an attractive, connected and welcoming community that is a desirable destination for new businesses, workforce, and visitors.
- Centre Wellington is a complete, four-season destination.

5.5 Continue to invest in regenerative and sustainable tourism initiatives.

Rationale

- Investing in sustainable initiatives represents proactive investments in the long-term success of local tourism initiatives, protecting and preserving the assets and essence that draw visitors.
- Regenerative and sustainable tourism initiatives centre community needs, therefore benefiting the well-being of residents, local businesses and natural assets.

Actions

5.5.1 Continue to implement the Sustainability Action Plan developed for Centre Wellington by the Global Destination Sustainability Movement (GDS-Movement); most notably, business-facing initiatives focused on sustainable tourism knowledge sharing and practices.

5.5.2 Collaborate with willing partners to develop educational campaigns and content focused on responsible visitor behaviour (see 7.4.2).

5.5.3 Invest in placemaking initiatives that help to strengthen the social fabric, highlight local entrepreneurs, and provide historically marginalized communities with platforms for storytelling and connection. (See 6.1.)

Desired outcomes

- Residents and visitors enjoy the community in harmony. Residents benefit from & understand the value tourism brings to the community.

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT & VISITOR MANAGEMENT

Looking further ahead...

- Continue to foster local experience development and evolve Visitor Passes, informed by data, visitor demands and tourism trends. Explore options for annual or seasonal memberships, offering local discounts and exclusive experiences to encourage repeat visits.
- Expand the Visitor Pass initiative (5.3.5) by collaborating with neighbouring communities to pilot cross-destination Visitor Passes, providing a broader range of experiences.
- Explore co-investment opportunities between the BIAs, Township and private sector partners to fund joint initiatives.
- Evolve visitor management tactics based on shifting visitor behaviours and evolving community & visitor demands.
- Expand local, regional and intramarket shuttle services as demand requires and resources allow.
- Explore the possibility of providing select tourism development services on behalf of Wellington County via the Centre Wellington DMO, in exchange for additional resources. If deemed valuable, utilize this shift to enhance the Township's focus on connecting urban centres to more rural experiences throughout the County.
- Determine the feasibility and value of an ongoing shuttle exclusively between privately-owned lots and downtown Elora during peak seasons. If determined feasible, pilot this strategy using a third-party service and adopt it as a longer-term approach if proven valuable, as an additional parking solution and to manage downtown congestion.
- As resources allow, expand the DMO team to include a Corporate and Film Tourism Development Liaison, dedicated to attracting niche groups and acting as a concierge while they're in-destination.
- Assess the need for additional restroom facilities based on visitor data, and work to provide sufficient service levels.
- Develop and pilot a Tourism & Hospitality Innovation Program (THIP) for local stakeholders, in partnership with new and existing support networks (i.e., County, RTO4, etc.). This may include: coaching; sector-specific capacity building and training; workforce capacity building; tourism readiness enhancements; sustainable initiatives; toolkits; piloting and incubation; networking and partnership; and incentives).

Strategic Pillar 6:

Placemaking

To understand the purpose of investing in placemaking and its connection to effective tourism and economic development, one must first understand exactly what "placemaking" is. In *Place matters: The role of placemaking in economic development,* authors write, "...The most widely understood definition of placemaking is the practice of creating or enhancing a community's assets to improve its overall attractiveness and livability. This includes large-scale projects such as the creation of public spaces and alternative transportation infrastructure, but also small-scale efforts such as pop-up retail and downtown beautification."[33]

At its core, placemaking strengthens the relationship between people and place, fostering spaces that are vibrant, inclusive, and reflective of the community's identity. Successful placemaking efforts are informed by the community and capitalize on unique local assets to improve public spaces in ways that serve cultural, social, and economic objectives such as "the promotion of public discourse, civic pride, neighbourhood connections, community health and safety, social justice, economic development, and environmental sustainability, to name a few."[34] These initiatives integrate arts & culture, green spaces, mixed-use development, and recreation to create meaningful experiences. By designing spaces that reflect local values, placemaking deepens residents' sense of belonging, strengthens social cohesion and fosters a shared sense of stewardship, which is particularly important in regenerative, sustainable development.

Placemaking initiatives also drive economic vitality, acting as catalysts for private-sector investment and local entrepreneurship. Research shows that strong social cohesion—an outcome of well-executed placemaking—is linked to higher economic growth. Well-designed

public spaces attract businesses, new residents and visitors, creating environments where people want to live, work, and invest.[35]

Communities focused on placemaking tend to attract new residents, visitors and investors who are drawn to a strong sense of community and a variety of experiences throughout the area. It is for this reason that placemaking is inherently connected to economic development and tourism, and is a key strategic direction within the EDTS.

Placemaking initiatives also support sustainable, community-based tourism, allowing visitors to genuinely connect with the spirit of a destination. This inspires a different level of care and appreciation, influencing responsible visitor behaviour. Further, vibrant and well-designed public spaces attract labour force and create infrastructure for entrepreneurship and start-ups.

There are a number of existing placemaking initiatives throughout Centre Wellington, and in particular, the urban centres of Fergus and Elora. Now is the time for an integrated and strategic approach to placemaking, to amplify the impact of existing efforts, creating a seamless and dynamic environment that benefits residents, businesses and visitors alike. There are opportunities for both place-based and program-based initiatives that enhance the spirit, connectivity and liveliness of Centre Wellington year-round, which is particularly critical for youth retention—creating a community where young people grow up and choose to stay, return after post-secondary experiences, and build a life.

Centre Wellington's growth, evolving demographics and increasing visitor appeal present an opportunity to be proactive in shaping its future. Strategic placemaking allows for public spaces to reflect the township's identity while balancing growth, economic vibrancy and community well-being. By prioritizing placemaking as a key pillar of the EDTS, Centre Wellington builds a thriving, inclusive, creative and sustainable community.

Appendix I provides a detailed background on current placemaking initiatives and opportunities, as relevant to economic and tourism development.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- Underutilized assets (i.e., Cultural Heritage Landscape Study) for building thematic content and experiences.
- Lack of interconnected or complementary stories, narratives and experiences established between Elora and Fergus.
- Lack of creative, playful public space activations.
- Loss of resident connection to downtown areas due to tourism and population growth, leading to a sense of displacement among long-standing residents.
- Lack of formalized community-driven placemaking initiatives to strengthen social cohesion and encourage civic participation.
- Limited integration of the Museum's storytelling into broader placemaking initiatives, reducing its potential as a cultural anchor.
- Lack of flexible, modular infrastructure (e.g., pop-up seating, movable performance spaces) to support spontaneous and low-cost community activations.

6.1 Implement a strategy to define and pilot placemaking projects to activate public spaces, helping to strengthen the social fabric, highlight local entrepreneurs, and provide platforms for storytelling and connection to a culturally diversifying community. (See also 5.5.)

Rationale

- Investing in placemaking and public space activation enhances Centre Wellington's appeal as a place to live, work, and visit.
- There is a sense of disconnect between residents and their community, which may only broaden with an influx of new residents. Placemaking helps to facilitate a connection to a place for residents and visitors alike.
- Communities focused on placemaking tend to attract new residents, visitors and investors who are drawn to a strong sense of community and a variety of experiences throughout the area.
- Placemaking initiatives provide a channel through which to connect various areas of the township.

Actions

6.1.1 Introduce simple, inexpensive and universally-designed ground wayfinding system to introduce new colour and life to local streetscapes.

6.1.2 Pilot pedestrian-only zones in connection with major events, as recommended in 5.2.3.

6.1.3 Develop a mandate, with support from the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee, for incorporating multicultural perspectives in informing, defining and leading placemaking initiatives.

6.1.4 Establish and implement a strategy to host performances in key public spaces, which may include a Busker Bylaw.

Desired outcome

- Residents and visitors enjoy the community in harmony. Residents benefit from & understand the value tourism brings to the community.

6.2 Define and pilot placemaking projects to foster a sense of connection between Fergus, Elora and Belwood downtowns.

Rationale

- There is stronger appeal when leaning into complementary narratives and experiences in Elora, Fergus and Belwood.
- Community engagement uncovered a sense of disconnect between the communities, and an opportunity to lean on one another's unique offerings to strengthen Centre Wellington's overall appeal and distribute tourism economic benefits more broadly.

Actions

6.2.1 Utilize the Working Group with the Fergus BIA and Elora BIA (see 5.3.4) to plan and implement cross-community experiences, building upon existing festivals, events and activations.

6.2.2 Develop thematic walking trails and interpretive signage connecting Fergus and Elora, incorporating local history and art to foster a shared experience.

Desired outcome

- There is a well-defined and activated destination brand/narrative that embraces a welcoming and connected community vibe and its nature-based positioning.

6.3 Continue to invest in Township support for local festivals and events.

Rationale

- Festivals and events play a critical role in Centre Wellington's cultural identity, economic vitality, and tourism appeal.
- Establishing enhanced support demonstrates reciprocity and responds directly to a need expressed by festival and event organizers, who report strained capacity and resources.

Actions

6.3.1 Continue to offer and evolve the Community Investment Fund, to support arts & culture, festivals and events.

6.3.2 Host recurring "Culture Summit," as recommended within the Culture Plan, to provide an opportunity for shared learning and connection amongst Centre Wellington's arts and culture groups.

Desired outcome

- There is a well-defined and activated destination brand/narrative that embraces a welcoming and connected community vibe and its nature-based positioning.

6.4 Invest in a Placemaking Strategy for Centre Wellington.

Rationale

- Placemaking provides opportunities for low-capital, high-impact efforts that enhance the social fabric of a community.
- There is an opportunity to leverage placemaking to enhance local life in Centre Wellington for residents, which also enhances the local experience for visitors.
- Placemaking initiatives boost the economic vitality of a specific area, often acting as catalysts for private-sector investment.
- Embracing placemaking as a comprehensive framework for approaching public art, beautification, activation and wayfinding as interconnected solutions enhances the impact in all of these areas.

Actions

6.3.1 Integrate creative and robust community engagement to inform a Placemaking Strategy, including throughout its implementation.

6.3.2 Explore opportunities to include neighbourhood-based and seasonal placemaking projects.

Desired outcome

- There is a well-defined and activated destination brand/narrative that embraces a welcoming and connected community vibe and its nature-based positioning.

PLACEMAKING
Looking further ahead...

- Consider designating formal cultural districts in Elora, Fergus and Belwood that integrate historical preservation with dynamic public spaces, local arts, and creative entrepreneurship, reinforcing a shared identity while celebrating each area's distinct character.
- Determine and implement feasible ways to add interactive elements to existing public art and installations, such as informational QR codes, photo opportunities, virtual or augmented reality experiences, and other creative ideas that encourage active engagement from passers-by.
- Establish a micro-grant program that empowers residents to propose and implement localized placemaking initiatives such as public art installations, street beautification, and cultural programming. Include campaigns to promote this strategy within community-facing marketing initiatives.
- Develop a map of potential locations for public art and other placemaking initiatives (i.e., vacant parcels, façades, streets, etc.), as a base for community activations. Select a minimum of one location per year and define a placemaking pilot project with measurable key performance indicators (KPIs). Enhance or expand the projects, as resources allow, based on impact and performance.
- Explore the viability of a placemaking-driven business incubator program in key public spaces, offering affordable micro-retail spaces, co-working hubs, and mentorship for local artisans, entrepreneurs, and social enterprises.
- Develop a strategy for broader incorporation of green infrastructure across major public spaces. This may include rain gardens, permeable pavements and carbon-neutral street furniture.
- Consider expanding pedestrian-only areas in Elora and Fergus into permanent, year-round shared streets that prioritize walkability, active transportation and public gathering spaces
- Invest in modular infrastructure such as movable performance stages, pop-up market kiosks and interactive art installations to allow for spontaneous activations and diverse community-led initiatives, and to support local festival and event organizers with an expanded collection of resources.

Strategic Pillar 7:

Brand Identity, Marketing & Communications

Brand identity, marketing and communications represent a strategy through which to engage residents, local entrepreneurs and businesses, as well as prospective residents, entrepreneurs, and investors. These interconnected activities play a primary role for a destination in:

- Shaping the perception of the community;
- Building a brand reputation;
- Attracting visitors, residents and investors; and
- Influencing how locals and non-locals alike interact with any given place.

These tactics are also important on a local level for information-sharing and engagement with local and regional businesses, and fostering buy-in and participation in Township-led initiatives among residents.

Ultimately, brand identity and marketing are essential to bringing economic development and tourism initiatives forward, taking Township-led initiatives and connecting them to a need and narrative, appealing to specific audiences. This work plants the seeds that drive interest in the destination. For that reason, the EDTS refers to a "destination brand," combining brand requirements from an economic development and tourism perspective, though activating the destination brand may be different.

Themed itineraries are one example of valuable tourism brand identity and marketing initiatives. These can exist on the website and in print, and shared via various channels; whether social media and newsletters, or at Visitors Centres within the community and beyond. To build notoriety within niche tourism markets, information and inspiration packages are a valuable investment, particularly to promote the community for film tourism, and attract small corporate meetings and events. Specific themes to build upon, based on the Tourism Asset Map (Appendix M) include: nature and outdoor recreation, creativity & the arts, and gastronomy.

A similar approach is applicable to economic development; creating informational resources, presented in refined and digestible formats and with a very clear target audience.

Ideally, marketing initiatives are connected across platforms as relevant, so audiences see an experience or business featured on social media then find more information about it on the relevant website.

At the root of effective destination branding and marketing is a defined brand, which encapsulates logos and visual assets, as well as a defined tone and voice, key messages, target audiences, and storytelling guidelines. A destination brand guides the Township in understanding its unique identity and provides direction for how to effectively communicate said identity through various channels with key target audiences.

Distinguishing a destination brand, complementary but separate from the corporate brand, allows for more flexible, creative and compelling storytelling that municipal corporate brands do not generally allow. A corporate brand is rightfully bureaucratic, which is why a destination brand brings value.

A strong and distinct destination brand elevates Centre Wellington's visibility in the broader competitive market when attracting prospective visitors, investors and entrepreneurs.

Appendix H outlines the current reality of the Township's brand, marketing and communications work, and provides an analysis of these assets to inform EDTS recommendations and actions.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- Absence of dedicated destination brand to support economic development and tourism initiatives (including visual and non-visual brand elements), also resulting in a lack of cohesion between digital and printed resources.
- Both EloraFergus.ca and LiveandWorkCW.com require strategic updates, to better-serve target audiences.
- Approaches to economic development and tourism marketing and promotional initiatives appear more reactive than proactive, impeding success and impact.
- Gap in community-focused marketing initiatives to demonstrate the value and impact of municipal investments and initiatives.
- Lack of capacity amongst many key tourism stakeholders to meaningfully invest in their own marketing initiatives.

[EMPHASIS]

WHAT IS A BRAND, ANYWAY?

A brand is a unique identity and set of characteristics that differentiates a place, product or business from others in the market. “Brand” refers to everything from a name, logo, and visual design to values, mission, and personality. A destination brand represents the perception and reputation of a place in the minds of its defined audiences, investors and ambassadors. Establishing brand guidelines is important to effectively use marketing and storytelling channels— such as websites, brochures, newsletters and social media—to attract target audiences. Here’s how:

Differentiation

A well-defined brand identity helps destinations stand out from the competition. Crafting a brand that accurately represents the essence, values, and offerings allows destinations to create a distinct positioning in the market, whether aiming to attract new residents, investors, or visitors.

Recognition and recall

A strong brand identity increases recognition and recall among target audiences. When prospective audiences can easily identify and remember a destination through consistent branding elements such as voice, story and imagery, it becomes a familiar and trusted entity in their minds. This leads to a higher likelihood of interest and engagement.

Emotional connection

A compelling brand identity has the power to forge an emotional connection with past and prospective visitors, as well as prospective residents. By effectively conveying a destination’s story, values, and unique selling proposition, tap into the hearts and minds of audiences—which is at the root of what drives memorable tourism experiences and compels people when choosing a place to call home.

Trust and credibility

A well-crafted brand identity cultivates trust and credibility. Maintaining consistent and professional branding across all touchpoints communicates a sense of reliability and competence.

Market expansion

A strong brand identity opens doors to new market opportunities. With a compelling brand that resonates with diverse audiences, Centre Wellington attracts attention from a broad range of demographics, regions and markets, ultimately driving growth and revenue.

Consistency and cohesion

A well-defined brand identity creates consistency and cohesion in messaging and visual representation. This consistency fosters a sense of professionalism, reliability, and authenticity.

7.1 Investigate developing a destination brand (separate from the Centre Wellington corporate brand) to promote the destination for economic development and tourism purposes.

Rationale

- A destination brand allows for more flexible, creative and compelling storytelling compared to a corporate brand.
- There is a need for consistency in the presentation of key storytelling and marketing assets, which fosters a sense of credibility, reliability and authenticity.
- A singular destination brand supports the narrative of a united community, working to resolve the perceived separation between Elora, Fergus and Belwood.

Actions

7.1.1 Invest in developing a destination brand, including visual elements, strategy and guidelines, through a community-informed process.

7.1.2 Adopt the destination brand across digital and print economic development and tourism marketing initiatives and activities.

Desired outcome

- There is a well-defined and activated place brand/narrative that embraces a welcoming and connected community vibe and its nature-based positioning.

[CASE STUDY]

DESTINATION BRAND: CAMPBELL RIVER, B.C.

PHOTO CREDIT: destinationthink.com/portfolio/campbell-river/

Campbell River introduced a new brand identity in 2018, developed through extensive community engagement and research. The new brand emphasizes four key elements: authentic wild nature, accessible city amenities, friendly people and First Nations living culture.

Paired with new visual assets, the new brand was implemented across a new brand guide, website update, visitor centre redesign, and an Xcelerator program to align local businesses with the brand story. It also led to updated retail and promotional items, and enhanced appeal of the visitor centre.

The case of Campbell River's brand evolution demonstrates the importance of community involvement, authentic storytelling, and strategic positioning in creating a successful destination brand that ultimately acts as a supporting tool for both economic development and tourism initiatives.

7.2 Invest in enhancing Centre Wellington's *tourism*-focused storytelling, visitor information and marketing assets & resources.

Rationale

- Storytelling and marketing represent a channel through which to expand visitor understanding of things to see and do locally, increasing opportunities for longer stays and greater spending.
- Strengthening and creating consistency between brand and marketing assets enhances brand recognition and trust, ultimately attracting a broader audience.
- Meaningful storytelling helps Centre Wellington establish a stronger reputation within niche tourism markets, such as film tourism and small corporate meetings and events. Tailoring resources to showcase the destination's appeal to these groups helps diversify Centre Wellington's tourism base, attracting new markets and working toward long-term sustainability.
- Utilizing storytelling as a tool supports a deeper understanding and appreciation for a destination, influencing responsible visitor behaviour.

Actions

7.2.1 Invest in ongoing capture of polished and refined photo and video assets featuring key locations within Centre Wellington throughout the seasons, and the diversity of the community & visitors.

7.2.2 Invest in redeveloping elorafergus.ca to adopt a storytelling approach.

7.2.3 Develop theme-based itineraries that facilitate collaboration and partnership among local tourism and hospitality businesses and organizations.

7.2.4 Develop Visitor Information Toolkits for local stakeholders, to enhance their ability to guide & inform visitors.

7.2.5 Create information and inspiration packages for film tourism, and small corporate meetings and events, utilizing themed location databases established through destination development efforts.

7.2.6 Explore partnership opportunities with WHA Publications Ltd., which currently promotes tourism to the area using "Grand and Gorgeous" branding.

Desired outcome

- There is a well-defined and activated place brand/narrative that embraces a welcoming and connected community vibe and its nature-based positioning.

7.3 Invest in dedicated *economic development* storytelling and marketing assets.

Rationale

- Storytelling and marketing represents channels through which to expand current and potential investor, business owner, and resident interest and engagement in the community.
- Current assets, including liveandworkcw.com, benefit from content and format modernization.
- Meaningful storytelling is an important tool to expand Centre Wellington's reputation to niche investment, business and prospective workforce audiences.

Actions

7.3.1 Update existing marketing collateral and content as needed to target investors and the workforce.

7.3.2 Develop content to feature notable economic development opportunities and successes related to investment, business growth and development, community developments that support economic growth and employment in Centre Wellington.

7.3.3 Undertake a website revitalization project for the "Doing Business" section of the Township's corporate website, prioritizing engaging, impactful, and most importantly, user-friendly content and function.

7.3.4 Implement new digital tools, including an online portal, to showcase dynamic and real time information about Centre Wellington and virtual or augmented reality site tours, to support investment attraction efforts.

Desired outcomes

- Centre Wellington has a thriving and diverse business base.
- Centre Wellington has established itself as an innovative community.

7.4 Develop and implement comprehensive economic development and tourism marketing plans on an annual basis, relying on earned and paid tactics.

Rationale

- Storytelling and marketing represent channels through which to expand investor, business owner, and resident interest and engagement in the community.
- Current assets, such as EloraFergus.ca, would benefit from content and format modernization.
- Meaningful storytelling is an important tool to expand Centre Wellington's reputation to niche investment, business and prospective workforce audiences.

Actions

7.4.1 Establish a template and approach for separate annual economic development and tourism marketing plans, particularly focused on campaign and content planning.

7.4.2 *(Tourism)* Incorporate campaigns and initiatives dedicated to influencing and managing visitor behaviour, and promoting responsible travel & tourism, within the annual Campaign Plan (see 7.4.1).

7.4.3 *(Economic Development)* Prepare business attraction ads for key publications in the GTA and SW Ontario, as new development and space becomes available.

7.4.4 Dedicate ongoing staff capacity to economic development and tourism marketing and storytelling efforts, and make destination marketing the responsibility of the new DMO once established.

7.4.5 *(Tourism)* Incorporate co-operative marketing opportunities for local tourism-focused organizations and businesses within the annual Tourism Marketing Plan.

Desired outcome

- There is a well-defined and activated place brand/narrative that embraces a welcoming and connected community vibe and its nature-based positioning.

7.5 Invest in community-focused communication initiatives and marketing campaigns to foster understanding and buy-in to key Township initiatives, strengthen communication channels and nurture welcoming environments.

Rationale

- Clear, consistent and transparent communication fosters connected, welcoming communities.
- Opposition to Township initiatives is often rooted in a lack of understanding.
- Prioritizing community outreach and connections supports buy-in to Township initiatives.

Actions

7.5.1 Develop and launch communications and marketing initiatives focused on relevant topics as outlined in the EDTS.

7.5.2 Develop and launch educational initiatives focused on relevant topics (i.e. how are parking revenues used).

Desired outcome

- Residents and visitors enjoy the community in harmony. Residents benefit from & understand the value tourism brings to the community.

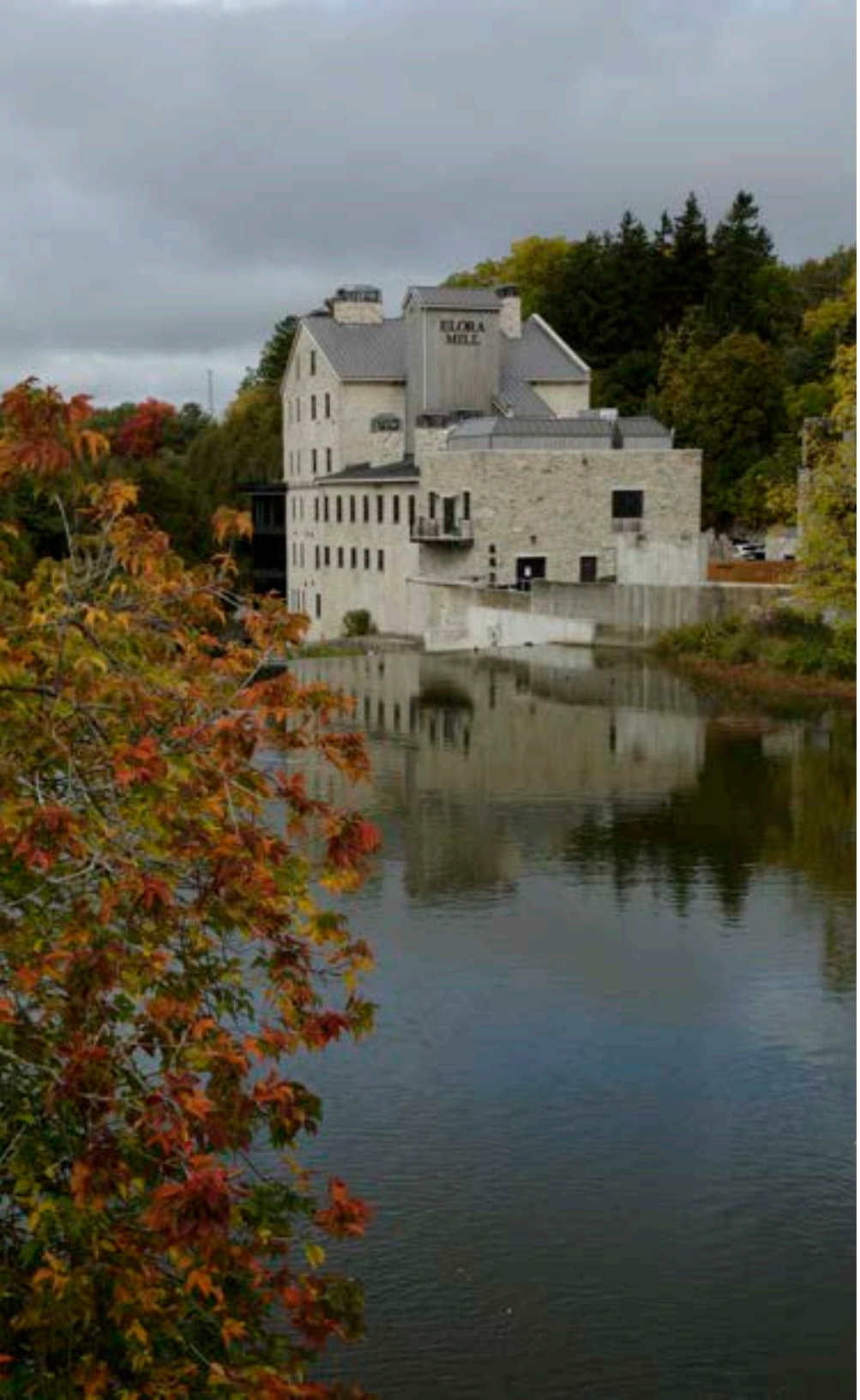
BRAND IDENTITY, MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

Looking further ahead...

- Slowly expand tourism marketing efforts to appeal to prospective visitors from further afield. Explore opportunities to collaborate with Destination Toronto, to feature Elora and Fergus as a potential add-on when hosting familiarization visits with travel trade and travel media.
- Explore the value and viability of participating in large tourism tradeshows, such as Rendez-vous Canada.
- Continue to lead development and investment attraction efforts, as needed, as land becomes available. The Township already has significant interest for commercial space, and its likely demand for available space, especially commercial space, will remain high. Investment attraction costs should only be incurred when space is available but interest is low, or to fill strategic gaps in focus sectors.
- Continue to annually review and refresh the “Doing Business” website and EloraFergus.ca content for accuracy, modernization and ease of use. Continue to monitor and implement novel technological solutions.
- Create a strategy and guidelines for User Generated Content (UGC), to guide efforts for encouraging, curating and crediting UGC to maintain quality and authenticity. Establish a process for collecting, organizing and tracking user-generated content.

Section 5

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN



LEGEND

Priority
This category indicates the suggested timeframe in which each Action is implemented based on priority, if required resources and capacity are made available.

- Short - 1-3 years
- Mid - 4 -6 years
- Long - 7 - 10 years
- *An asterisk (*) means that the Action is ongoing*

Notes:

- The timeframe for implementing the EDTS Recommendations and Actions should be viewed as a starting point rather than a deadline for completion, as most actions are intended to establish a foundation for ongoing, sustainable efforts that will generate long-term impact in economic development and tourism.
- Should resources not support implementation of actions within the ideal timelines noted above, proceed based on priority (complete “short-term” items, followed by “mid” and finally, “long”).

Lead Team
This category indicates the internal party responsible for leading the implementation of each associated Action.

Internal Support Networks
This category indicates internal parties/departments to engage or involved in implementing each associated Action.

External Support Networks
This category indicates external parties, who have a shared common interest in supporting the action, who should be engaged or involved in implementing each associated Action. See the table on the following page.

Table 3: Legend, External Support Networks

EXTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	EXPLANATION
BIAs	Elora and Fergus Business Improvement Areas
BIA Working Group	A Working Group with the Fergus BIA and Elora BIA, as recommended in the "Destination Development and Visitor Management" pillar.
BCGW	Business Centre Guelph Wellington
Business Community	Businesses located within the township
Commercial Property Owners	Those who own commercial properties in the township
County	Wellington County (Municipal Organization)
Cultural Roundtable	As recommended in the Culture Action Plan (regular informal arts sector meetups (i.e. quarterly or biannually) to foster and strengthen relationships amongst CW arts and culture groups)
CWCC	Centre Wellington Chamber of Commerce
GRCA	Grand River Conservation Authority
Library	Wellington County Libraries throughout the township
LIP	Guelph-Wellington Local Immigration Partnership
MEDJCTE	Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade Export
Media	Local media sources (i.e., the Wellington Advertiser, EloraFergusToday.com, CTV, Global News, Grand 101, etc.)
Owners of Underutilized Lots	As suggested, specifically as it relates to lots that may be used as prospective parking solutions
Post Secondaries	University of Guelph, University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University, Conestoga College)
Realtors	Residential and Industrial, Commercial & Investment (ICI) Realtors
Relevant Partners	Partners relevant to the action, as determined by the Township
Regional Municipalities	Cities of Guelph, Kitchener, Cambridge, Waterloo, Wellington County member municipalities
RTO4	Regional Tourism Organization 4
School Boards	Upper Grand District School Board and Wellington Catholic District School Board
Service Clubs	Belwood & District Lions Club, Centre Wellington Optimist Club-Fergus, Elora Lions, Fergus Lions Club, South Wellington Community Lions Club, Rotary Club of Fergus Elora
Tourism Stakeholders	Businesses or organizers that serve visitors (i.e., retailers, experience providers, restaurants, accommodators, festival & event organizers, etc.)
Utility Providers	Natural gas, internet providers
WWCF	Wellington Waterloo Community Futures

1. CAPACITY

RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTIONS	PRIORITY	LEAD TEAM(S)	INTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	EXTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	BUDGET NEEDS	KPIS
1.1 Invest in expanding organizational capacity for economic development and tourism initiatives, including staffing, tools and financial resources.						
1.1.1 Expand staff complement for economic development and tourism to align with similar-sized communities and explore opportunities for departmental synergies.	Short/ Mid	Office of the CAO	HR Economic Development Tourism			- Increase in dedicated staff FTEs for economic development and tourism - Time saved/capacity gained from new technology or tool implementation - Staff satisfaction and capacity to meet workload demands (tracked via internal feedback or reviews) - Revenue collected from tourism-adjacent initiatives (paid parking, STR fees, etc.)
1.1.2 Explore utilization of technology to automate work and increase efficiency to reduce workload.	Short	Economic Development Tourism			Automation & technology tools ($-$$)	
1.1.3 Direct a portion of funds collected from tourism-adjacent initiatives to tourism investments and expanded staff complement.	Mid*	Finance	Tourism Economic Development Planning & Development Office of the CAO			
1.2 Establish an Internal Working Group ('EDTS Working Group'), including leadership from various Township departments, to foster ongoing collaboration, align efforts and maximize the impact of EDTS implementation.						
1.2.1 Develop a clear mandate outlining the Working Group's role in aligning economic development and tourism efforts across departments, also considering priorities with other Township strategies	Short*	Economic Development Tourism				- Commitment of Working Group to mandate - Team participation rate across departments represented in the Working Group - Team satisfaction with internal collaboration and alignment efforts (gathered via feedback or survey)
1.2.2 Create and implement a structured collaboration roadmap aligned with the EDTS's key priorities.		EDTS Working Group				
1.2.3 Conduct an annual review of Working Group activities, assessing effectiveness and identifying and implementing opportunities for process improvements.		EDTS Working Group				

RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTIONS	PRIORITY	LEAD TEAM(S)	INTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	EXTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	BUDGET NEEDS	KPIS
1.3 Implement a Municipal Accommodation Tax.						
1.3.1 Invest in a robust education and engagement campaign regarding the Municipal Accommodation Tax.	Short	Tourism	Office of the CAO Communications		Third party support ($$$)	- Success of MAT Education and Engagement (collected via participant surveys) - Number of stakeholders engaged in MAT education and engagement processes (by group) - % of accommodators using provided remittance tools and resources - On-time MAT remittance rate - MAT dollars collected - Frequency of MAT performance reporting to stakeholders (e.g., quarterly, bi-annually) - Stakeholder and community awareness of MAT investments and impacts (measured via survey or engagement feedback) - Increase in dedicated staff FTEs for tourism - Visitor arrivals (by origin, type of visit, time of year) - Visitor spending (per sector, time of year, per visitor origin, etc.) - Number of visitors staying in commercial accommodation, short-term rentals - Duration of visit and occupancy rate, including based on time of year - Growth of new visitor experiences and product offerings (annual) - Growth of tourism private sector revenue - Growth of collaborative tourism experience initiatives - Growth of stakeholder participation (in experience development) - Tourism dispersal (throughout the township, throughout the year) - Visitor satisfaction - Economic impact of tourism
1.3.2 Utilize findings from the education and engagement campaign to inform a MAT Implementation Strategy.	Short*	Tourism	Office of the CAO Communications			
1.3.3 Establish a DMO, as recommended within the MAT Implementation Plan.	Short	Office of the CAO	Tourism Economic Development			
1.3.4 Develop tools, resources and education needed for accommodators, to facilitate hassle-free MAT remittance.	Short*	Tourism	Legislative Services Office of the CAO			
1.3.5 Define a clear process for ongoing communication and reporting to share MAT successes and investments.	Short*	Tourism	Finance Office of the CAO Planning and Development			

RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTIONS	PRIORITY	LEAD TEAM(S)	INTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	EXTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	BUDGET NEEDS	KPIS
1.4 Enhance economic development and tourism data collection.						
1.4.1 Create a document to track and monitor key performance measurements to monitor outcomes of the strategy annually and change tactics as necessary.	Short*	Economic Development Tourism	Community Services Communications Planning & Development Office of the CAO			- Development and usage of internal KPI tracking and performance measurement document - Participation rates of surveys conducted annually (business, visitor) and every two years (resident/ community) - Levels of resident, business, community, and visitor sentiment and satisfaction rates
1.4.2 Complete an annual business survey to inform strategic decision-making and business-focused investments & initiatives.	Short*	Economic Development	Tourism	RTO4		
1.4.3 Continue to invest in mobile data to track tourism arrivals and behaviours, via the exiting RTO4 service on an annual basis.	Short*	Economic Development			Data collection services, via third party support ($-$$)	
1.4.4 Explore options to acquire point of sale data on an annual basis, to track visitor spending habits.	Short*	Tourism				
1.4.5 Introduce a regular Resident Satisfaction survey, to identify concerns related to tourism and economic growth and inform solutions-oriented initiatives.	Mid*	Tourism	Economic Development			
1.4.6 Expand the existing Visitor Survey for scenario-based data collection.	Mid*	Tourism				
1.4.7 Invest in a Tourism Economic Impact Study, every four years.	Mid*	Tourism	Finance Planning & Development		Third party support ($)	

2. ECONOMIC GROWTH & RESILIENCE

RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTIONS	PRIORITY	LEAD TEAM(S)	INTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	EXTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	BUDGET NEEDS	KPIS
2.1 Work with partners to raise the profile of small business and entrepreneurship opportunities available to the community.						
2.1.1 Encourage residents to explore entrepreneurship-related resources.	Short	Economic Development/ BCGW/WWCF	Communications Community Development Library	Media CWCC BIAs Realtors Service Clubs	Social media ($)	-New business start ups - all and in target areas -New youth business start ups - all and in target areas -Webpage visits -Booth visits at community events -Participation in related programming.
2.1.2 Develop an ongoing storytelling campaign to raise the profile of local entrepreneurship as a career.	Short	Economic Development/ BCGW/WWCF	Communications Tourism	School Boards Media CWCC BIAs Realtors Service Clubs	Social media ($)	
2.1.3 Establish a consistent presence with the Business Centre Guelph-Wellington in the community.	Mid*	Economic Development/ BCGW/WWCF	Tourism	CWCC BIAs	Partnership ($-$$)	
2.1.4 Work with Business Centre Guelph-Wellington to establish a “for youth, by youth” entrepreneurship competition.	Mid*	Economic Development/ BCGW/WWCF	Tourism	School Boards Media CWCC BIAs	Prizes or prize money ($-$$)	

RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTIONS	PRIORITY	LEAD TEAM(S)	INTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	EXTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	BUDGET NEEDS	KPIS
2.2 Undertake a regular business visitation program to monitor the health and needs of the business community.						
2.2.1 Finalize the design and resourcing of a business visitation program for Centre Wellington.	Short	Economic Development	Tourism Planning & Development	BCGW WWCF CWCC		- Number of critical issues/ opportunities addressed and related outcomes - Number of business relationships established - Participation rate in activity
2.2.2 Conduct a benchmarking business visitation program to gather baseline data.	Short	Economic Development	Tourism Planning & Development	BCGW WWCF CWCC	Additional staffing ($$)	
2.2.3 Establish an ongoing business visitation program with consistent metrics, prioritizing key sectors identified in this strategy.	Mid*	Economic Development	Tourism Planning & Development	BCGW WWCF CWCC		
2.2.4 Monitor and analyze data to identify trends, inform service delivery, and evaluate strategy impacts.	Mid*	Economic Development	Tourism Planning & Development	BCGW WWCF CWCC		
2.3 Work with partners to enhance and promote virtual and in-person resources to help businesses in Centre Wellington start, grow, thrive, and innovate.						
2.3.1 Establish a bi-annual meeting with Support Network members to engage in planning for local initiatives and activities that support small business and entrepreneurship growth.	Short*	Economic Development		BCGW WWCF CWCC Post Secondaries BIAs	Convening budget ($)	- New business start ups - all and in target areas - New youth business start ups - all and in target areas - Business expansions - Export activity - Participation in related programming - New products, services, and processes developed by businesses in programming
2.3.2 Develop a relationship with the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade Export Staff to explore the development of workshops and promotion of resources and services related to exporting in new markets.	Short	Economic Development	Tourism Planning & Development	MEDJCTE CWCC	Convening budget ($)	

RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTIONS	PRIORITY	LEAD TEAM(S)	INTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	EXTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	BUDGET NEEDS	KPIS
2.3.3 Work with partners to support the hosting of sector-based networking/ discussion events related to opportunities and challenges that businesses are facing.	Short	Economic Development/ CWCC	Tourism	BCGW WWCF	Convening budget ($)	
2.3.4 Collaborate with support network partners to plan an annual series of business development events tailored to supporting business start-up and expansion needs within the community.	Mid	Economic Development	Tourism	BCGW WWCF CWCC Post Secondaries BIAs	Convening budget ($) Partnership budget ($)	
2.3.5 Establish a calendar of local and regional events and workshops geared to supporting business growth and development on the corporate website.	Mid	Economic Development	Tourism	BCGW WWCF CWCC Post Secondaries BIAs	Additional staffing ($$)	
2.3.6 Establish and enhance relationships with the Universities of Guelph and Waterloo to integrate their innovation programming/support into the local business development support environment.	Mid	Economic Development		BCGW WWCF CWCC Post Secondaries BIAs	Additional staffing ($$)	
2.3.7 Establish a “side gig”-style program open to residents with business ideas they want to develop, with a focus on youth and young adults.	Long	Economic Development/ BCGW	Tourism Planning & Development	WWCF	Training, mentorship, and seed funding ($-$$)	

RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTIONS	PRIORITY	LEAD TEAM(S)	INTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	EXTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	BUDGET NEEDS	KPIS
2.4 Establish a meaningful relationship with the Elora Research Station and the University of Guelph to capitalize on student interest in the agricultural sector, research activities and the desire to better connect to the local and regional community.						
2.4.1 Meet with the University of Guelph and Elora Research Station staff to begin establishing a relationship.	Short	Economic Development		University of Guelph		- Participation in related programming - Employment in agriculture and agriculture adjacent sectors - New businesses in agriculture and agriculture adjacent sectors - Expanding businesses in agriculture and agriculture adjacent sectors - University-based spin off businesses
2.4.2 Promote opportunities to leverage the research and innovation services of the University of Guelph, and eventually the Research Station, to the business community.	Short*	Economic Development		University of Guelph	Additional staffing ($$)	
2.4.3 Act as a liaison to bring the needs, opportunities and challenges of the agricultural sector to the University and Research Station staff.	Mid*	Economic Development		University of Guelph		
2.4.4 Explore opportunities to support and connect any development of community and innovation space at the Elora Research Station to the needs of the local agricultural sector.	Mid*	Economic Development Office of the CAO		University of Guelph		

3. WORKFORCE & LIVABILITY

RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTIONS	PRIORITY	LEAD TEAM(S)	INTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	EXTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	BUDGET NEEDS	KPIS
3.1 Work with partners to expand and advocate for increased local, regional and inter-urban transit connections, and into Guelph and Kitchener-Waterloo.						
3.1.1 Connect with third party transportation services to explore opportunities to promote driver recruitment.	Short	Office of the CAO	Communications		Promotion ($)	- Businesses and residents identify transportation as a barrier less frequently - Businesses can access the labour they need
3.1.2 Leverage the business visitation program to support route mapping and provide an ongoing feedback mechanism on transit solutions for business.	Short*	Economic Development	Planning & Development	County	Possible transit expansion contribution ($-$$)	
3.1.3 Undertake a Community Transit Feasibility Study, with a key focus on employment and connections to education & services.	Mid	Infrastructure Services	Economic Development Community Development Planning & Development Office of the CAO	County Cities of Guelph, Kitchener and Waterloo	Third party support ($$$-$$$$)	
3.2 Dedicate resources to support the development of workforce attainable-housing, through the promotion of financial incentives and education.						
3.2.1 Develop an engaging promotional campaign to highlight the Rental Housing Grant, which is a stream of the CIP.	Short*	Communications	Community Development	Media Realtors	Promotion ($)	- New housing units built - New affordable housing units built - Uptake of Rental Housing and Tax Increment Grant CIPs - Anecdotally, housing is less of a barrier to attracting workforce
3.2.2 Develop a website to promote the Rental Housing Grant campaign and other Community Improvement Plan programs that support the development of attainable housing. Include resources for employers on improving housing options for staff.	Mid*	Economic Development	Planning & Development Communications	County	Possible transit expansion contribution ($-$$)	

RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTIONS	PRIORITY	LEAD TEAM(S)	INTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	EXTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	BUDGET NEEDS	KPIS
3.3 Implement strategies that foster equity and belonging within the community.						
3.3.1 Expand the New Resident reception in location and scope.	Short*	Community Development	Economic Development	LIP CWCC	Event ($)	- Community attitudes towards newcomers - Newcomer perceptions of the community
3.3.2 Profile and showcase newcomers' contribution and impact in the community using Township communication channels.	Mid	Community Development	Economic Development Communications	LIP	Content development ($), if required	
3.3.3 Create a peer connection program to connect new residents with existing ones, enhancing the sense of belonging while also supporting resident retention, workforce stability, and long-term community growth.	Long*	Community Development		LIP Service Clubs	Promotion ($)	
3.4 Invest in creating paths and spaces for youth to build tangible connections to the community and employers, as well as contribute to a leadership role in developing the Centre Wellington of tomorrow.						
3.4.1 Explore the conversion of existing Township-managed spaces into teen-friendly zones.	Mid*	Community Development	Community Services Infrastructure Services Economic Development	School Boards Library	Physical space conversion ($-$$) Supportive programming ($-$$)	- Population under 18 - Population under 30 - New youth-led (under 30) businesses - Youth connections to local employment
3.4.2 Work with local schools to establish a platform for building connections between employers and youth.	Long*	Economic Development	Community Development	School Boards	Convening and events budget ($-$$)	
3.5 Create and enhance connections to post-secondary institutions to encourage employers to utilize cooperative education and internship talent.						
3.5.1 Establish a relationship between the Township and Cooperative Education and Student Success management staff at post-secondary institutions to promote local employment opportunities.	Mid*	Economic Development	Community Development	Post Secondaries		- Anecdotal evidence from employers of recruitment success - Number of successful student – employer connections
3.5.2 Work with partners to pilot a familiarization tour of the township to showcase entrepreneurship and employment options within Centre Wellington and across Wellington County to the post-secondary student base.	Long*	Economic Development	Community Development Tourism	CWCC Post Secondaries	Familiarization tour ($-$$)	
3.5.3 Develop a "Meet the Employers" night for post-secondary students.	Long*	Economic Development		CWCC Post Secondaries	Familiarization tour ($-$$)	

4. INVESTMENT READINESS & INFRASTRUCTURE

RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTIONS	PRIORITY	LEAD TEAM(S)	INTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	EXTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	BUDGET NEEDS	KPIS
4.1 Explore and advocate for mechanisms to improve industrial and commercial infrastructure provision within the township. This includes the internet, cell signal, hydro, roads, bridges and natural gas.						
4.1.1 Work with regional partners and utility companies to quantify the need for each infrastructure element (e.g. hydro, water, sewage, natural gas, internet, cell phone network) and identify which requires enhancement.	Short	Economic Development	Infrastructure Services Office of the CAO	Wellington County Regional Municipalities Utility Providers		- % increase in infrastructure provision - Annual business survey indicates satisfaction with roads is increasing - Industrial land strategy is developed
4.1.2 Advocate for the consideration of business needs in the implementation of the Transportation Master Plan.	Mid	Economic Development	Infrastructure Services			
4.1.3 Connect with utility providers and the Provincial government, including small providers, to advocate for improved service delivery.	Mid	Economic Development	Office of the CAO	Wellington County Regional Municipalities Utility Providers		
4.1.4 Develop an industrial land development strategy to increase the amount of available employment land.	Long	Economic Development	Planning & Development		Third party support ($$$)	
4.2 Facilitate the development of spaces for new and expanding commercial and industrial businesses to locate, including the development of commercial and industrial malls. Base these decisions on the identified needs of the business community.						
4.2.1 Incorporate an investment attraction strategy around commercial and industrial mall development into the Marketing Plan (see 7.4.1).	Short	Economic Development		Media Realtors	Trade show attendance ($) Promotional campaign ($)	- Number of new industrial and commercial spaces developed - Value of new industrial and commercial spaces developed -Tax assessment
4.2.2 Create targeted marketing materials to support investment attraction for commercial and industrial mall development.	Mid	Economic Development	Communications			

RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTIONS	PRIORITY	LEAD TEAM(S)	INTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	EXTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	BUDGET NEEDS	KPIS
4.2.3 Establish communications with industrial and commercial developers to promote and educate them on local opportunities for development.	Mid	Economic Development			Lead generation firm ($$)	- Number of new industrial and commercial spaces developed - Value of new industrial and commercial spaces developed -Tax assessment
4.2.4 Increase the budget allocated to the CIP program to encourage larger, transformational projects.	Long	Economic Development	Corporate Services Planning & Development		CIP investment ($$$$)	
4.3 Improve communications on planning and building processes and the Community Improvement Plan (CIP) to the business community.						
4.3.1 Develop an online roadmap to promote understanding of, and guide users through, the planning and building processes and the CIP programs within the community.	Short*	Planning & Development	Economic Development	Business Community	Third party support, if required ($$-$$$)	- Value of new investment - Survey feedback on business satisfaction with processes - CIP program utilization
4.3.2 Develop an evaluation process for planning and building processes.	Mid*	Planning & Development	Economic Development			
4.3.3 Provide concierge services to businesses going through planning and building processes, eventually guided by a matrix to determine which businesses require additional support.	Mid*	Economic Development	Planning & Development			
4.3.4 Host an annual event to inform the business community about planning and building processes.	Long*	Planning & Development	Economic Development Communications		Event	
4.4 Undertake targeted retail, service and entertainment investment attraction to meet community needs.						
4.4.1 Evaluate and promote upcoming vacant properties to targeted needs and retail, service, and entertainment gaps in the community.	Mid	Economic Development	Communications	BIAs Commercial Property Owners Realtors		- Number of new businesses in target sectors vs available vacancies -Local business mix meets the needs of the community (sentiment survey)

5. DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT & VISITOR MANAGEMENT

RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTIONS	PRIORITY	LEAD TEAM(S)	INTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	EXTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	BUDGET NEEDS	KPIS
5.1 Explore opportunities to expand the Elora-Fergus Downtown Shuttle Program, and pilot shuttle service connecting the downtowns to primary visitor markets.						
5.1.1 Utilize MAT education and engagement initiatives to explore funding for the expanded shuttle program.	Short	Tourism	Office of the CAO Planning & Development			- Shuttle demand and usership, based on: time of year, time of day, day of week, route (local, inter-community), etc. - Shuttle user profile (i.e., locals vs visitors) - Parking occupancy rates (downtown, peripheral/ shared lots) - Traffic congestion - Resident satisfaction with downtown congestion and visitor impacts
5.1.2 Explore expanding and adapting Elora-Fergus Downtown Shuttle Program, based on demand.	Short*	Tourism	Planning & Development			
5.1.3 Pilot expanding the existing Elora-Fergus Downtown Shuttle Program to include Fridays and expanded hours.	Short*	Tourism	Planning & Development		Expanded shuttle service ($$$$)	
5.1.4 Pilot an Inter-Community Shuttle Program connecting Elora and Fergus to nearby communities (i.e., Toronto, Guelph, Kitchener, Hamilton) during shoulder season, to support year-round visitor arrivals.	Long*	Tourism	Planning & Development	RTO4	Inter-Community Shuttle Service Resources ($$$)	
5.1.5 Explore opportunities to integrate the Inter-Community Pilot Shuttle with Visitor Passes (see 5.3.5) and/or thematic experiences, such as an Elora Downtown to Raceway pilot.	Long*	Tourism		RTO4 County		
5.2 Implement creative visitor management tactics to curb overtourism and mitigate the challenges tourism brings to Centre Wellington's urban centres.						
5.2.1 Implement paid parking, exclusively applicable to visitors, as recommended in the Downtown Municipal Parking Strategy. Invest in free parking for residents.	Short	Planning & Development	Office of the CAO Tourism		Paid parking tactics (i.e., parking machines, mobile app, joint use agreements, etc.) ($$$$)	- Paid parking revenues - Parking occupancy rates - Increase in shuttle use connected to expanded or shared parking areas (if applicable) - Days/hours pedestrian-only zones are activated - Stakeholder sales during pedestrian-only hours - Visitor satisfaction with access, movement, and amenities (peak season) - Resident satisfaction
5.2.2 Explore the possibility of establishing sharing agreements with owners of underutilized lots to expand visitor parking solutions during high season and major events, as recommended in the Downtown Municipal Parking Strategy. Adapt shuttle accordingly.	Short*	Planning & Development	Tourism Community Services Office of the CAO	Owners of underutilized lots		

RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTIONS	PRIORITY	LEAD TEAM(S)	INTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	EXTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	BUDGET NEEDS	KPIS
5.2.3 Pilot pedestrian-only areas during high season and major events.	Short*	Planning & Development	Tourism			
5.2.4 Establish solutions for traffic management during high season and major events.	Short*	Planning & Development	Tourism	County	Traffic management solutions ($$-$$$)	
5.2.5 Invest in additional resources and capacity to manage waste and maintain public toilets during high season and major events.	Short*	Planning & Development	Tourism	County RTO4	Additional staff ($$)	
5.2.6 Explore opportunities to expand the Elora and Fergus Downtown Shuttle, as recommended in 5.1.	Short*	Tourism	Planning & Development	RTO4	See 5.1.	
5.3 Dedicate resources to enhanced tourism experience development, in partnership with local stakeholders in urban and rural areas.						
5.3.1 Provide education, coaching and ideation services to local stakeholders, to support creative experience development.	Mid*	Tourism		County RTO4	Third party support, as required ($)	- Visitor arrivals (by origin, type of visit, time of year) - Visitor spending (per sector, time of year, visitor origin, etc.) - Number of visitors staying in commercial accommodation, short-term rentals - Duration of visit and occupancy rate (incl. based on time of year) - Annual growth of new visitor experiences/tourism product - Growth of tourism sector revenue (private) - Growth of collaborative tourism experience initiatives - Growth of stakeholder participation (in experience development) - Tourism dispersal (throughout township, throughout year) - Stakeholder satisfaction among partners involved in experience development initiatives - Visitor satisfaction - Economic impact of tourism
5.3.2 Develop themed content and itineraries featuring destinations and experiences throughout the township, to appeal to various interests (see 7.2.3).	Mid*	Tourism	Communications		Third party support, as required ($)	
5.3.3 Develop themed Location and Resource Databases for each: 1. small corporate meetings and events, and 2. film, to support niche product market development.	Mid*	Tourism	Economic Development Communications	County RTO4	Third party support, as required ($)	
5.3.4 Establish a Working Group with the Fergus BIA and Elora BIA ('BIA Working Group'), with a mandate for shared visioning, complementary experience development and marketing.	Mid*	Tourism	Economic Development	County RTO4 BIAs		
5.3.5 Explore opportunities to create multiple thematic Visitor Passes with local and neighbouring businesses, integrating visitor experiences and services offerings.	Mid*	Tourism	Economic Development Communications	County RTO4 Tourism Stakeholders		

RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTIONS	PRIORITY	LEAD TEAM(S)	INTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	EXTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	BUDGET NEEDS	KPIS
5.4 Activate the Fergus Grand Theatre as a tourism asset while enhancing its role as a driver of arts and culture in the community.						
5.4.1 Explore partnerships with existing local & regional music and film-based event organizers to host satellite performances and complementary experiences at the Theatre.	Mid*	Tourism	Community Services Cultural Roundtable	Event and Festival Organizers	Potential partnership contributions ($)	- Number days of year Theatre is activated - Attendance of theatre events - Visitor arrivals (by origin, type of visit, time of year) - Visitor spending (per sector, time of year, per visitor origin, etc.) - Duration of visit and occupancy rate, including based on time of year
5.4.2 Explore a pilot project to host a professional theatre group for a summer run with complementary dinner packages.	Mid	Tourism	Community Services	Professional Theatre Group Tourism Stakeholders	Professional theatre group ($$-$$$)	
5.4.3 Include the Theatre within marketing and promotional resources developed to target film and small corporate meetings & events (see 5.3.3 and 7.2.5).	Mid*	Tourism	Community Services Communications		See 7.4.1.	
5.4.4 Evaluate the feasibility of retrofitting the Theatre to screen movies. If feasible, screen when theatre is available with a focus on engaging youth.	Long	Tourism	Community Services		Third party support ($)	
5.5 Continue to invest in regenerative and sustainable tourism initiatives.						
5.5.1 Continue to implement the Sustainability Action Plan developed for Centre Wellington by the Global Destination Sustainability Movement (GDS-Movement); most notably, business-facing initiatives focused on sustainable tourism knowledge sharing and practices.	Short*	Tourism				- Number of actions implemented from GDS Index Sustainability Action Plan - Number of stakeholders engaged in sustainability-related programs or initiatives - Reach and engagement of responsible visitor behaviour campaigns (i.e., impressions, shares, views) - Number of placemaking initiatives implemented with a focus on equity, inclusion, or local entrepreneurship - Stakeholder satisfaction with sustainability support and resources - GDS Index Score
5.5.2 Collaborate with willing partners to develop educational campaigns and content focused on responsible visitor behaviour (see 7.4.2).	Mid*	Tourism	Communications	Relevant Partners (i.e., GRCA)	See 7.4.1.	
5.5.3 Invest in placemaking initiatives that help to strengthen the social fabric, highlight local entrepreneurs, and provide historically marginalized communities with platforms for storytelling and connection. (See 6.1.)	Long*	Community Services	Tourism DEI Committee		See 6.1.	

6. PLACEMAKING

RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTIONS	PRIORITY	LEAD TEAM(S)	INTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	EXTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	BUDGET NEEDS	KPIS
6.1 Implement a strategy to define and pilot placemaking projects to activate public spaces, helping to strengthen the social fabric, highlight local entrepreneurs, and provide platforms for storytelling and connection to a culturally diversifying community. (See also 5.5.)						
6.1.1 Introduce simple, inexpensive and universally-designed ground wayfinding system to introduce new colour and life to local streetscapes.	Mid*	Planning & Development	Tourism Community Services		Ground wayfinding systems ($)	- Number of placemaking pilot projects implemented annually - Number of public spaces activated through performances, art, or installations - Number of initiatives informed by multicultural perspectives or led in collaboration with equity-seeking groups - Community satisfaction with activated public spaces - Foot traffic in areas with placemaking interventions (where applicable - visitors vs residents) - Stakeholder participation in placemaking planning and activation (entrepreneurs, artists, cultural leaders) - Foot traffic in nearby retail establishments
6.1.2 Pilot pedestrian-only zones in connection with major events, as recommended in 5.2.3.	Mid*	Planning & Development	Tourism		See 5.2.3.	
6.1.3 Develop a mandate, with support from the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee, for incorporating multicultural perspectives in informing, defining and leading placemaking initiatives.	Mid*	Community Services	Tourism DEI Committee			
6.1.4 Establish and implement a strategy to host performances in key public spaces, which may include a Busker Bylaw.	Long	Community Services	Tourism			
6.2 Define and pilot placemaking projects to foster a sense of connection between Fergus, Elora and Belwood downtowns.						
6.2.1 Utilize the Working Group with the Fergus BIA and Elora BIA (see 5.3.4) to plan and implement cross-community experiences, building upon existing festivals, events and activations.	Mid*	Tourism	Community Services	BIA Working Group Cultural Roundtable		- Number of collaborative placemaking projects initiated through the BIA Working Group and/or Cultural Roundtable - Establishment and usage of thematic trails and interpretive signage (measured through visitation estimates or trail counters, if applicable) - Resident and visitor perception of connection between downtown Fergus and Elora (collected via Community Sentiment Survey) - Overall resident sentiment
6.2.2 Develop thematic walking trails and interpretive signage connecting Fergus and Elora, incorporating local history and art to foster a shared experience.	Long*	Tourism	Community Services	BIAs		

RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTIONS	PRIORITY	LEAD TEAM(S)	INTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	EXTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	BUDGET NEEDS	KPIS
6.3 Continue to invest in Township support for local festivals and events.						
6.3.1 Continue to offer and evolve the Community Investment Fund, to support arts & culture, festivals and events.	Short*	Community Services	Tourism			- Number of applications for Community Investment Fund - Number of participants in Culture Summit
6.3.2 Host recurring "Culture Summit," as recommended within the Culture Plan, to provide an opportunity for shared learning and connection amongst CW's arts and culture groups.	Short/ Mid*	Community Services	Tourism			
6.4 Invest in a Placemaking Strategy for Centre Wellington.						
6.4.1 Integrate creative and robust community engagement to inform a Placemaking Strategy, including throughout its implementation.	Long	Community Services	Economic Development Tourism			- Community satisfaction with activated public spaces (collected via Community Satisfaction survey) - Overall resident sentiment - Number of placemaking pilot projects implemented annually - Number of public spaces activated through performances, art, or installations - Number of initiatives informed by multicultural perspectives or led in collaboration with equity-seeking groups - Foot traffic in areas with placemaking interventions (where applicable) - Stakeholder participation in placemaking planning and activation (entrepreneurs, artists, cultural leaders) - Community participation in placemaking planning and activation
6.4.2 Include neighbourhood-based and seasonal placemaking projects.	Long	Community Services	Economic Development Tourism			

7. BRAND IDENTITY, MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTIONS	PRIORITY	LEAD TEAM(S)	INTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	EXTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	BUDGET NEEDS	KPIS
7.1 Investigate developing a destination brand, separate from the Centre Wellington corporate brand, to promote the destination for economic development and tourism purposes.						
7.1.1 Invest in developing a destination brand, including visual elements, strategy and guidelines, through a community-informed process.	Mid	Economic Development Tourism Communications			Third party support ($$-$$$)	- Development and implementation of a Destination Brand - Adoption rate of the new destination brand across marketing platforms (digital, print, etc.) - Stakeholder satisfaction with the brand development process and outcomes - Brand awareness and recognition among target audiences - Evaluation completed on long-term naming transition (e.g., Elora-Fergus to Centre Wellington) - Consumer brand awareness of Centre Wellington/Elora-Fergus
7.1.2 Adopt the destination brand across digital and print economic development and tourism marketing initiatives and activities.	Mid	Economic Development Tourism Communications				
7.2 Invest in enhancing Centre Wellington's tourism-focused storytelling, visitor information and marketing assets & resources.						
7.2.1 Invest in ongoing capture of polished and refined photo and video assets featuring key locations within Centre Wellington throughout the seasons, and the diversity of the community & visitors.	Short*	Tourism	Communications		Third party support ($$)	- Website engagement metrics (page views, time on site, itinerary downloads/views, bounce rates, etc.) - Number of theme-based itineraries developed and distributed annually (print and digital) - Number of film & meetings/events groups hosted - Stakeholder satisfaction with marketing tools, promotional support - Visitor arrivals (by origin, type of visit, time of year) - Visitor spending (per sector, time of year, per visitor origin, etc.) - Number of visitors staying in commercial accommodation, short-term rentals - Duration of visit and occupancy rate, including based on time of year - Tourism dispersal (throughout the township, throughout the year) - Visitor satisfaction - Economic impact of tourism
7.2.2 Invest in redeveloping elorafergus.ca to adopt a storytelling approach.	Short/ Mid*	Tourism	Economic Development Community Services Communications	RTO4	Third party support ($$)	
7.2.3 Develop theme-based itineraries that facilitate collaboration and partnership among local tourism and hospitality businesses and organizations.	Mid*	Tourism		BIA Working Group Tourism Stakeholders	Printed collateral ($)	

RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTIONS	PRIORITY	LEAD TEAM(S)	INTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	EXTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	BUDGET NEEDS	KPIS
7.2.4 Develop Visitor Information Toolkits for local stakeholders, to enhance their ability to guide & inform visitors.	Mid*	Tourism	Communications	Tourism Stakeholders	Printed collateral ($)	
7.2.5 Create information and inspiration packages for film tourism, and small corporate meetings and events, utilizing themed location databases established through destination development efforts.	Long	Tourism		Tourism Stakeholders	Collateral development, marketing & outreach initiatives ($)	
7.2.6 Explore partnership opportunities with WHA Publications Ltd., which currently promotes tourism to the area using "Grand and Gorgeous" branding.	Long	Tourism		WHA Publications		
7.3 Invest in dedicated economic development storytelling and marketing assets.						
7.3.1 Update existing marketing collateral and content as needed to target investors and the workforce.	Short	Economic Development	Communications Tourism			- Engagement with promotional content - Number of inquiries - New investment
7.3.2 Develop content to feature notable economic development opportunities and successes related to investment, business growth and development, community developments that support economic growth and employment in Centre Wellington.	Mid*	Economic Development	Communications Tourism		Content development ($) Marketing ($)	
7.3.3 Undertake a website revitalization project for the "Doing Business" section of the Township's corporate website, prioritizing engaging, impactful, and most importantly, user-friendly content and function.	Mid	Economic Development	Corporate Services			
7.3.4 Implement new digital tools, including an online portal, to showcase dynamic and real time information about Centre Wellington and virtual or augmented reality site tours, to support investment attraction efforts.	Long	Economic Development	Corporate Services		Digital tools ($) Content development ($$)	

RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTIONS	PRIORITY	LEAD TEAM(S)	INTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	EXTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	BUDGET NEEDS	KPIS
7.4 Develop and implement comprehensive economic development and tourism marketing plans on an annual basis, relying on earned and paid tactics.						
7.4.1 Establish a template and approach for separate annual economic development and tourism marketing plans, particularly focused on campaign and content planning.	Short*	Economic Development Tourism	Communications		Marketing investments, per department (i.e., Economic Development, Tourism) ($$)	- Number of marketing campaigns executed annually (by type: tourism, economic development) - Reach and engagement metrics for paid and organic campaigns (e.g., impressions, clicks, conversions) - Adherence to content calendar (measured by % of planned content delivered on time) - Number of cooperative marketing partners participating in annual tourism marketing plan of responsible tourism campaign assets developed (videos, blog posts, infographics, etc.) - Engagement with business attraction ads placed in key publications and platforms - Staff hours or FTEs dedicated to economic development and tourism marketing functions - Business community awareness and participation in workshops, events, and initiatives - Retail and service business sales, as measured by the annual survey - Visitor arrivals (by origin, type of visit, time of year) - Visitor spending (per sector, time of year, per visitor origin, etc.) - Number of visitors staying in commercial accommodation, short-term rentals - Duration of visit and occupancy rate, including based on time of year - Tourism dispersal (throughout the township, throughout the year) - Visitor satisfaction - Economic impact of tourism
7.4.2 (Tourism) Incorporate campaigns and initiatives dedicated to influencing and managing visitor behaviour, and promoting responsible travel & tourism, within the annual Campaign Plan (see 7.4.1).	Mid*	Tourism	Communications	Relevant Partners	Third party support, as required ($)	
7.4.3 (Economic Development) Prepare business attraction ads for key publications in the GTA and SW Ontario, as new development and space becomes available.	Mid/Long	Economic Development	Communications	Commercial Property Owners		
7.4.4 Dedicate ongoing staff capacity to economic development and tourism marketing and storytelling efforts, and make destination marketing the responsibility of the new DMO once established.	Mid/ Long*	Economic Development Tourism	Communications		Budget for additional staff capacity ($$-$$$)	
7.4.5 (Tourism) Incorporate co-operative marketing opportunities for local tourism-focused organizations and businesses within the annual Tourism Marketing Plan.	Long*	Tourism	Communications	Tourism Stakeholders	Marketing budget ($$)	

RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTIONS	PRIORITY	LEAD TEAM(S)	INTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	EXTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORK	BUDGET NEEDS	KPIS
7.5 Invest in community-focused communication initiatives and marketing campaigns to foster understanding and buy-in to key Township initiatives, strengthen communication channels and nurture welcoming environments.						
7.5.1 Develop and launch communications and marketing initiatives focused on relevant topics as outlined in the EDTS.	Short*	Economic Development Tourism Communications	Tourism Community Services		See 7.4.	- Number of locally-focused marketing and communication campaigns delivered annually - Number of educational initiatives launched - Participation and engagement with educational initiatives (residents, stakeholders) - Resident satisfaction with Township communications and engagement opportunities
7.5.2 Develop and launch educational initiatives focused on relevant topics (i.e. how are parking revenues used).	Short*	Economic Development Tourism Communications	Tourism			

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

UNDERSTANDING THE PROJECT APPROACH

BALANCING **COMMUNITY-CENTRED & DATA-DRIVEN** APPROACHES

COMMUNITY-CENTRED PRACTICE IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

Community-centred practices have guided the development of this EDTS and its outcomes, emphasizing the active involvement of Centre Wellington communities in shaping their future.

Whether **community economic development** (CED) or **community-based tourism** (CBT), community-centred approaches prioritize the needs, aspirations and strengths of community members, giving them a voice in decisions that affect their lives, and guiding efforts in the best interests of the local community above all else.

Community-centred practices manifest through various strategies that empower local residents to manage resources and participate in decision-making processes. Key characteristics include:

Giving locals a voice
At the heart of community-centred practices are engaging community members in decision-making processes, allowing them to voice their needs and aspirations. By doing so, communities align development initiatives with their priorities and cultural contexts.[36]

Participatory decision-making
Community-centred practices emphasize participatory methods where community members are actively involved in planning, implementing and evaluating projects. This approach fosters a sense of ownership and accountability, and aligns initiatives with local needs.[37]

Asset-based development
This practice focuses on identifying and leveraging existing community assets—such as human capital, cultural heritage and social networks—to create or attract sustainable economic opportunities that are locally rooted and resilient.[38]

Community-Centred Approaches In Practice

The following table outlines some of the ways community-centred practices are incorporated into economic development and tourism.

Table A.1: Community-centred approaches in practice

Economic Development	Tourism
Local innovation ecosystems: By fostering collaboration between local businesses, educational institutions and community organizations, this approach creates vibrant and innovative ecosystems. These networks drive entrepreneurship, skills development and knowledge transfer within the community. **Inclusive workforce development:** Community-centred economic development prioritizes inclusive workforce strategies that address local skills gaps and employment barriers. This may involve tailored training programs, apprenticeships and partnerships with local employers to create pathways to meaningful employment. **Circular economy initiatives:** Emphasizing sustainability, community-centred approaches often promote circular economy principles. This involves supporting local recycling and upcycling businesses, encouraging resource sharing and developing community-owned renewable energy projects.	**Community-led experience development:** This model empowers local communities to manage and benefit directly from tourism activities. CBT initiatives include (but are not limited to) homestays, guided tours by local residents, and community-run attractions, keeping tourism revenues within the community. **Cultural heritage preservation:** Community-centred tourism emphasizes the preservation and celebration of local cultural heritage. This involves supporting traditional artisans, promoting local festivals, and developing themed "trails" or "routes" that showcase the community's unique history and culture. **Sustainable destination management:** By involving community members in tourism planning and management, communities develop strategies that balance visitor needs with local priorities. This includes implementing visitor management techniques to prevent overtourism and protect sensitive ecosystems.
Economic development and tourism	
Public-private-community partnerships (PPCPs): PPCPs drive sustainable development by combining government resources, private sector expertise and community engagement, skills and/or participation[39], to develop tailored strategies or projects that resonate with local contexts, enhance community ownership, and ultimately lead to more resilient and inclusive economic outcomes. **Social enterprise support:** Community-centred approaches often include support for social enterprises that address local challenges while creating economic opportunities. This may involve providing mentorship, funding and networking opportunities for socially-minded entrepreneurs in tourism and other sectors. **Infrastructure development:** Gathering and incorporating community perspectives plays a crucial role in bridging infrastructure gaps, benefiting both tourism and broader economic development. This includes developing hotels, roads, energy and telecommunications infrastructure. **Inclusive and equitable growth:** Community-centred practices seek to reduce disparities by promoting equitable access to economic resources and opportunities for all community members, regardless of socioeconomic status or other characteristics, so the benefits of municipal economic development and tourism initiatives are shared broadly throughout the community. Further, "community-centred economic inclusion strengthens the capacity of small and grassroots community-based organizations to advance community priorities."[40]	

DATA-DRIVEN APPROACHES IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

A data-driven approach to economic development and tourism applies quantitative and qualitative insights to guide decision-making, monitor progress, and measure outcomes.

This evidence-based practice informs strategies by real-world trends rather than assumptions, enhancing the effectiveness of planning, resource allocation, and program implementation. By integrating data from multiple sources communities and organizations can make informed choices that drive sustainable growth.

Relevant data points to consider in economic development and tourism include:

Table A.2: Economic development & tourism data

Economic Development	Tourism
• Economic performance indicators • Employment, overall • Employment, by sector • Number of businesses • Workforce trends • Demographic trends • Commercial and industrial vacancy rates • Housing costs • Taxes and fees • Education rates and programs • Commuting patterns • Immigration patterns	• Visitor arrivals (by origin) • Visitor length of stay • Visitor spending • Repeat visitor rates • Occupancy rates • Employment & labour income • Tax contribution • Revenue growth for local tourism businesses • Number of tourism experiences, services, and product • Visitor satisfaction

Leveraging Data For Strategic Decision-Making

Data-driven approaches begin with comprehensive data collection, drawing from both primary and secondary sources. Surveys, business performance metrics, demographic studies, visitor analytics and other third-party data sources provide valuable insights into local economic conditions and tourism patterns. Advanced digital tools, such as geographic information system (GIS) mapping, customer relationship management (CRM) platforms and social media analytics allow for real-time data tracking, enabling adaptive and responsive decision-making.

Analyzing data allows municipalities to uncover trends, identify challenges and highlight opportunities for growth. Tools such as predictive modelling also help to identify areas where proactive decision-making strengthens a community's position or enhances the efficacy of resource allocation, rather than being reactive. Whether responding to economic shifts, environmental changes or global disruptions, real-time data empowers leaders to make decisions that sustain long-term resilience.

For the sake of transparency and accountability, it is important to present data in clear and accessible formats to keep decision-makers, businesses and residents informed. This ultimately enhances trust and engagement with stakeholders, thereby strengthening collaboration across sectors. Data visualization tools are useful for this reason, transforming often-complicated raw information into accessible insights.

Efficiency is another core advantage of data-driven decision-making. By analyzing performance and identifying redundancies, communities streamline operations and maximize the impact of available resources. Automated tools and real-time data tracking allow for agile adjustments to policies, programs and investments. Destination marketing organizations, for instance, leverage visitor data analytics to refine marketing efforts, aligning these investments with traveller interests and behaviours.

BALANCING THESE APPROACHES

There is a place for both community-centred and data-informed approaches in economic & tourism development; in fact, the most effective strategies strike a balance between both, therefore being both visionary and practical.

Community-informed practice allows for development efforts to align with local needs, aspirations and values, while data provides objective evidence to inform decision-making, measure success and refine strategies over time. Neither approach alone is sufficient—relying solely on community input may overlook broader economic and tourism trends, while a data-only approach risks losing the human context that makes development efforts meaningful and sustainable.

Finding balance enhances economic resilience while strengthening social cohesion and creating conditions whereby economic growth benefits all residents rather than a select few. Ultimately, recommendations hererin respond to objective data while being rooted in community priorities.

[CASE STUDY]

COMMUNITY-CENTRED PRACTICE IN ACTION

What does community-centred practice look like? Here are a few examples from Ontario and beyond:

PHOTO CREDIT: muskokacommunitylandtrust.org

Muskoka Community Land Trust

In 2019, The District of Muskoka's Housing and Homelessness Task Force put out a call for solutions that address the increased unaffordability of Muskoka as a place to live, and an absence of vacant rental properties. The Muskoka Community Land Trust was formed in 2021 as a result. It is "a non-profit corporation that holds land on behalf of a place-based community, while serving as the long-term steward for affordable housing, community gardens, civic buildings, commercial spaces, and other community assets, on behalf of Muskoka." The Trust is working to create partnerships within the community to develop permanently attainable and sustainable housing for low and moderate-income families.[41] Its first development project is set to create 179 units of mixed market and permanently affordable rental housing in Huntsville, owned and governed by the community. Large-scale community engagement including insight surveys, volunteer power, and ongoing collaboration and negotiation with the Town of Huntsville are core elements of the Trust's practice. A partnership has also been established with Indigenous Community Engagement (ICE), an Indigenous-owned consulting firm, to guide the process and incorporate a reconciliation action plan.

Market 707

Located at Scadding Court Community Centre (SCCC) in Toronto, Market 707 is a shipping container market. Launched in 2011, the initiative provides low-barrier, affordable commercial space in repurposed shipping containers, allowing small business owners—particularly newcomers, women and racialized entrepreneurs—to establish and grow their businesses without the high costs of traditional retail. The market transforms an otherwise inactive space into a dynamic, pedestrian-friendly marketplace, fostering a sense of community ownership and engagement while attracting locals and visitors, strengthening social ties and creating a shared gathering space. Market 707 operates as a social enterprise, with revenue generated reinvested into community programming at Scadding Court.[42][43]

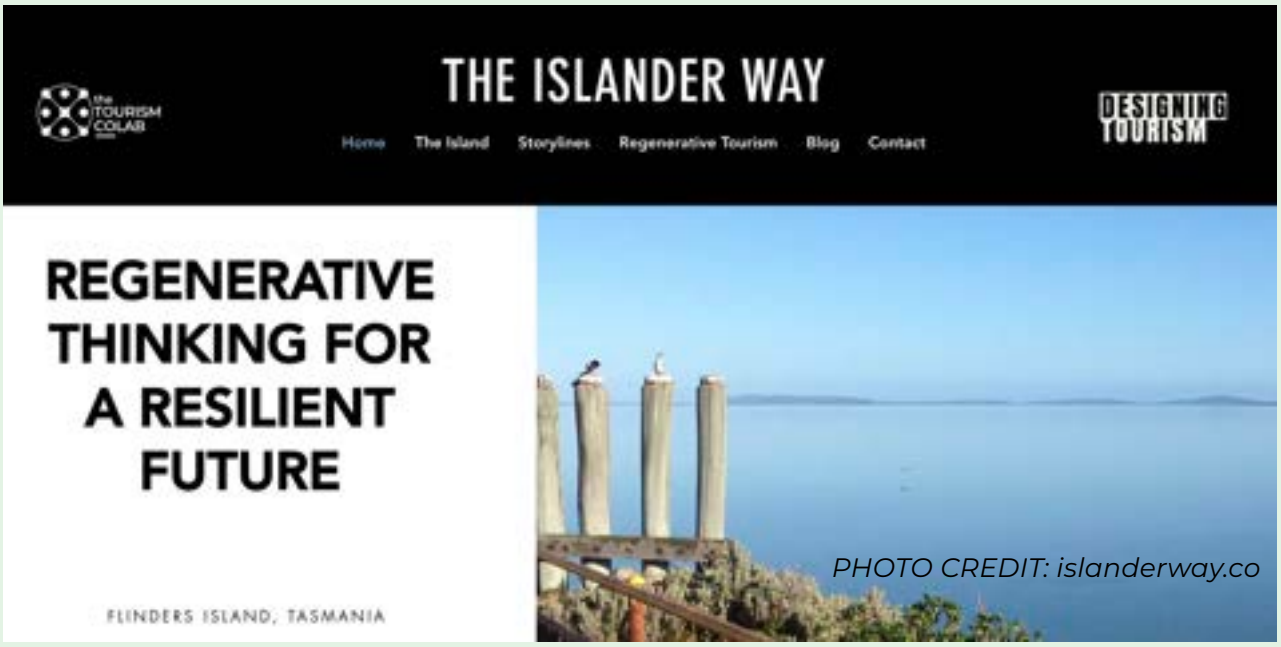


PHOTO CREDIT: islanderway.co

The Islander Way Project

On Tasmania's Flinders Island, there was an ongoing concern that overtourism was threatening the island's natural environment and way of life. Launched in 2021, The Islander Way Project aims to co-design the future of tourism with the local community using regenerative tourism principles, and align tourism development with community values, environmental stewardship and economic resilience. The project emphasizes a community-led approach, engaging residents in shaping tourism's future so it aligns with local values and aspirations, and includes a business incubator program. Seeking to balance community identity, values, relationships and the regeneration of natural and cultural capitals, it also guides environmental stewardship and capacity building. The project has stimulated local entrepreneurship, leading to the development of new tourism products and services that reflect the island's unique identity. Sub-projects like the Flinders Island Food Network have emerged to address local concerns such as food security, demonstrating the project's role in fostering economic resilience and the interconnections of tourism development to greater community good.[44]

Invisible Cities:

Operating in the UK, Invisible Cities is a social enterprise that trains individuals who have experienced houselessness to become tour guides within their own communities. The initiative provides people with employment opportunities and a platform to share their stories, addressing a need within the community while providing meaningful visitor experiences.

The Sandbox Centre

Located in Barrie, Ontario, The Sandbox Centre is a non-profit hub for innovation, entrepreneurship and collaboration. By connecting startups, scale-ups and established businesses, it accelerates growth, drives innovation and supports local entrepreneurs through mentorship, networking and access to experts. Designated as Ontario's 17th Regional Innovation Centre, it received $1 million in provincial funding to expand its support for local businesses. The Sandbox strengthens Barrie's economy by promoting knowledge sharing, creating opportunities and driving sustainable economic growth.

APPENDIX B

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THEMES

The following pages summarize the key and recurring ideas, themes and concerns gathered from people participating in engagement activities ("participants"). (While these key themes represent points and perspectives and perceptions heard repeatedly throughout the engagement period, they do not necessarily reflect the views of all people engaged, nor all the views shared.)

Key themes were organized within five key overarching themes, which are summarized in the main report and include:

- Connection and Communication
- Quality of Life
- Infrastructure
- Business and Employment
- Tourism

THEMES OF **CONNECTION & COMMUNICATION**

Communication & engagement

There are opportunities to develop and enhance communications between the Township and the community, particularly around economic development and tourism. Specific themes for communication and engagement initiatives noted include events and activities, workshops, and general community information and engagement sessions. Further, there is an appetite for local-focused educational initiatives on, for example, community care and the value of tourism. Many community members enjoy being asked to provide specific input and desire more opportunities for two-way dialogue.

New resident connections

There is a desire among many new residents for a central information hub about Centre Wellington and the community, noting it can be challenging to find the information they are looking for. Many businesses also express an interest in connecting with new residents, with participants suggesting that realtors and public points of contact with the Township could be explored as potential avenues to share more information.

Elora vs. Fergus

There is an "Elora versus Fergus" mentality in Centre Wellington, with the two towns embracing two very different narratives. In particular, many participants perceive Elora to be a tourism destination but not Fergus. This is seen by some to create an imbalance as to which businesses benefit from Township-led tourism initiatives. Participants recognize that there is an opportunity for Elora and Fergus to strengthen their respective appeal by leaning on each other.

Community identity

Resident survey respondents identify the mix of small towns and rural settings as the number one reason why Centre Wellington is a great place to live. There are multiple community identities (or, "local brands") within Centre Wellington, and a clear need to consider how these are celebrated and connected—considering rural areas and urban spaces—to bolster community identity and for economic development and tourism marketing purposes. Regardless, there is a general consensus throughout Centre Wellington that its essence and community-oriented values are core to its appeal as a place to live, work and play; holding onto this aspect is a primary concern for the community. Having limited corporate representation within the downtown areas is a point of pride. Access to the water is another key part of the identity.

Connection with the business community

There is a desire and demand from the local business community—and tourism businesses, in particular—for opportunities to connect and collaborate with the Township. They say that, overall, there is an opportunity for the Township to evaluate and enhance how they work with local businesses, to deepen the impact of their investments and resources. Businesses also want to engage more with one another, building their networks, learning from each other's expertise, and creating new partnerships.

Centre Wellington as a hub

While there are things to do and see in Centre Wellington, many participants suggest that it can act as a hub for visitors seeking to experience things to do in the surrounding rural and urban communities. Farm stands, wine tasting and breweries, nature-based activities, and arts & culture are among those options outside of Centre Wellington proper that are suggested to enhance its positioning as a multi-night destination.

THEMES OF **QUALITY OF LIFE**

Growth

There is a recognition by some that growth presents opportunities for new employment and business growth. Simultaneously, as they watch growth happen, community members are concerned about preserving the essence, agricultural land, and natural & cultural heritage (the river and history). Many community members speak of the need for increased housing density, more complete communities, and the importance of preserving farmland in the face of growth. Similarly, residents note the importance of protecting access to and views of the river (no or minimal, lower-density development along the banks).

Placemaking

Community members indicate they are looking for active and engaging spaces to help them connect to and enjoy living in Centre Wellington. They suggest these spaces could be affordable points of connection, to get to know others in the community and enjoy a nice day close to home. Stakeholders believe there is an opportunity to activate more public spaces using arts and culture across the community. While placemaking makes a community a more desirable place to live, it was suggested that it would also result in a more appealing visitor destination and encourage spending. Many shared visions for Centre Wellington to be like a top European destination, where public spaces are always activated, bike lanes connect key locations, and people enjoy car-free/pedestrian-only spaces.

Equity, inclusion & belonging

As the community grows, there is an overall recognition that a more diverse community benefits everyone. However, it was shared that folks representing historically marginalized communities (i.e., Black, Indigenous, racialized, 2sLGBTQ+, persons with disabilities, etc.) do not always feel a sense of belonging or welcomeness within the community, often being pushed to seek out certain supports or services in nearby Guelph, Kitchener-Waterloo or the GTA. Further, there are concerns about the community's attitude towards marginalized communities. Finally, storefront accessibility is a concern, particularly in downtown Fergus.

Recreation and leisure spaces

Many community members say there is a need to enhance and expand free and affordable recreational spaces (indoor and outdoor) for all ages, to keep up with the pace of growth and provide things to do for locals. Indeed, residents are concerned that the Township's focus on tourism is too great, at the expense of meeting the needs and

wants of local residents. Among the specific types of public spaces on the wishlist of participants are: more hockey arenas (indoor and outdoor), lacrosse fields, multi-use sports fields, indoor walking and running tracks and a climbing wall. Other recreational activities in demand include a movie theatre, bowling alley, BMX park and roller rink, particularly to address a gap in activities and entertainment for youth in the community. Further, there is a demand for more dedicated spaces for youth in existing community/ public spaces.

Volunteerism

Local festivals, events and non-profit organizations rely strongly on volunteer participation and, in fact, would not be possible or sustainable without volunteers. Community members say that the strong volunteer culture in Centre Wellington is upheld largely by local retirees. Still, representatives from local non-profit and events organizations say that human resource capacity is a challenge, as core leadership personnel balance organization, marketing, volunteer management, administration and other responsibilities.

Short-term rentals

Feedback suggests that some community members have come to rely on short-term rentals for income and that STRs help to diversify the limited hotel accommodation options currently available within Centre Wellington. Simultaneously—and while the Township works to develop a new STR-focused bylaw—there are serious concerns among residents about STRs; particularly for those who live adjacent to STR properties. Residents report disruptive behaviour that impacts their quality of life, quality of sleep and enjoyment of their own home/property. They say there is a need for regulations and enforcement, though are skeptical about what is to come.

THEMES OF **INFRASTRUCTURE**

Housing/general affordability

The rising cost of living concerns community members, particularly in comparison to local wages and the supply of affordable housing. Community members note there is a lack of affordable housing options in Centre Wellington and local entrepreneurs reference affordability as a labour attraction issue. Notably, youth say that affordability is a core concern and a key factor that may prevent them from staying in the community permanently.

Transit

There is a significant amount of feedback on transit, and particularly, a demand from the community for improved public transit and active transportation connections for youth, seniors, residents and the workforce, within Centre Wellington and beyond. Many employers say transit is a barrier to attracting and retaining labour, as many staff live in larger, more affordable centres. Community members believe transit connections with Guelph and Kitchener-Waterloo ('KW') would be beneficial, although some strongly oppose this. Improved cycling connections and infrastructure are also noted, for both recreational and employment purposes.

Infrastructure, utilities and services

A number of community members say that they require improved service to effectively run their business or are altogether unable to access key infrastructure such as cell signal, internet and natural gas. While businesses and residents in rural areas indicated they struggle with all three of the noted factors, a business on the main commercial strip of Fergus also did not have cell signal.

Industrial and commercial space

Businesses of all types—from retailers to constructors to manufacturers—all indicate there is a lack of available commercial and industrial space. They say the current trend for growing businesses is for prefabricated industrial and commercial malls, rather than to buy land or a building. Building ownership is desirable, and for a large manufacturer to expand, they would likely need to build; however, participants note costs are high compared to other locations (outside of Canada). Many growing businesses say they have nowhere to go within Centre Wellington, and as such, are moving to other communities like Guelph, Wellington North, etc. Further, participants say there is a mismatch between residential growth and access to services and retail that support that growth.

Parking & congestion

Community members and visitors alike cite parking and traffic congestion as a tourism-related challenge. For residents, parking access defers their interest in visiting the downtown areas. As for visitors, 87%of survey respondents say parking is a "Very important" or "Important" factor when choosing a travel destination for a day trip or long weekend. For those respondents who had previously visited Centre Wellington, many reference parking challenges as a factor that impacted the quality of their overall experience.

Natural spaces & environmental protection

Participants say that Centre Wellington's natural spaces hold memories for many, are an attractive asset for new residents, and also draw visitors. There is a recognition across the community that environmental protection is absolutely necessary for the long-term health and well-being of the Centre Wellington community. In fact, youth note environmental protection as a key concern. Locals say that they are eager to have more opportunities to access and enjoy natural spaces. Among recurring demands are improved cycling networks and improved access to waterfront features, including resident access to Belwood Lake. Many people also express a desire for investment that is related to green or environmental opportunities.

THEMES OF **BUSINESS & EMPLOYMENT**

Employment growth

Community members feel that residential growth is outpacing employment and retail/service growth. Survey results show 'employment/career opportunities' and 'business opportunities' are ranked as some of the lowest reasons as to why Centre Wellington is a great place to live. Many participants note that Centre Wellington has a high number of commuters, as many residents commute out to larger urban centres for employment, and local employers attract a workforce from those urban centres. Generally, community members would like to see new employment opportunities within Centre Wellington, and the following represent sectors of strength, opportunity, and interest: Manufacturing, Agriculture, Healthcare & Social Services, Environmental/Green, and key resident-focused retail, services and entertainment.

Planning and building processes

Businesses note that planning and building processes can be expensive, lengthy and difficult to navigate. From the survey, the top-rated challenge businesses identify is 'Township building and permitting processes are challenging to understand and/or pursue, etc.' (44.3% , 35 businesses). Input indicates that a zoning bylaw refresh would be useful to confirm the classifications are appropriately permissive.

Cost of doing business

The cost of doing business is noted as a challenge for businesses with rising interest rates and inflation. Businesses perceive Centre Wellington to be more expensive from a business operation perspective (i.e. land and building costs, rent costs, development charges, taxes).

Workforce

34% of business survey respondents indicate access to the workforce is a significant challenge they are facing. Consultation shows this varies between skilled and unskilled positions. Part of the challenge lies in the cost of housing and access to transportation, as much of the workforce resides in surrounding urban centres and commutes to Centre Wellington for work, and in turn, many residents commute out for employment. 55.6%

of residents commute to a location outside of the Centre Wellington Census Subdivision vs 41.3% in Ontario (Statistics Canada, 2021). Employers say there is an opportunity to enhance their connection to youth in the community, for the sake of workforce development. Further, businesses suggest they would benefit from more education on how to connect and engage with youth, schools, and cooperative education (co-op) educators.

Business retention and expansion

Participants say that connections between the Township and businesses, especially those outside the tourism sector, happen when they reach out directly to the Township, typically to begin a planning and development process. Consultations identified opportunities to enhance the relationship between the Township and the business community to support strategy implementation, use of the new CRM, and effective economic development.

Bureaucratic red tape

There is a feeling that the Township can better support business- and community-led events and programming. Current practices, particularly around permits and resource provision, often hinders the ability of external organizations or individuals to activate ideas. For example, while in the past, the Township provided pylons for free to certain organizations, there is now a fee.

Retail, service and entertainment businesses

Community members indicate they would like to see a range of additional retail and service businesses including childcare, healthcare, senior/elder care, clothing stores, grocery stores and entertainment options for youth and families.

Agriculture

A number of stakeholders and partners say that the agricultural sector presents a strategic opportunity. The township and region is rich in agricultural assets, including some of the best soil in the country and the addition of the new poultry research centre to the Elora Research Station, one of the largest agricultural research centres in the world. With intense growth pressures and the average primary landholder in agricultural families aging, preservation and maintenance of agricultural land must be a key consideration for this sector to succeed. It is noted that the Elora Research Station is due for a refurbishment and the University of Guelph ('U of G') is very interested in creating a community space and possibly a space for innovation. A representative from the U of G notes that there is an increasing interest in the development of agricultural-related technology from engineering and tech students in Guelph.

THEMES OF **TOURISM**

Experience development

There is an interest in seeing new experiences available in Centre Wellington, particularly in the off-season, to drive year-round visitation to help sustain local businesses and tourism economic impact. Tourism businesses and entrepreneurs see a gap in experiences available to visitors, and recognize this as a gap to enticing longer stays and greater visitor spending. As experience development is considered, a number of themes that the community can lean into are suggested, including: food (especially farm-to-table), agritourism, art (performing art, visual art, etc.), nature & the outdoors, haunted history and festivals & events.

Marketing, storytelling & trip planning resources

Tourism business representatives say there is an opportunity to enhance tourism marketing initiatives. Some say that there are always plenty of activities taking place to entertain people, and the gap is raising awareness. One solution identified is improving the quality of Municipal trip planning resources, such as the local Events Calendar and other information available online, which businesses say would drive more traffic to their businesses, events and programming. Investing in more marketing and storytelling about things to do in the community is seen to be a way to benefit visitors and local community members seeking entertainment and activities close to home.

Events

There is an appreciation for the events and festivals that take place in Elora and Fergus, which are seen to encourage influxes of tourism visitation whilst also being a point of pride and entertainment for the community. There is a desire to see festivals and events expand into the winter seasons, though organizers say staff capacity is a barrier to such initiatives. Additionally, many people feel that community events held at the Sportsplex are Fergus-centric. They are keen to see solutions that extend appeal more broadly across the community; for example, by expanding into Elora and other areas and/or providing transportation to make these events more accessible.

Visitor management vs. growth

While some participants say they see the benefits tourism brings to the community, others do not and are opposed to Municipal investments in tourism development, citing the disruptions visitors bring to their day-to-day lives. There is a general sense that the township is “at capacity” when it comes to tourism, particularly in summer months, demonstrated by traffic congestion and lack of resident access to certain amenities (i.e., restaurants, parking). Many residents see managing the visitation that already occurs as the primary issue, rather than attracting new visitors. That said, participants say there is an opportunity to attract visitors to stay longer and spend more throughout the year, as many come exclusively for day trips. This is especially important to small businesses and restaurants who feel the seasonal effects of fewer tourism arrivals in the winter months.

Accommodations

Currently, the Elora Mill, Village Inn, Kat Florence Hotel, Best Western and Village Inn are the primary hotel options for Centre Wellington visitors, each appealing to vastly different budgets and visitor profiles. Short-term rental accommodations are also available, with a broader price scale. There is a perception that more accommodation options would increase the number of overnight visitors and expand Centre Wellington's ability to pursue niche tourism segments.

Beyond downtowns

There is an appetite to activate public spaces beyond the Fergus and Elora downtowns, as a way to bring focus and investment more broadly throughout the community and as an opportunity to disperse visitor traffic. There is a demand for providing spaces where businesses can host pop-ups, to test ideas and also provide fun & engaging things to do for residents & visitors.

Capacity of local organizations

Narrowing of grant and sponsorship dollars is a noted challenge facing many of the community's festivals, events and non-profit organizations. Participants say that any support the Township could offer in the future—for example, marketing support and other partnership avenues—are welcome opportunities, as are changes to policy that create barriers to the growth and evolution of current initiatives (i.e., permit requirements).

Municipal Accommodation Tax

While some participants acknowledge the benefit a Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) would bring to Centre Wellington, engagement data shows a notable gap in awareness about the structure, purpose and implementation of a (MAT), which is expected in the early stages of the community's exploration of MAT. Some survey participants representing the tourism sector perceive that an additional tax will dissuade visitors from visiting the township; others suggest it is a valuable visitor management tactic. Participants suggest that community engagement is necessary to determine the Township's strategy for MAT application. They also note the importance of transparency regarding dollars collected and how they are invested once a MAT is in place.

APPENDIX C

THE PRESENT STATE

AT A GLANCE

This section provides a general landscape of economic development and tourism in Centre Wellington.

EXISTING SUPPORT NETWORKS

There are a number of external players who are critical to Centre Wellington's economic development and tourism development and success. Among them are:

Centre Wellington Chamber of Commerce

A member-driven non-profit organization which serves as a resource to support business growth and success in the community. The Chamber hosts regular networking and educational opportunities for members and also dedicates efforts to promotion and advocacy.

County of Wellington

The upper tier municipal body that takes a broader view to economic development and tourism efforts. The County hosts a monthly Member Municipal Group with economic development and tourism representatives from lower tiers within the County, providing an opportunity for knowledge sharing and to discuss areas where County support is needed. Economic development focus areas include rural transit service, workforce/talent attraction, CIP support for lower tiers, and housing initiatives. When it comes to tourism, the County's focus is on leveraging Elora and Fergus as hubs that connect to rural experiences. They work with the Centre Wellington team and RTO4 on product development projects (i.e., culinary tourism development in Fergus, cycling tourism) and support niche marketing investments. For example, "Taste Real" is a County initiative that guides visitors to local food and farm businesses, events, special programming, and experiences in Wellington County and Guelph.

Business Improvement Areas

Non-profit business associations (BIAs) which act as stewards of Elora and Fergus, respectively. The BIAs each host their own events, promote businesses within their catchment, collaborate with the community and Township, and advocate on behalf of their members to create an environment for business to thrive. The Township provides funding to support the BIAs, and uses its community-facing platforms to promote BIA initiatives. There is also ongoing Township representation present at BIA meetings.

Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA)

Manages water and other natural resources on behalf of 38 municipalities (including Centre Wellington) and close to one million residents of the Grand River watershed. The GRCA oversees and protects primary natural assets in Centre Wellington, including the Elora Gorge, Elora Quarry and Belwood Lake Conservation Area, which are also core tourist draws.

Regional Tourism Organization (RTO) 4

A marketing and destination management organization which takes a regional view to tourism development, encompassing Huron County, Perth County, Waterloo Region and Wellington County. RTO4 provides strategic and financial support for tourism efforts, primarily focused on product and workforce development. It was an RTO4 report that, in 2017, recommended the "Elora and Fergus Tourism" branding that is now used on the Centre Wellington website and dedicated tourism Instagram page. The organization continues to support key Township initiatives, including the Winter Experience Development Program (formerly known as The Destination Animation Strategic Co-Investment Project).

Wellington Waterloo Community Futures (WWCF)

Provides business consulting & repayable loans to rural businesses in the County of Wellington & Region of Waterloo. WWCF supports the business community through financing, training and business consulting, and community development efforts. The Township currently engages with them on an as needed basis, or at regional meetings hosted by the County of Wellington.

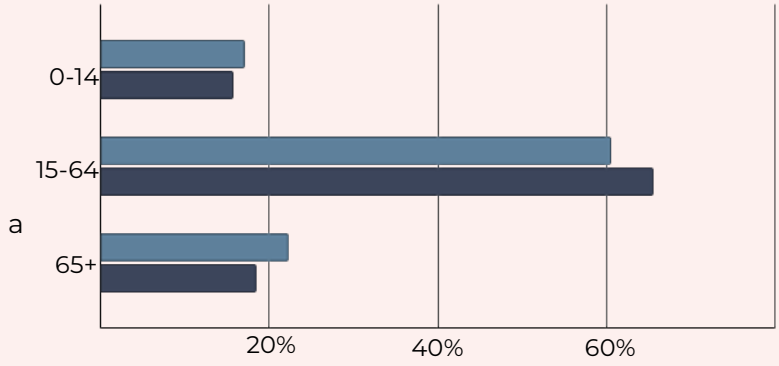
Business Centre Guelph Wellington (BCGW)

Provides business consulting, events, workshops & seed funding programs to businesses in the County of Wellington and City of Guelph. BCGC supports the business community through one-on-one coaching, informational events and opportunities, and by providing a small amount of seed funding. The Township currently provides an annual contribution towards operations in recognition of the service provided to local businesses.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Additional Insights into Centre Wellington Demographics

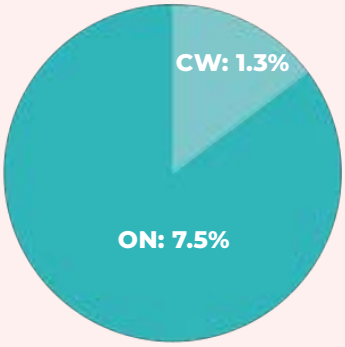
Centre Wellington's population, on average



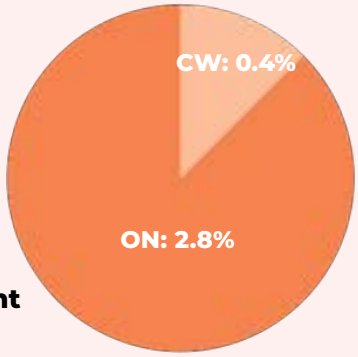
Centre Wellington's older population means that less of the township's residents are available and/or interested in participating in the workforce or volunteering. If the population continues to age without adding more youth and young adults to the community, employers will likely experience worsening shortage of labour. While an aging population may contribute less to the workforce, they are still important residents of the community and consideration should be given to the economic opportunities that are presented by this population. Health and seniors care businesses and organizations will likely see an increase in demand for their services to enable residents to age safely and comfortably in the community.

Centre Wellington has lower levels of immigration than the Ontario average, which is consistent with other rural and semi-urban communities. The majority of immigrants in the township arrived before 1980. Of the total resident population:

Immigrants who arrived between 2011-2021

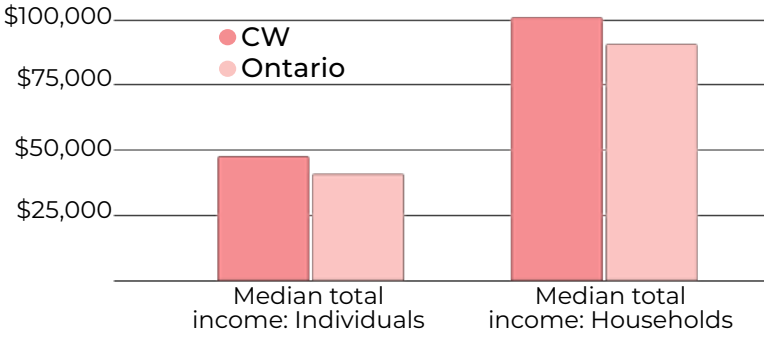


% of permanent residents

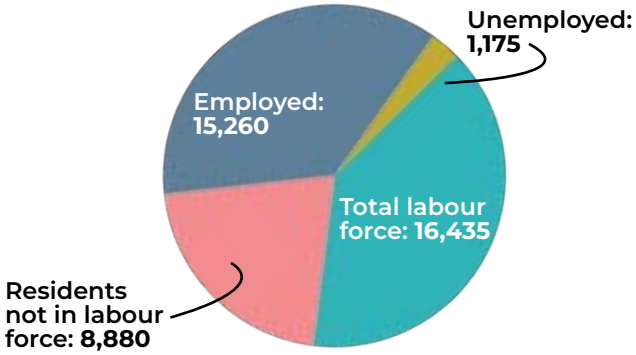


Income & employment

Median total income, Centre Wellington (2020)



Labour force (population)



BACKGROUND DOCUMENT REVIEW

The Township of Centre Wellington has developed a number of strategic documents and reports to guide its municipal administration efforts. Many of them contain connections and alignment with economic development and tourism.

For the purposes of developing this strategy the following reports were reviewed:

- Township of Centre Wellington Official Plan 2003 (consolidated 2024)
- Centre Wellington Strategic Economic Development Action Plan (2019) (*see Peer Review in Appendix K*)
- County of Wellington Official Plan 1998 (consolidated 2024)
- Economic Development Report Card (2024)
- Centre Wellington Draft Cultural Action Plan (2024)
- Centre Wellington Council Report CAO2024-03: 2024 Downtown Parking Strategy (2024)
- Centre Wellington Council Report CAO2024-17: Downtown Parking Strategy Update (2024)
- Centre Wellington Council Report PLN2024-35: Recommended Settlement Area Boundary Expansions (2024)
- Report: Short-Term Rentals in Centre Wellington (2024)
- Township of Centre Wellington Strategic Plan (2023 - 2026)
- Wellington Agri-Food Systems Report (2023)
- Experience Wellington Tourism Strategy (2023)
- Wellington County Research for Cycle Tourism Product Development (2023)
- Elora & Fergus Tourism Performance Improvement Report - Global Destination Sustainability Movement (2023)
- Elora & Fergus Tourism GDS-Index Assessment Results 2023 (2023)
- Economic Development Business Plan (2023/26)
- Centre Wellington Business Park Strategy (2021)
- The Fergus Downtown Action Plan (2019)
- Elora & Fergus Tourism: Summary of DMO to DMMO Transition (2017)

A number of key themes and priorities emerge across these reports for consideration in the EDTS. They include:

Enhancing Downtown Vibrancy:

- Encouraging local business activity and attracting visitors to boost economic activity.

Business Development, Retention and Expansion:

- Attracting and supporting businesses to stimulate growth and diversify the local economy.

Support for Agricultural and Agri-Food Businesses:

- Strengthening these sectors to boost the local economy, provide employment and attract related businesses.
- Providing resources for farmers, encouraging innovative agricultural practices, and stimulating sector growth.
- Incorporating agricultural education into local programs to foster sector appreciation and development.
- Prioritizing the protection of high-quality agricultural lands for long-term food security and sustainability.

Promotion of Agri-Tourism:

- Leveraging agricultural heritage and equine industry to develop and promote agri-tourism through farm tours and local festivals.
- Highlighting local produce, farm experiences and events to draw visitors.

Affordable Living for Workers:

- Prioritizing affordable housing to retain workforce, supporting local businesses and services.

Infrastructure Investment:

- Investing in projects to support local businesses and agriculture, and enhance community attractiveness to investors and residents.

Regional Partnerships:

- Strengthening ties with neighbouring municipalities to create a cohesive regional strategy and maximize the impact of initiatives.

Expansion and Diversification:

- Preparing for potential expansion of the business park as the initial development reaches capacity.
- Diversifying into advanced industries like biotech, agri-tech and renewable energy.

Resilience Planning:

- Implementing measures to adapt to economic and environmental disruptions, such as climate-resilient infrastructure and diversified revenue streams.

Welcoming and Accommodating Tourism:

- Enhancing visitor experiences to increase tourist numbers and repeat visits.
- Supporting tourism business in skills development, knowledge sharing and collaboration, to expand value and appeal of tourism assets.

Supporting Arts and Culture:

- Attracting visitors through events and cultural experiences that enhance the community's profile as a vibrant destination.

Heritage Conservation and Storytelling:

- Protecting heritage buildings to support tourism by preserving the area's cultural, historical and aesthetic appeal.
- Leveraging local heritage assets to connect to local stories.

Enhancing the Visitor Experience:

- Addressing infrastructure challenges, such as signage and accommodations, to improve accessibility and convenience for visitors.
- Leveraging local nature- and arts & culture-based assets for tourism experience development.
- Developing comprehensive visitor information systems, such as improving wayfinding and digital resources, to aid visitors.

Targeted Marketing Campaigns:

- Focusing on key markets and utilizing digital tools to attract visitors effectively.
- Developing thoughtful marketing assets for impactful visitor attraction initiatives.

Sustainability & Sustainable Tourism:

- Promoting sustainable tourism to preserve natural assets and cultural heritage.
- Integrating sustainable design and energy-efficient infrastructure into park development to attract environmentally-conscious businesses.
- Collaboration between multi-level stakeholders to align climate/sustainability initiatives.

Community Engagement:

- Involving local communities & residents in economic development and tourism planning to align development with residents' values.

Immediate Land Development:

- Accelerating infrastructure servicing and marketing efforts to capitalize on pent-up demand.
- Ensuring zoning and policies accommodate key target industries while minimizing incompatible uses.

Talent and Workforce Development:

- Strengthening partnerships with regional educational institutions to align programs with local industry needs.
- Supporting workforce retention by improving local amenities and housing affordability.

Enhanced Marketing Efforts:

- Prioritizing attracting businesses within the Kitchener-Waterloo-Guelph corridor through targeted campaigns and broker outreach

APPENDIX D

STRATEGIC PILLAR 1: **Capacity**

CURRENT REALITY & OPPORTUNITIES

This section provides the background information on Centre Wellington's current reality and opportunities as it relates to **CAPACITY** as a strategic pillar of the EDTS.

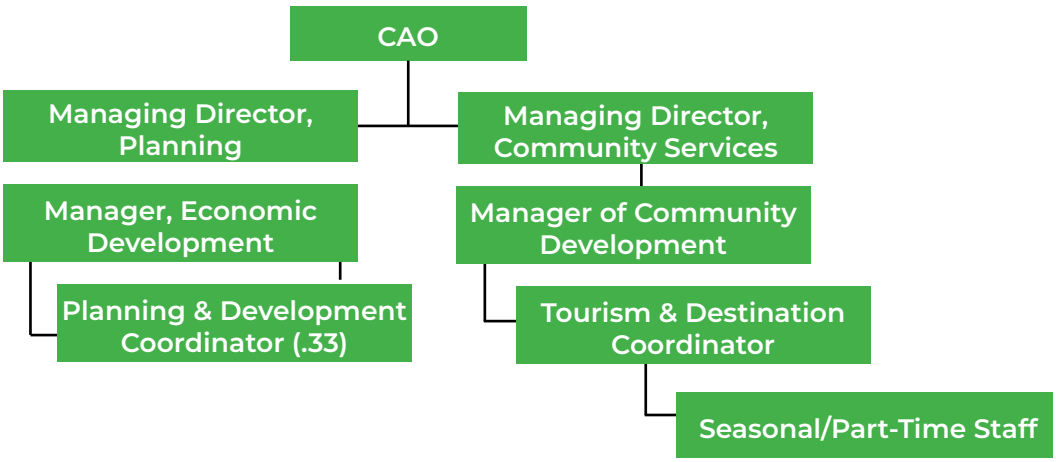
THE TEAM & OPERATING BUDGET

The Township operates with a lean and agile staff structure, which extends to its economic development and tourism teams and budgets. As economic development and tourism become more sophisticated disciplines requiring data-driven decision-making, stakeholder collaboration, and proactive business engagement, the Township must enhance staff capacity and budgetary allocations to remain competitive. This is especially important given the significant growth projected for the community.

This Strategy positions Centre Wellington as an active steward of its growth, striving to create a community that meets the needs of residents, businesses and visitors, now and in the future. Strengthening staff and budgetary capacity is fundamental to the successful implementation of this Plan.

The current economic development and tourism team includes:

- Economic Development: A full-time Economic Development Manager;
- Tourism Development: A full-time Tourism and Destination Development Coordinator;
- Direct Support Staff: The Planning and Development Coordinator, Communications from the CAO's Office, and four part-time Visitor Information Services staff based at the Elora Visitor Centre.
- Other Township Staff: Parks and Recreation, Building and Properties, Infrastructure, Event/ Facility Support, and Festivals and Events.
- Oversight and Collaboration: Managing Director of Planning and Development, Managing Director of Community Services, and the CAO.



This team operates with a strong collaborative approach but faces limitations in capacity to comprehensively address the range of initiatives outlined in the Strategy.

In 2025, total budget expenditures are an estimated $248,722 for economic development and $323,873 for tourism. About $42,000 in revenue from external sources, including a County grant and partner contributions, is expected to offset tourism costs.

SUPPORT NETWORKS

To augment capacity, Centre Wellington relies on partnerships with community organizations, other levels of government and regional bodies. (*See Appendix D, Support Networks*.)

Partnerships are especially valuable for smaller municipalities to achieve impactful and cost-effective economic development and tourism outcomes. Centre Wellington maintains strong connections with local and regional organizations, however there is an opportunity to deepen and formalize partnerships with institutions such as: the University of Guelph, the University of Waterloo, the Elora Research Station, Agilec, and Second Chance Employment, where relationships are not yet fully established.

Enhancing these relationships is vital for expanding collaboration opportunities, leveraging external funding, offloading responsibilities outside of the Township's purview, and maximizing the Township's ability to deliver on this Strategy.

ENHANCING CAPACITY

Team

Effective implementation of the EDTS requires a comprehensive and priority-sensitive approach to maximize efficiency. To guide implementation, attention must be paid to the priority of each recommendation and action. For example, it would be counterproductive to invest in economic development marketing if there is not sufficient land or space for business development. As such, there is strategic reasoning to justify every step, each positioning the next for optimal impact to avoid misuse of resources. Key areas where increased capacity is needed are:

Economic Development:

- Business Retention and Expansion (BRE): Proactively working with partners to understand and support existing businesses to grow and remain competitive.
- Workforce Development: Addressing local labour market challenges to align with business needs.
- Data Collection and Analysis: Collecting and analyzing data to support program development, advocacy efforts, and strategy outcomes.
- Placemaking and Livability: Supporting initiatives that enhance community appeal, aligning with economic goals.

Tourism Development:

- Destination Development: Supporting stakeholders in developing meaningful, year-round experiences, developing niche markets and fostering local collaboration.
- Visitor Management: Working with other Township departments to implement visitor management strategies in an effort to protect natural assets, enhance the visitor experience and protect the destination's brand and reputation.
- MAT Implementation: Providing leadership within the Township organization and community as a Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) is rolled out (see C.3).

Beyond these respective areas, there is an overlap in economic development and tourism staffing needs, which points to an opportunity for shared team resources. This is especially relevant to initiatives dedicated to:

- Small business support
- Community marketing
- Community engagement
- Transportation

The following table outlines a snapshot of where further synergy can be explored:

Table D.1: Economic development & tourism synergies

ACTIVITY	CONSIDERATIONS FOR SYNERGY	WHY ALIGN EFFORTS
Start-up and small business support: Offering resources, support, and workshops to support general small business start up, development and sustainability. Small businesses include those with under 50 employees in the retail, service, and tourism sectors.	Entrepreneurship and small business development plays a vital role in the Township's long-term economic growth. Targeted workshops on product and experience development are essential for tourism businesses to maximize their growth potential, attract visitors and create compelling offerings that drive economic impact. The Economic Development department plays a key role in managing relationships with small business support organizations and provides funding to the Business Centre of Guelph Wellington, providing local entrepreneurs access to valuable resources.	**Enhancing Business Capacity through Tourism Development:** Feedback from local stakeholders suggests that retail and service businesses, particularly those in the downtown core, could benefit from specialized workshops focused on product and experience development. These initiatives help businesses capitalize on growing tourism opportunities by creating more engaging offerings that attract and retain visitors. **Improving Access to Business Support Services:** Strengthening the flow of information about available business support programs is essential for fostering small business growth. Establishing a centralized point of contact would streamline access to resources, funding opportunities, and advisory services, providing small business owners the guidance they need to succeed. **Address Retail/Service Gaps:** Addressing gaps in both visitor and resident experiences presents an opportunity for economic growth. Encouraging startups to develop businesses, products and services that meet these needs enhances the local economy while improving the overall appeal of the Township for both residents and visitors.

ACTIVITY	CONSIDERATIONS FOR SYNERGY	WHY ALIGN EFFORTS
Community marketing: Developing community- and business-based communications to educate and inspire residents on a range of economic development and tourism topics such as the benefits of tourism, or the types of local businesses the public could find in the community. Developing communication tools to share the highlights of visiting and living in Centre Wellington. Embody and integrate the newly developed destination brand into communications and marketing initiatives.	Strengthening communication between the Township and the business community, as well as advocating on behalf of local businesses, enhances engagement and support economic growth. Public-facing businesses are seeking innovative ways to increase visibility and attract customers. Currently, tourism and economic development communications are fragmented across multiple channels. Greater alignment between these efforts creates a more cohesive platform for showcasing local opportunities. Exploring the integration of a "Living, Working and Starting a Business" component on elorafergus.ca, along with enhancing resources for business development on Centre Wellington's corporate website, improves access to essential information for workers, residents and investors.	**Strengthening Community Identity:** A perceived division between Elora and Fergus remains. Establishing consistent branding and communication across the community as a whole can help foster a stronger, more unified identity. Regular engagement also builds community pride and increase buy-in for place-based branding initiatives over time. **Leveraging Tourism for Workforce and Business Growth:** Tourism plays a crucial role in attracting visitors and in supporting workforce, business and resident attraction. Leveraging tourism messaging to highlight relocation opportunities helps draw new talent and investment to the community. **Enhancing Public Awareness and Engagement:** Both Economic Development and Tourism share valuable messaging that benefits the broader community. Increasing awareness about local businesses, employment opportunities and the economic impact of tourism helps residents better understand and capitalize on the opportunities to spend, work and enjoy life in Centre Wellington. **Success Stories:** Highlighting tangible benefits from past initiatives improves public perception and demonstrate the positive impact of economic development and tourism efforts.
Community engagement: Participation and development of community engagement efforts to shape economic development and tourism efforts, including industry-specific roundtables and business visitation programs.	Regular assessment of resident, business and visitor sentiment provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of economic development and tourism initiatives. Tracking community perceptions helps refine strategies and guide tactical actions to align with local needs and expectations. This is also necessary to track progress in achieving the 20-year vision of the EDTS.	Fostering Positive Perceptions of Growth: Residents sometimes hold a negative perception of growth. Establishing regular two-way dialogue helps address concerns and is a way to highlight the benefits of community and tourism growth. Proactive communication works to ensure that growth supports residents and businesses, creating a more balanced and informed perspective. The interests of residents in regards to economic development and tourism are generally aligned, as are the interests of businesses, so combining engagement efforts reduces duplication. *continued on next page...*

ACTIVITY	CONSIDERATIONS FOR SYNERGY	WHY ALIGN EFFORTS
Community engagement: *(...continued from previous page)*	Expanding participation in Township economic development and tourism initiatives strengthens relationships with the business community. Consistent engagement fosters trust, enhances awareness and encourages greater collaboration, ultimately leading to increased long-term participation and support.	**Aligning Business Support Across Sectors:** Retail, service and tourism-based businesses share many of the same challenges, and benefit from similar strategic interventions. Coordinating support efforts across these sectors leads to more effective solutions that drive local business success and encourage more local connectivity. **Prioritizing a Community-Centred Approach:** Aligning economic development and tourism strategy implementation with the needs of current and future residents & businesses creates a more impactful, sustainable and inclusive strategy. Many of the key themes emerging from community engagement are shared across various stakeholder groups, reinforcing the importance of a unified, community-driven approach.
Transportation: Work with partners to create transportation solutions for visitors and residents, to ease the congestion caused by increased visitation levels and enhance connections to employment.	Traffic congestion in downtown Elora, and to a lesser extent, in downtown Fergus, presents challenges for residents and some businesses, limiting their ability to fully access and enjoy these areas. Growing frustration over congestion contributes to negative perceptions of tourism—ironically, a key factor that initially attracted many residents to the community. Proactive transportation planning helps balance the needs of both residents and visitors while preserving the appeal of these vibrant downtown spaces. Very limited public transit is offered within the Township and between Elora and Fergus, and does not meet the transportation needs of the local workforce and visitors. Private transit solutions in Elora are also available to relieve parking demand during peak times but this does not fully satisfy the challenge. Expanding transit services and exploring innovative mobility solutions is critical to improving connectivity, supporting business growth and enhancing the overall visitor experience.	**Expanding Transit for Visitor and Workforce Mobility:** Enhanced transit connections provides visitors with more options to access the community without relying on personal vehicles, helping to alleviate congestion in high-traffic areas through a “park and ride” system. Additionally, improved transit supports workforce mobility both within Centre Wellington and between the township and larger urban centres. Consultation findings highlight that many local employers rely on workers from Guelph and Kitchener-Waterloo, with a significant portion of these positions offering lower wages. Similarly, many residents commute to these larger centres for employment, reinforcing the need for efficient and accessible transit solutions. **Leveraging Transit as a Marketing and Engagement Platform:** Beyond improving resident and visitor mobility, the development of transit options presents an opportunity to showcase Centre Wellington’s economic and lifestyle advantages. Public transit serves as a dynamic platform for advertising and engagement, encouraging visitors, residents and regional workers to explore local businesses, recreational assets and investment opportunities.

Naturally, budget is required to support staff enhancements. A MAT provides direct funding to tourism efforts, and other recommendations, such as introducing paid visitor parking, provide other direct-from-tourism revenue sources.

DIGITAL TOOLS

The Township has recently adopted a CRM system, which provides insights into the business community. Expanding the use of digital tools and technology solutions further streamlines operations and improves staff efficiency. Following are common digital tools that are utilized to support economic development and tourism efforts in other jurisdictions.

GIS and Data Analytics for Economic Development

Application: Economic Development, Tourism

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) combined with advanced data analytics platforms provide spatial and economic insights. GIS technology is being used in for the following activities:

- Mapping available land and commercial properties for investment.
- Mapping and analyzing tourism-related data, such as visitor traffic patterns, points of interest, and infrastructure needs.
- Visualizing demographic, workforce, and market data to identify growth opportunities.
- Creating interactive online tools for site selectors and investors.

GIS is a beneficial solution to explore, as it allows for quick assessment of opportunities, informs data-driven decisions, and improves transparency and accessibility for investors and stakeholders. GIS tools like Esri or Localintel are scalable for smaller municipalities like Centre Wellington.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Systems

Application: Economic Development, Tourism

CRM systems such as Executive Pulse or Salesforce help manage relationships with businesses, stakeholders, and potential investors. Economic developers are using CRM systems to:

- Tracking and managing leads for business attraction or retention.
- Coordinating communications with local businesses and stakeholders.
- Monitoring the success of initiatives.

CRMs are useful to explore to centralize and analyze information, making it easier to tell your story, coordinate efforts across your team, and to save time and reduce redundancies in stakeholder engagement. Economic development has implemented Executive Pulse as a CRM currently. .

Digital Twin Technology

Application: Economic Development, Tourism

This is a technology that provides virtual models that simulate physical spaces and infrastructure, helping to plan and optimize development projects. It is being used to:

- Model infrastructure impacts of future development.
- Visualize zoning and land-use scenarios.
- Enhance public consultation through immersive experiences.

Employing this technology helps reduce risks by simulating potential outcomes before investments are made by engaging the public and investors with compelling visualizations.

Artificial Intelligence and Predictive Analytics

Application: Economic Development

AI-powered tools analyze data to generate content, forecast economic trends, identify investment opportunities, and assess risks. It is used to:

- Predict industry growth and workforce needs.
- Automate economic impact analysis.
- Target businesses most likely to invest or expand.
- Automate time-consuming analyses, freeing up staff for strategic work.
- Automate content development for emails and communications initiatives.

Online Community Portals and Dashboards

Application: Economic Development

Platforms like Localintel, MySidewalk, or GIS Planning offer interactive tools for community engagement and investor attraction. It is used to:

- Provide up-to-date data on workforce, demographics, and available properties.
- Offer self-serve tools for site selectors and entrepreneurs.

It has the potential to reduce staff workload by automating information sharing and improving community transparency and investor engagement.

Drones and Internet of Things (IoT) for Infrastructure Planning

Application: Economic Development

Drones and IoT sensors collect data on infrastructure and land use. They are used to :

- Conduct site surveys and monitor construction progress.
- Assess Infrastructure needs and environmental impacts.

They provide detailed, up-to-date insights without requiring extensive on-the-ground work, which speeds up planning and decision-making processes. This technology makes sense to employ when managing significant infrastructure projects.

Social Media Listening and Sentiment Analysis

Application: Economic Development, Tourism

Tools like Brandwatch or Hootsuite Insights analyze social media data to understand public sentiment and trends. It is used to:

- Gauge community support for initiatives.
- Identify potential concerns or opportunities based on public feedback.

Engaging these tools allows for proactive engagement with the community and supports more informed decision-making based on real-time feedback. These tools are most helpful for maintaining strong community engagement.

Virtual and Augmented Reality (VR/AR) Tools

Application: Economic Development, Tourism

Virtual and augmented reality technology offers immersive experiences that enhance the way locals and visitors interact with destinations. These tools are rapidly becoming essential for storytelling and experiential tourism, giving visitors a deeper connection to the places they visit. AR & VR are used to:

- Showcase industrial or commercial sites for sale or development, allowing users to “visit” a site without actually accruing the time and cost of travel.

- Create interactive experiences that allow users to learn about notable public spaces, cultural landmarks or natural landscapes in new ways.
- Activate public art, with the development of additional layers of engagement only available when viewed through a smartphone.

MECHANISMS TO ENHANCE CAPACITY

To effectively steward economic and tourism growth, the Township must enhance its resource base over the coming years. Opportunities to align economic development and tourism efforts—such as shared business development programming, community marketing and placemaking—amplify outcomes. Collaboration with internal departments (e.g., Planning, Community Development, and Communications) and external stakeholders is also essential.

As referenced multiple times throughout this EDTS, implementing a Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) is a key recommendation to enhance the Township's capacity. The Province of Ontario requires that a municipality establish a non-profit organization, with a mandate for tourism promotion, in order to implement a MAT. There are various models for how this takes shape, including the following, which are presented in order of most recommended for Centre Wellington, including an envisioned structure:

1. Establish a DMO within the Township Organization, with a focus on tourism and small business-focused economic development.

Structure:

- The DMO employs a Tourism and Destination Development Coordinator (evolving to a Manager position), Visitor Centre staff, and a Small Business Development Coordinator (new position).
- The Economic Development Manager maintains their position within the main Township administrative structure.

Pros:

- As an "arms-length" entity of the Township, the Organization has a more direct connection to MAT funds.
- This approach facilitates enhanced collaboration between economic development and tourism teams, uniting efforts as it relates to small business development and support.
- There is potential for economic development and tourism to share positions, improving efficiencies.
- Fewer parties/organizational bodies involved leads to faster decision-making.

Cons:

- Potential for reduced collaboration with other municipal departments (i.e., Planning, Community Development), without clear processes in place.
- Risk of over-focusing on either tourism or economic development and losing focus on the other, if roles and responsibilities are not clear, defined and managed appropriately.
- Potential disconnect from service departments (i.e., Public Works, Bylaw, and Parks & Facilities) that manage key tourism-related infrastructure (e.g., snow removal, washrooms), which may reduce responsiveness without strong interdepartmental coordination.

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WHY SMALL-BUSINESS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT?

Bringing small business-focused economic development into the DMO aligns tourism growth and local economic benefits. Small businesses are often the primary providers of visitor experiences—for example, accommodations, retail, food services, tours, and cultural offerings. By integrating this function into the DMO, support for these businesses becomes more targeted, coordinated, and responsive to visitor trends. It also enables the DMO to better identify and develop tourism-ready products, fill experience gaps, and foster entrepreneurship that strengthens the destination. This structure promotes a holistic approach to place-based economic development, where business vitality and visitor satisfaction reinforce one another.

2. Establish a DMO within the Township Organization, with a sole focus on tourism.

Structure:

- The DMO employs the Tourism and Destination Development Coordinator (evolving to a Manager position) and Visitor Centre staff.
- Economic Development responsibilities remain within the main Township administrative structure.

Pros:

- As an "arms-length" entity of the Township, the Organization has a more direct connection to MAT funds.
- Economic development retains strong alignment with Planning, Communications and Community Development staff.

Cons:

- Without direct connections, there are potential barriers to collaboration between economic development and tourism, with a risk of duplicating efforts.
- Potential disconnect from service departments (i.e., Public Works, Bylaw, and Parks & Facilities) that manage key tourism-related infrastructure (e.g., snow removal, washrooms), which may reduce responsiveness without strong interdepartmental coordination.

The DMO structure and MAT collection are two separate considerations. Many communities rely on the internal administration to collect MAT payments (i.e., Kirkland Lake, Wawa), while others rely on a third party—namely, the Ontario Restaurant Hotel & Motel Association—to manage collection (i.e., Guelph, Kingston). This approach is largely defined by internal capacity. The best solution for Centre Wellington is defined through further MAT-dedicated public engagement and recommended within a MAT Implementation Plan.

To position the Township to fully implement this EDTS, it is imperative that staffing levels align with comparable municipalities of similar size and growth trajectory.

The following table shares examples for consideration as the Township considers growing its own staff complement. It displays direct economic development and tourism department staff for comparator municipalities of a similar size and/or growth trajectory as the Township of Centre Wellington. This table does not take into account the numerous support staff and departments that enable economic development and tourism efforts across the municipalities.

Table D.2: Comparative municipalities, staff complement

COMMUNITY	POPULATION			NUMBER OF ED STAFF	NUMBER OF TOURISM STAFF	OTHER STAFF
	2001	2011	2021			
Centre Wellington	24,260	26,693	31,093	1	1	FTE equivalent for part time or partial staff roles
Bradford West Gwillimbury	22,228	28,077	42,880	2	0	
Innisfil	N/A	20,365	43,326	4.5	0	2 staff in DMZ Innisfil
North Bay	62,303	64,043	52,662	1	0	1 staff in administration
Orangeville	25,248	27,975	30,167	2	0	2.5 staff to support culture, 1 staff as small business centre coordinator, 1 staff in administration
Orillia	29,121	30,546	33,411	2.5	0.5	1 staff in culture, 2 staff in Fuel Innovation, 1 administration
St. Thomas	36,189	40,973	42,840	6	1	1 staff in the small business centre
Stratford	29,780	30,886	33,232	4	5	2 staff in administration
Woodstock	33,061	37,443	46,705	2	0	

[EMPHASIS]

UNDERSTANDING MAT

In 2017, the province enacted O. Reg. 435/17 ('Transient Accommodation Tax), which granted municipalities the authority to implement a Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) if they so choose. The purpose of the MAT, as articulated by the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO), is:

- To support local tourism growth and development while providing municipalities with another source of revenue; and
- Amplifying existing tourism investments through marketing and product development

Benefits of a MAT include:

- A MAT enables municipalities to develop and sustain local tourism economies, with additional revenues strengthening the impact of tourism investments and initiatives;
- A MAT increases the return on investment of local tourism offerings through diversified income and provides revenue/seed funding for municipalities.
- A MAT is a visitor-facing tax; there is no burden carried by residents.
- A MAT can ultimately be applied to tourism and non-tourism initiatives, based on the needs of the Municipality and community at large.

One of the MAT's greatest challenges is the name itself, given public resistance to any 'tax.' It is important to remember that a MAT is not a business tax; **it is a visitor-focused tax**, applied by local accommodators but not to local accommodators. Accommodators themselves are unaffected financially. The greatest impact to them is the administrative duty to charge and remit the MAT.

At least 50 municipalities across the province have implemented a MAT, with more in the process of doing so. There is no evidence to suggest that a MAT dissuades visitors from selecting a destination.

MAT Parameters:

- MAT can only be applied to short-term visitor stays (less than 30 days).
- MAT only applies to the accommodation portion of the receipt; HST is charged on top of the MAT.
- MAT is a tax, not an optional fee: If imposed by a municipality, MAT must be paid by all applicable accommodation providers.
- MAT design is at the discretion of the municipality.
- Short-term rental regulations influence the application of MAT. In addition to hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts and STRs, campsites are another prospective area of application.
- A Municipality must establish a non-profit organization, with a mandate for tourism promotion, in order to implement a MAT.
- A minimum of 50% of MAT funds collected must go directly to this non-profit organization (henceforth referred to as a 'DMO' - destination management organization).

MAT 'Dos':

- Invest in education and engagement to inform the Municipality's approach to MAT, including with accommodators, tourism stakeholders, public administrators, Council, and the community at large.
- Define a clear purpose for the DMO, with a focus on leveraging tourism in the best interest of the community.
- Implement short-term rental licensing and regulation prior to implementing MAT.

- Establish clear terms of agreement between the DMO and Council. Create a reserve fund for the non-DMO MAT dollars, to direct investments to tourism-led initiatives.
- Once the process for MAT remittance is defined, educate accommodators on how to pay the tax.
- When a MAT is in place, be transparent in communicating with the community about how it is being invested.

MAT 'Don'ts':

- Don't rush into it. Careful consideration and engagement are required to align all impacted parties, to maximize the impact of MAT once it is being collected and invested. Expect that once MAT is passed, it will take time to get time establishing the roles & responsibilities.
- Don't leave the 50% of non-DMO required funds without a clearly defined purpose.

Notable Practices:

- Visit Stratford, which is a separate entity from the Town of Stratford, asks Council to match their MAT investments with their portion of funds, then seek additional funding from upper levels of government. This allows each dollar to go up to three times further.
- Huntsville has **a clear and public list of projects** that have been funded through the MAT.
- Tourism Kingston, which works with Kingston Accommodation Partners on MAT collection and spending, invests some of the funding into member services. As an example, for Queen's University Homecoming, they send Queen's-branded merch (i.e., posters, decals, chocolates, scarves, etc.) to hotels, to pass onto their guests. This helps accommodators see the value of the MAT and see that initiatives funded by MAT help fill their properties.

Communities with MAT:

Table D.3: MAT comparators

COMMUNITY	IMPLEMENTATION DATE	%	REVENUE* (ANNUAL)
Niagara-on-the-Lake	January 1, 2024	4% (moved from 3% Jan. 1, 2025)	$309,000 in first seven months[45]
Collingwood	March 1, 2025	4%	Forecast $900,000 - $1.2M annually
Kirkland Lake	January 1, 2024	4%	+$300,000 in Year 1
Wawa	Expected April 1, 2025	4%	$400,000
Lincoln	December 13, 2023	4%	$428,335.20
South Bruce Peninsula	January 1, 2022	4%	nearly $500K in 2023
Windsor	December 1, 2017	4%	$300,000
Thunder Bay	December 1, 2017	5% (moved from 4% in Jan. 2025)	$733,000
Waterloo Region	July 1, 2019	4%	$3.3M

** Note that Revenue does not equal economic impact. For example, Thunder Bay: $733,000 in MAT funding supported 37 tourism events & destination development projects, which leveraged an additional $2.3M in funding, generating over $12M in local economic impact.*

General Source: TIAO, MAT Overview & Implementation Considerations[46]

APPENDIX E

STRATEGIC PILLAR 2: **Economic Growth & Resilience**

CURRENT REALITY & OPPORTUNITIES

This section provides the background information on Centre Wellington's current reality and opportunity as it relates to **ECONOMIC GROWTH AND RESILIENCE** as a strategic pillar of the EDTS.

SECTORS

Centre Wellington's economy is moderately diversified, with key sectors such as construction, manufacturing, health and social services, retail, accommodation and food service, respectively. These sectors employ more than 1,000 workers each, and lend to the township's two vibrant downtowns with minimal vacancies. Consider these sectors in investment attraction and business retention & expansion efforts. The current state of each sector in the township, as well as key sector trends, are detailed below. The sector profile also contains the shift share analysis for each sector.

Manufacturing

As the largest local employer and one of the most competitive sectors based on location quotient, manufacturing would typically represent an excellent opportunity from which to further grow the economy. Some of the best opportunities lie within intersections between manufacturing and other key sectors in the region such as agriculture and health care.

However, at the time of writing, U.S. President Donald Trump has enacted a series of tariffs on a range of imports to the United States from Canada, and uncertainty remains as to if more will be imposed. As the U.S. is Canada's largest trading partner, this will cause significant uncertainty in the economy, particularly in the automotive and agrifood sector. Of particular concern are recent commitments to build EV manufacturing facilities in southwestern Ontario, and a number of recent announcements have indicated those projects are being delayed. Motor vehicle parts make up the largest share of Centre Wellington's manufacturing sector, and has experienced recent growth, thus it is important that the Township seek opportunities that help build resilience in that sub-sector during these tougher times, including through support for the development of new markets for manufactured goods.

Current trends in the Canadian manufacturing sector include technological advancements such as the adoption of industry 4.0 technologies like automation, artificial intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Things, as well as enhancing sustainability in the manufacturing process to minimize environmental impact through energy efficient processes and the use of eco-friendly materials.[47,48] A total of 104 businesses on the Township's business directory fall within the Manufacturing NAICS sub-category.

[EMPHASIS]

UNDERSTANDING SHIFT SHARE ANALYSIS

For strategy development purposes, shift share analysis is used to provide a better understanding of changes taking place in the township's key sectors. Shift share analysis is a tool used to assess regional economic performance. These measures help analyze how and why a region's economy is growing or declining by comparing it to a larger benchmark economy, such as a nation or a province. They include:

Industrial Mix Effect:

The industrial mix effect evaluates how a sector's regional performance is influenced by the overall performance of a sector. It assesses whether a region's sector is benefiting or not from overall growth or decline across the sector. Thus, a positive industrial mix effect suggests that the region has a higher proportion of industries that are growing faster than the provincial average. A negative industrial mix effect indicates that the region is concentrated in industries that are underperforming or shrinking provincially.

National Growth Effect:

This evaluates how the overall national economy's growth (or decline) impacts the region. It measures the general impact of national economic trends on the region, assuming that the region's industries would grow at the same rate as the national economy.

Expected Change:

This measures the expected amount of job growth or decline for a particular regional industry based on the national growth effect and the industry (or occupation) mix effect. Job change beyond this level is "unexpected" and is therefore attributed to the region's unique competitive effect

Competitive Effect:

The competitive effect evaluates how the performance of specific industries in a region compares to the same industries at the national level. It reflects the region's ability to outperform or underperform relative to the national average in the same industries. A positive competitive effect indicates that the region's businesses are outperforming their national counterparts, possibly due to innovation, cost advantages, or local policies. A negative competitive effect suggests underperformance, potentially due to inefficiencies or lack of competitiveness.

Table E.1: Largest Sub-Sectors in Manufacturing (2024)

Sub-Sectors Manufacturing (4-Digit NAICS)	Workforce FTEs (2024)
Motor vehicle parts manufacturing	789
Rubber product manufacturing	239
Non-ferrous metal (except aluminum) production and processing	235
Other electrical equipment and component manufacturing	228
Printing and related support activities	115

Manufacturing Shift Share Analysis

Using the shift share analysis to examine the manufacturing sector, 107 jobs were lost because of the industrial mix effect, and 106 jobs were gained as a result of the national growth effect, thus 1 job was lost through expected change. However, the competitive effect revealed that 447 jobs were created. This indicates the manufacturing sector across Canada has been experiencing challenges but Centre Wellington has remained very competitive.

Healthcare and Social Assistance

The healthcare sector in Centre Wellington is primarily driven by long-term care facilities and hospital employment, further supported by a diverse range of other healthcare service providers. The outlook for long-term care remains strong as the population continues to age, aligning with the community's demographic trends.

Survey results indicate that access to healthcare (i.e., family doctors, mental health services, etc.) is a top concern among residents, emphasizing the need for expanded services. Key trends in the Canadian healthcare sector include digital transformation and the growth of telehealth, an increasing focus on aging populations, and ongoing workforce shortages.[49,50]

Economic development efforts must prioritize addressing local healthcare needs by considering adequate space for healthcare practitioners to establish their practices. If healthcare access remains a significant concern, there is growing interest in shared spaces and administrative support models to reduce the burden on physicians. In the long term, facilitating the development of such a space may be a strategic initiative for the Township.[51] Similarly, with an older-than-average population, there is an opportunity to increase in-home care providers and aging support services. A total of 66 businesses on the Township's business directory fall within the Healthcare and Social Assistance NAICS sub-category.

Table E.2: Largest Sub-Sectors in Healthcare and Social Assistance

Sub-Sectors Healthcare and Social Assistance (4-Digit NAICS)	Workforce FTEs (2024)
Nursing care facilities	445
General medical and surgical hospitals	344
Offices of other health practitioners	206
Residential developmental handicap, mental health and substance abuse facilities	202
Individual and family services	165
Child day-care services	165

Health and Social Assistance Shift Share Analysis

Conducting shift share analysis on the healthcare and social assistance sector indicated that 141 jobs were gained as a result of the industrial mix effect, and 97 jobs were gained as a result of the national growth affect, thus 238 jobs were created as a result of the expected change. 42 jobs were created as a result of the competitive effect. This indicates the health care and social assistance sector is a strong and competitive sector both locally and nationally.

Tourism

Centre Wellington has experienced significant growth as a tourism destination over the past decade, driven by major private investments, particularly in Elora. This growth has been fueled in part by the rise of day-tripping, a trend that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic as Ontario residents sought outdoor experiences and opportunities to support local businesses. The surge in visitation remains strong, most recently demonstrated by the high attendance at the Elora Christmas Market.

Many retailers and service providers catering to visitors report increased success due to rising visitor numbers. There is a continued interest in further investment in the tourism sector, presenting an opportunity to engage with stakeholders and explore how new assets can be leveraged to maximize benefits for businesses, residents and the community as a whole. (See Appendix H: Destination Development & Visitor Management, for a deeper overview and analysis.)

The sector faces challenges related to a shortage of accommodations and limited experience-based offerings, particularly those geared toward youth, which limits the local capacity to capitalize on growing visitation. Addressing these gaps is a priority for investment attraction efforts, as outlined in Strategic Pillar 7, Brand Identity, Marketing and Communications.

The tourism sector plays a vital role in the local economy, supporting 1,126 jobs in the restaurant and food service industry, as well as 196 jobs in the accommodations sector. Working to ensure an available workforce remains a key challenge, and future sector development considers strategies to address workforce needs and sustain long-term growth.

A total of 64 businesses on the Township's business directory fall within the Accommodations, Food Service, Entertainment, Attractions NAICS sub-categories.

Table E.3: Largest Sub-Sectors in the Tourism Industry

Sub-Sectors of Tourism (Accommodation; Food Service, Entertainment, Attractions) (4-Digit NAICS)	Workforce FTEs (2024)
Full-service restaurants and limited-service eating places	1,126
Traveller accommodation	196
Recreational vehicle (RV) parks and recreational camps	84
Other amusement and recreation industries	83
Heritage institutions	76

Tourism Shift Share Analysis

Conducting the shift share analysis on the arts, entertainment, and recreation sector revealed there were 24 jobs lost due to the industrial mix effect and 17 jobs gained due to the national growth effect, thus 7 jobs were lost due to expected change within the sector. However, 73 jobs were lost due to the competitive effect, indicating there are locally mitigating factors that have led to the sector being less competitive locally, and it is losing jobs as a result. In the accommodation and food services sector, 73 jobs were lost through the industrial mix effect and 62 jobs were gained through the national growth effect. Thus, there were 11 jobs lost through the expected change. 264 jobs were gained because of the competitive effect. This indicates the accommodation and food service sector is a strong and competitive sector both locally and nationally.

Construction

Given Canada's current housing shortage and the projected near-doubling of Centre Wellington's population by 2051, the outlook for the construction sector is positive. Simultaneously, demand for non-residential construction remains strong, though industrial and commercial businesses struggle to find the space required to expand.

The Canadian construction sector is expected to experience continued growth in 2025, driven by infrastructure development, green building initiatives and technological advancements like automation and AI. However, challenges such as labour shortages and rising material costs persist, creating potential barriers to local business growth.[52]

A total of 104 businesses on the Township's business directory fall within the Construction NAICS sub-category.

Table E.4: Largest Sub-Sectors of the Construction Industry

Sub-Sectors Construction (4-Digit NAICS)	Workforce FTEs (2024)
Building equipment contractors	600
Residential building construction	458
Non-residential building construction	205
Building finishing contractors	198
Other specialty trade contractors	101

Construction Shift Share Analysis

Utilizing shift share analysis for the construction sector revealed that 47 jobs were created as a result of the industrial mix effect and 88 jobs created as a result of the national growth effect, thus 135 jobs created as a result of expected change. However, 73 jobs were lost due to the competitive effect, indicating there are locally mitigating factors that have led to the sector being less competitive locally.

Retail and Professional Services

There is a diverse retail and professional services sector in Centre Wellington, with a significant concentration of businesses in downtown areas catering to visitors. However, the largest employers in this sector are those that provide essential services to residents and businesses such as building maintenance, architectural services and grocery stores. This underscores a strong focus on meeting the needs of the local business and resident community. These businesses would be further strengthened by enhanced connections with the local and regional business community.

Emerging trends in the retail and service sectors include the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, the development of personalized services and experiences, an increasing emphasis on sustainability and the circular economy, and a shift towards more experiential retail shopping experiences. These trends are reshaping the landscape of retail and services, influencing consumer expectations and business strategies.[53]

A total of 104 businesses on the Township's business directory fall within the Retail NAICS sub-category. A total of 158 businesses on the Township's business directory fall within the Services NAICS sub-category.

Table E.5: Largest Retail Sub-Sectors

Sub-Sectors Retail (4-Digit NAICS)	Workforce FTEs (2024)
Grocery stores	335
Department stores	269
Health and personal care stores	164
Other general merchandise stores	125
Building material and supplies dealers	80

Table E.6: Largest Service Sub-Sectors

Sub-Sectors Services (4-Digit NAICS)	Workforce FTEs (2024)
Services to buildings and dwellings	310
Architectural, engineering and related services	197
Agencies, brokerages and other insurance-related activities	190
Computer systems design and related services	177
Other professional, scientific and technical services	167

Retail and Professional Services Shift Share Analysis

Examining the shift share analysis for the retail sector noted that 69 jobs were lost due to the industrial mix effect and 71 jobs created due to the national growth effect, thus 2 jobs created after results of expected change. However, 192 jobs were created as a result of the competitive effect, indicating there are locally mitigating factors that have led to the sector being less competitive locally.

There are a number of sectors that align with professional services including information and

cultural industries, finance and insurance, real estate and rental and leasing, and professional, scientific and technical services. Examining the shift share analysis for the information and cultural industry sector reveals that 2 jobs were lost as a result of the industrial mix effect and 10 jobs were added as a result of the national growth effect, thus 8 jobs were added as a result of expected change. 96 jobs were added as a result of the competitive effect.
When examining the shift share analysis for the finance and insurance sector, 25 jobs were created due to the industrial mix effect and 22 jobs created due to the national growth effect, thus 48 jobs were created due to expected change. 135 jobs were created due to the competitive effect.

Utilizing shift share analysis on the real estate and lease rental and leasing sector reveals 19 jobs were lost due to the industrial mix effect, but 13 jobs were created due to the national growth effect, thus 6 jobs were lost as a result of expected change. 6 jobs were lost due to the competitive effect.

Lastly, using shift share analysis to examine the professional, scientific and technical services sector revealed that 141 jobs were created due to the industrial mix effect and 58 jobs created due to the national growth effect, thus 199 jobs created due to expected change. However, 174 jobs were lost due to the competitive effect.

Agriculture

Centre Wellington's agricultural sector is characterized by a blend of large-scale producers operating under existing contracts or quota systems, alongside smaller-scale farmers focused on adding value to their products and exploring agritourism opportunities. Community consultations reveal that key concerns for larger farmers include the preservation of agricultural land, the maintenance of road and bridge infrastructure, and increased awareness of the agricultural sector. In contrast, smaller-scale farmers are particularly interested in exploring new market channels and enhancing agritourism opportunities. While Centre Wellington is not the largest producer of agricultural products within Wellington County (primarily due to the high number of residential dwellings within its settlement areas), it is home to the Elora Research Station. As previously noted, the Research Station—administered by the U of G—is an underutilized asset that warrants further investigation and strategic leveraging, as it very well may be the asset that truly differentiates Centre Wellington from other similar municipalities.

The U of G, located less than half an hour away, is also home to the Ontario Agricultural College, which is dedicated to addressing critical challenges in food, agriculture, community and the environment. At present, there is no active connection between businesses in Centre Wellington and the University or the Research Station. However, the University has expressed interest in exploring the potential for a community space at the Research Station that could incorporate an innovation component. This offers significant prospective benefits to local agricultural businesses and potentially creates opportunities for future investment in agricultural-adjacent sectors, such as agri-tech and agri-food processing.

The Canadian agricultural sector is navigating a range of challenges and opportunities in 2025. Increased input costs, labour shortages and global trade disruptions are among the factors shaping the landscape. For instance, Canadian farmers are adjusting their strategies in response

to new U.S. tariffs on pigs and crops, which could significantly impact Canada's export-dependent agricultural economy. Despite these hurdles, Canada's agriculture and food exports remain robust, reaching nearly $99.1 billion in 2023.[54,55] Labour shortages are also a pressing issue for the sector, with nearly 5% of positions currently unfilled—the highest level in two decades. Amid these challenges, the sector must continue to adapt and innovate. Despite lower projected prices for crops like soybeans, the growing emphasis on export opportunities, along with the advancement of clean and sustainable technologies, suggests a promising outlook for Canadian agriculture. Moreover, the sector's evolving dynamics highlight the importance of strategic investments in labour, technology and infrastructure for the sake of long-term sustainability and competitiveness.

A total of 76 businesses on the Township's business directory fall within the Agriculture NAICS sub-category.

Table E.7: Farms Sub-Sector

Sub-Sectors Farms (4-Digit NAICS)	Workforce FTEs (2024)
Farms	584

Agriculture Shift Share Analysis

Examining the agricultural sector through shift share analysis reveals that 107 jobs were lost due to industrial mix effect, but 35 jobs were gained due to the national growth effect, thus 72 jobs were lost due to expected change. Three jobs were lost due to the competitive effect. This indicates that while the sector as a whole is experiencing a decline in employment, due to locally competitive factors, Centre Wellington's agricultural sector remains moderately stable.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT ECOSYSTEM

Economic growth is often more effectively driven by supporting the expansion of existing businesses rather than attracting new ones. Centre Wellington businesses currently benefit from a range of local and regional business development and support organizations, including a Community Futures in Elora, a Small Business Centre in Guelph, the Centre Wellington Chamber of Commerce, and two Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) in Elora and Fergus. Between these service providers, businesses in Centre Wellington have access to a number of business development supports and services locally and regionally that provide:

- **Business Development and Advisory Services:** The Business Centre Guelph Wellington and Wellington Waterloo Community Futures both offer advisory services to help the business community navigate the programming that's available from respective organizations. This includes programs like: Summer and Starter Company, which support the development of new businesses; Momentum and the Community Futures business mentorship program, which connects businesses with local experts; and the Foodpreneur Advantage program, which is focused on helping food-related businesses start and grow.

- **Specialized Business Development Workshops:** The Business Centre hosts a suite of events and workshops designed to support business startups and growth. These workshops cover a wide range of topic areas including business planning, marketing, taxes and even a special focus on food.
- **Financing:** The Community Futures office offers financing programs to support business growth and expansion for loans up to $250,000. There is also a focused stream for women-led businesses and a program to match Community Improvement Program funding at low interest rates.
- **Employment Support:** Agilec and Second Chance Employment provide workforce attraction support for individual businesses through job posting, online resources, and, in the case of Agilec, additional training services. They also help place individuals using their services and as a result, have a ready pool of labour to connect to employers.

While these supports are helpful, a lack of awareness of programming and events persists within the community. There is an opportunity for the Township to bridge this gap and connect local businesses with existing supports. Not only is this a valuable service to provide stakeholders, it allows the Township team to focus on their core roles rather than dedicating energy to develop internal programs of similar likeness.

Additionally, innovation is a key driver of economic sustainability, encompassing both operational improvements to boost productivity, and innovations in product or service development to enhance profitability. At present, there is no dedicated initiative to foster innovation within Centre Wellington's business community. However, the Township's proximity to post-secondary institutions, particularly the Elora Research Station via the U of G, presents an opportunity for innovation support, particularly in sectors like agriculture where the University has expertise, to drive local and regional growth.

Opportunities to extend active support networks

Engagement and data analysis reveal the opportunity to develop and enhance new partnerships that play a key role in supporting business growth and resilience in Centre Wellington. They include:

Elora Research Station:
The Elora Agricultural Research Station spread over 650 hectares and primarily located in Centre Wellington, is a world-leading complex, encompassing state-of-the-art facilities focusing on research, innovation, education and collaboration. Designed to ensure Canada's leadership in the agriculture sector into the future, the unique partnerships between the various industry sectors and Provincial & Federal Governments, U of G and the research community include the following research facilities:

- Ontario Dairy Research Centre
- Ontario Beef Research Centre
- Ontario Crop Research Centre
- Ontario Swine Research Centre
- Sheep Research Centre – Ponsonby site
- Ontario Aquaculture Research Centre – Alma site

This is a one-of-its kind facility in Canada, and amongst the best agricultural research facilities in the world. While the Township has not yet actively engaged with the Elora Research Station, it hosts the potential to be an incredible asset to support agri-business development within the township and broader region. This can be through knowledge and information transfer to the local agri-business sector, and enhanced connection to the University of Guelph that could expose a pipeline of students to opportunities to work and open a business in Centre Wellington; and also connect the business community to new resources to support and enhance their business operations. The University of Guelph spoke about the interest from students across many disciplines (i.e. engineering) that were interested in developing and exploring new technologies and products that could result in spin-off entrepreneurial activity with the right support in the community. The facility is set to undergo renovations in the near future, and there is a desire to explore a future community-focused space to facilitate information sharing, connection with local businesses, and innovation opportunities. This space could serve as a catalyst to better connect the world class research, facility and direct link to the University of Guelph to Centre Wellington businesses. There is no more salient time for the Township to work to enhance their relationship with the Research Station for the sake of maximizing the benefit of the knowledge, talent and spin-off investment potential that may emerge from there.

Post-Secondary Institutions:
With an estimated over 120,000 students within a 1-hour drive of Centre Wellington, businesses within the community are ideally positioned to connect with local post secondary students to support their employment needs through co-op, internship, summer student, and post-graduation hiring. Beyond this, post-secondary institutions can support business development through a range of programming and supports unique to each school, and detailed below.

University of Guelph (U of G): Only 30 minutes away and home to 30,000 students, U of G specializes in diverse fields including physical and life sciences, arts and humanities, social sciences, business, and agricultural and veterinary sciences. It supports businesses through technology transfer, industry research partnerships, innovation, entrepreneurship and knowledge mobilization. The Wood Centre (formerly CBaSE) offers programs for students pursuing entrepreneurial ideas, while The Hub incubator provides students and alumni with funding, office space and mentorship from experienced entrepreneurs. The University's Industrial Liaison Program (ILP) connects companies with research expertise and resources to drive growth through innovation. By leveraging these initiatives, the Township taps into research collaborations, supports business innovation, and enhances investment attraction by showcasing access to world-class expertise and commercialization opportunities. The University of Guelph is renowned for its excellence in agriculture due to its comprehensive academic programs, cutting-edge research, and strong industry connections through its Ontario Agricultural College.

University of Waterloo: With approximately 42,000 students, the University of Waterloo is renowned for its strengths in engineering, computer science, mathematics and science. It offers a range of business development resources to support students, alumni and early-stage entrepreneurs. Velocity, the world's largest free start-up incubator, provides early-stage founders with expertise, product development support, collaborative workspace and access to risk-tolerant capital. The Centre for Career Development helps individuals explore career opportunities,

offering career planning, job search strategies and graduate school preparation. WatSPEED, an Authorized Training Partner with the School's Project Management Institute, delivers professional development courses in business, leadership and project management, leveraging insights from professors, researchers and industry leaders. Leveraging these resources could collectively foster a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem, equipping businesses with the skills and support needed for business success.

Wilfrid Laurier University: With approximately 20,000 students, the Wilfrid Laurier specializes in undergraduate degrees in arts and science, music and music therapy & business and economics; master's degrees in arts, business, economics & social work; and doctoral degrees in social work, geography & history.

Conestoga College: The College has 32,000 students across campuses and offers a full range of career-focused education, cooperative education, training, and applied research programs. They also offer employee training and are in the process of developing tools and resources to support small business growth.

These post-secondary institutions not only have a large population of students who are interested in co-op and future employment opportunities, but also offer a suite of resources to support local entrepreneurs. Efforts should be made to create awareness about Centre Wellington employment opportunities to the student bases, and connect post-secondary business development resources to the Township.

Agilec and Second Chance Employment:
Agilec provides free employment services to both job seekers and employers, supporting workforce development through various programs and resources. Job seekers can access a local job board, online tools and career transition assistance such as resume writing, interview preparation and vocational rehabilitation. Employers benefit from leadership, and team & professional development training, helping to build stronger workplaces and improve employee retention.

Second Chance Employment offers free employment services for job seekers and employers, featuring both online and in-person resources to support job searches and hiring needs. In addition to a local job board, the organization provides a specialized youth skill-building program that offers participants minimum wage throughout their training, equipping them with valuable experience and financial support while they develop in-demand skills.
These organizations support workforce connections and development and should be considered partners in employment-related initiatives within the community (i.e., job fairs).

THE ECONOMY OF THE FUTURE

As Centre Wellington continues to grow, business development must provide diverse employment, retail, and service opportunities for both existing and new residents, while addressing the demands of a growing tourism market. Economic development needs to focus on two approaches in regard to business development in the community:

- Sustaining and expanding its high-potential sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, health and wellness, construction, and tourism, with particular attention to synergies between these sectors to stimulate innovation and business growth.
- Filling retail, service and entertainment gaps to create complete communities that meet resident needs.

Innovation and value chains

Innovation and the development of regional value chains are crucial for local economic development. Innovation is a key driver of economic growth, as it enhances productivity, fosters competitiveness and leads to the development of new products and services. Results include more efficient production processes, allowing businesses to produce more output with the same or fewer inputs. This increase in productivity is a fundamental component of economic growth, as it enables higher output without a proportional increase in resource consumption. Innovation also opens new markets and enhances a community's competitiveness on the global stage. By developing cutting-edge technologies and services, businesses capture new customer segments and expand their market share, contributing to economic growth.[56] In conjunction with developing regional value chains, this enables communities to diversify their economic activities, reducing dependence on a single industry or market. In turn, this diversification enhances economic resilience, enabling greater resilience when faced with external shocks and adapting to changing global economic conditions.[57] Engagement in regional value chains further facilitates the exchange of knowledge and technology among firms, suppliers and customers, fostering innovation by encouraging the adoption of new processes, products and services.

The development of regional value chains often leads to the establishment of new businesses and the expansion of existing ones, resulting in job creation within the community. As firms grow and integrate into larger value chains, they require a more skilled workforce, thereby generating diverse employment opportunities and contributing to local economic stability. Prioritizing innovation and the development of regional value chains is essential for strengthening local economies. These strategies lead to increased productivity, enhanced competitiveness, job creation, and economic resilience, all of which are vital components of sustainable local economic development.

Youth

With an older-than-average population, Centre Wellington must find a way to attract, retain, and anchor youth in the community. Entrepreneurship is a pathway to just that. Recent studies indicate a significant rise in entrepreneurial aspirations among younger generations, particularly Gen Z and Millennials. A 2022 survey by EY revealed that 60% of teens prefer starting their own businesses over traditional employment. This trend is attributed to their desire for

autonomy, financial independence, and the flexibility that entrepreneurship offers. Several factors contribute to this entrepreneurial inclination:

- ***Digital Proficiency:*** Growing up in the digital era, young individuals possess a natural aptitude for technology, enabling them to leverage digital tools and platforms effectively in their ventures.
- ***Desire for Purpose-Driven Work:*** Many young entrepreneurs aim to create businesses that align with their values, focusing on social impact and sustainability.
- ***Adaptability and Resilience:*** Exposure to economic fluctuations has instilled a sense of adaptability in younger generations, making them more inclined to pursue entrepreneurial paths that offer control over their careers.

This shift toward entrepreneurship among youth is reshaping the business landscape, introducing innovative ideas and new business models that reflect the values and technological fluency of younger generations, and harnessing this energy should be a consideration for the Township.

Looking to the future, it is critical to consider the broader, rapidly evolving global landscape. Technological advancements, geopolitical and demographic shifts and climate change all present new opportunities and challenges for businesses and communities. Fostering innovation and deeper connections among local and regional businesses will further develop value chains, enhancing resilience against global economic uncertainties or future shocks. Part of the role of economic development and tourism is to guide the local business community through these shifts and equip them with tools to remain competitive and resilient in an ever-changing environment.

APPENDIX F

STRATEGIC PILLAR 3: **Workforce & Livability**

CURRENT REALITY & OPPORTUNITIES

This section provides the background information on Centre Wellington's current reality and opportunity as it relates to **WORKFORCE AND LIVABILITY** as a strategic pillar of the EDTS.

WORKFORCE OUTLOOK

Centre Wellington faces a critical challenge in workforce sustainability: It has an older-than-average population and approximately 33% of business survey respondents identify "access to workforce" as a challenge in Centre Wellington. This demographic trend impacts business attraction and long-term economic development.

Residents have expressed concerns that residential growth is outpacing employment and retail/service expansion. While this imbalance aligns with the prescribed resident and employment growth targets, it underscores the need for strategic development in sectors that reduce resident commuting and foster local employment opportunities.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Future economic development must prioritize creating opportunities for higher-skilled employment, addressing the community's limited advanced career pathways.

Centre Wellington District High School contributes to workforce development through its 12 Specialist High Skills Majors (SHSM) programs. These initiatives prepare students for careers in critical sectors such as agriculture, arts and culture, business, construction, environment, health and wellness, hospitality and tourism, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), manufacturing, non-profit education and childcare, sports and transportation. While Centre Wellington is not currently home to a Wellington Catholic District School Board Secondary School, students residing in the Township are bused to surrounding schools. Secondary schools across the region are home to SHSM programming.

Centre Wellington's proximity to world-class institutions—including the University of Guelph, University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University and Conestoga College—presents an opportunity to build strategic partnerships for workforce attraction and development. Each of these institutions offers robust co-op and internship programs to enhance students' academic experiences with practical work opportunities, potentially creating a bridge to over 120,000 students within a 40-minute drive of Centre Wellington.

Strengthening collaboration between local employers and these institutions bridge workforce gaps, enhance skills development and attract investment, thereby fostering sustainable economic growth.

COMMUNITY LIVABILITY

Community livability is a cornerstone of Centre Wellington's economic development and tourism success. As the township grows, maintaining its unique charm and vibrant downtowns is essential to sustaining its appeal for both residents and visitors. Thoughtful planning allows for growth to enhance (rather than diminish) the qualities that make Centre Wellington an attractive place. Additionally, modern economic development strategies emphasize the importance of fostering inclusive communities that support traditionally marginalized groups and create environments where businesses and talent thrive. By prioritizing livability, Centre Wellington strengthens its workforce, attracts investment and remains a destination of choice for residents, businesses, and tourists alike.[58]

The rapid increase in housing costs—far outpacing wage growth—has created significant affordability challenges. While the average cost of a home in Centre Wellington is currently (2025) $838,695 (down approximately 12% from a year earlier), the cost still remains outside a comfortable range for the average worker.[59] This is particularly problematic for early- to mid-career workers, whose access to housing is critical for workforce stability. Competing demands for housing, including the rise in short-term rental accommodations, exacerbate these challenges. It is imperative that the Township attract new accommodations to address shortfalls in overnight stays while working to ensure sufficient residential stock remains available. Without action, there is a risk of further pricing the local workforce out of the housing market.

Transit services in Centre Wellington are currently limited. The Elora and Fergus Downtown Shuttle Program operates on weekends during the summer months, providing transportation between key locations in Elora and Fergus to alleviate parking constraints and improve local mobility. While it is a tourism-led initiative, it is reportedly well-used by residents as well. Additionally, the County's RIDE WELL program offers on-demand, door-to-door transportation services throughout Wellington County and Guelph. This publicly funded, rural transit pilot project operates Monday through Friday, from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., excluding statutory holidays. Uber operates within the community, but has a limited number of drivers which means potentially long wait times and high costs.

A number of employers and residents indicate that the limited and costly access to transit is a barrier to employment and residents further express a desire for expanded transit options. Still,

fiscal constraints at higher levels of government could limit future investments. Enhancing transit accessibility is crucial to support employment, especially amongst youth, and for workforce mobility, especially for connecting residents to regional employment hubs and post-secondary institutions.

Rising costs for goods, services and materials continue to impact household budgets, business operations and visitor spending. These pressures affect the community's affordability and could hinder both resident retention and economic competitiveness.

As Centre Wellington grows, fostering a welcoming and inclusive community is essential to attracting and embracing new residents. Community engagement efforts reveal feelings of disconnect and unwelcome among residents representing historically marginalized groups. Expanding local support and services to promote belonging and equity is critical, especially given the concentration of such services in larger urban centres that represent competition for investment attraction. Community-focused educational efforts and campaigns are also valuable. Not only is there benefit to individuals, diversity and belonging overall equate to more vibrant, economically competitive and innovative communities. Notably:

- In general terms, a diversified workforce is likely to have different skills and mindsets, which in turn correlate with business, technological, and cultural innovation in a positive way.[60] Studies show that companies with above-average diversity scores generate 45% of their revenue from innovation, compared to 26% for those with below-average diversity scores.[61]
- Embracing diversity makes a community more appealing to a broader talent pool. Organizations that prioritize diversity and inclusion are more likely to attract and retain top talent, enhancing their competitiveness.[62]
- Inclusive communities that address social conditions contributing to safety and well-being experience lower rates of violence and better overall health outcomes. Research shows that certain social conditions are present where safety thrives, and understanding these conditions guide resource allocation to reduce violence.[63]

Youth represents a vital resource for workforce attraction and retention in the future, however, EDTS engagement shows they currently feel disengaged and lack connection to the community, in particular, due to a lack of youth-centric spaces. Strategies to engage young residents should include creating opportunities for connection with local employers, enhancing local training programs, expanding transit options to post-secondary institutions, and creating community spaces where youth feel engaged and valued. This is an important group for the Township's economic development efforts to consider because they represent the next generation of workers, entrepreneurs and community leaders who—if they remain within the community—drive economic growth and sustainability.

A substantial portion of Centre Wellington's workforce commutes to larger urban centres for employment. While this contributes to higher income levels for some residents, it also increases housing costs and reduces accessibility for lower-wage workers. Enhancing local employment opportunities and improving transit systems are essential to addressing these challenges and fostering a more sustainable local economy.

APPENDIX G

STRATEGIC PILLAR 4: **Investment Readiness & Infrastructure**

CURRENT REALITY & OPPORTUNITIES

This section provides the background information on Centre Wellington's current reality and opportunity as it relates to **INVESTMENT READINESS AND INFRASTRUCTURE** as a strategic pillar of the EDTS.

PLACES TO GROW

Centre Wellington's growth trajectory positions the township, at least in part, as an attractive destination for retail and service-based investments. However, current and future business expansion is limited by a lack of available land and appropriately zoned buildings. Feedback from local businesses and stakeholders highlights a significant shortage of suitable expansion sites, which has, in some cases, led businesses to relocate to neighbouring municipalities where their spatial needs are met.

The Township is mandated to accommodate a population of 58,200 residents by 2051, along with 25,100 jobs—an increase of 9,456 from the current employment base of 15,644 (Lightcast Analyst, 2024). Achieving this employment growth target requires a concerted effort to identify and develop additional lands and facilities designated for employment uses, providing businesses with the physical space they need to thrive within Centre Wellington.

An analysis of resident and employment allocations by the province for Centre Wellington reveals that the Township is positioned at least, in part, as a bedroom community. This results from the imbalance between the number of residents and available local jobs. While the concept of a bedroom community may not always align with traditional economic development goals, such communities are essential, particularly in regions like Centre Wellington, which benefits from its close proximity to two moderately sized urban centres, Guelph and Kitchener-Waterloo, and is within a two-hour drive of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), the largest urban area in Canada.

What distinguishes Centre Wellington, however, is that many of the businesses and stakeholders consulted for this EDTS draw their primary workforce from nearby cities such as Guelph and Waterloo. This suggests that local residents are either not attracted to or not adequately suited for the existing employment opportunities in the township. Moving forward, employment growth in Centre Wellington should focus on creating job opportunities that offer a competitive quality of life, particularly in relation to the higher housing costs in the township. Additionally, employment initiatives align with the retail and service needs of residents, aligning new opportunities with local demand.

One key challenge facing bedroom communities like Centre Wellington is the tendency for residents, who commute to larger centres for work, to shop outside of the township. In response, the EDTS considers ways to better engage these residents and encourage them to contribute to the local economy, thus increasing economic activity within the township.

BUSINESS INFRASTRUCTURE

As revealed during the EDTS engagement period, business growth and productivity in the township are hindered by inconsistent access to essential infrastructure, including natural gas, water, roads, bridges, telecommunications and internet services. However, there is no clearly identified sector or geography that is experiencing barriers. To address these gaps effectively, the Township must conduct a comprehensive analysis to prioritize infrastructure improvements that align with the greatest needs of businesses and economic development objectives.

Roads and Bridges

Centre Wellington faces ongoing challenges in maintaining and upgrading its extensive network of roads and bridges, which are essential for connectivity and economic growth. The Township oversees approximately 500 kilometres of roads and 111 bridges and culverts, many of which require significant investment, such as those along Wellington Road 109.

The condition of roads and bridges has direct implications for economic development, impacting business operations, visitor experience from a tourism perspective, and community growth. Deteriorating infrastructure leads to higher transportation costs and delays for businesses, reduce the township's attractiveness to investors, and negatively affect the tourism sector by discouraging visitors. Additionally, infrastructure deficiencies may hinder residential and commercial development, limiting long-term economic expansion and competitiveness.[64]

Hydro

Centre Wellington Hydro, is one of two local electricity distribution providers for Centre Wellington, Ontario, is a key driver of economic growth within the community. The utility plays a vital role in fostering a favourable business environment by delivering reliable and efficient electrical services that support the sustainability and expansion of local businesses.

The utility's ongoing commitment to maintaining and upgrading its infrastructure is central to minimizing power outages and providing consistent operations for businesses. Notably, Centre Wellington Hydro has outlined plans to replace and construct new distribution stations in Elora and Fergus to enhance service reliability and safeguard against potential service disruptions.[65]

To accommodate the township's growing demand, Centre Wellington Hydro continuously invests in infrastructure improvements, including the upgrading of distribution stations and the implementation of advanced grid technologies. These strategic investments provide businesses with the electrical capacity needed to innovate, scale and remain competitive in the region.

In addition to its infrastructure investments, Centre Wellington Hydro actively engages with the community to better understand the unique needs of local businesses. By collaborating with stakeholders and supporting community development initiatives, the utility plays an important role in cultivating an environment that is conducive to business growth and economic prosperity.

Hydro One also provides electricity to Centre Wellington residents and businesses depending on where they are located within the community. Hydro One is Ontario's largest electricity transmission and distribution service provider. They distribute electricity across Ontario to nearly 1.4 million predominantly rural customers, or approximately 26% of the total number of customers in Ontario.

Water

The Township sources its water from municipal groundwater wells to serve residents and businesses. According to the 2019 Water Supply Master Plan, additional water supply is needed to support future growth. In 2019, estimated peak system capacity was 12,400 cubic meters per day (m3/d). In 2041, peak demand is predicted to be 19,400 m3/d. The estimated additional supply needed to meet predicted 2041 demand is 7,000 m3/d which translates into the equivalent of four new municipal wells to meet future demand. To meet this demand, the Township plans to both optimize output from existing wells and develop new municipal supply sources. In May, 2025, a Water and Wastewater Servicing Master Plan was completed to provide the Township with an understanding of how the existing water and wastewater networks are functioning, identify current and future capacity constraints, evaluate opportunities to increase system capacity and inform short and long-range planning to maintain or improve levels of service and accommodate future growth in the Township.

Natural Gas

While natural gas services are supplied by Enbridge Gas and available in Centre Wellington, coverage may not extend to all areas within the township. This uneven distribution limits access for some residents and businesses, potentially affecting energy choices and costs.

Internet and Cell Phone Services

Access to high-speed internet and reliable cell phone coverage is inconsistent across the township. Some areas benefit from fibre optic services, while others lack adequate connectivity. This digital divide poses challenges for residents and businesses, particularly in more rural areas.

Centre Wellington Business Park and Strategy

Centre Wellington's Business Park, located in north Fergus, is a strategic initiative aimed at fostering economic growth and diversifying the local economy. In February 2020, the Township acquired a 58-acre parcel of land to establish its first business park.

In 2021, the Township developed a comprehensive Business Park Strategy to guide its development. This strategy identified target industries for investment attraction, including manufacturing, technology, and logistics. It also recommended zoning changes and permitted

uses to accommodate a broader range of businesses, which were recently adopted by Council. To enhance the park's appeal, the Township has implemented several changes, including:

- Zoning Adjustments: Modifying zoning regulations to permit a wider array of business activities.
- Lot Size Flexibility: Introducing smaller lot sizes to attract a diverse range of businesses.
- Infrastructure Improvements: Upgrading roads, utilities, and digital connectivity to meet modern business needs.

These initiatives aim to make the Business Park more attractive to potential investors and businesses. The Township's Business Park strategy also emphasizes the importance of market analysis to understand regional economic trends and align the Business Park's offerings with current demands.

This approach positions the park to remain competitive and relevant in a dynamic economic landscape. In total, the Business Park currently has 33 acres remaining in custom lot sizes, available for sale at $450,000/acre.

Planning and development processes

As is true in many municipalities, businesses in Centre Wellington perceive the planning and development processes as complex, costly and difficult to navigate. Survey results identified this as the top challenge facing local businesses. Although there is no clear evidence of systemic issues, the perception itself has the potential to deter investment and growth. Planning and development are critical components of economic and business development. Improving transparency, simplifying processes where possible and addressing stakeholder concerns are key to reducing these barriers, supporting the expansion of existing businesses and attracting new investments to the area.

Centre Wellington offers a structured and transparent planning and permitting process for industrial and commercial developments. This process aligns new projects with the Township's Official Plan and Zoning By-law, which guide land use policies and regulations. The application process roughly follows these steps:

- **Pre-Consultation:** Engage with the Township's Planning and Development Department to discuss a new project and understand applicable policies and requirements.
- **Application Submission:** Submit a complete application, including necessary plans, studies, and fees. The Township provides a Development Manual to guide applicants through this process.
- **Review and Approval:** The Township reviews the application for compliance with planning policies and regulations. This may involve public meetings and consultations.
- **Permitting:** Upon approval, the necessary permits are issued to commence construction.

Currently, Centre Wellington provides online services through the CityView Portal, allowing applicants to submit applications, track progress and access resources remotely.

Community Improvement Plan

A Community Improvement Plan (CIP) is a tool available to municipalities in Ontario to stimulate economic development by providing grants, tax incentives and other support for the revitalization and development of underused or blighted areas. These plans target growth, improve infrastructure and encourage private investment to enhance the community's overall livability and economic potential.

The Township's Community Improvement Plan (CIP) offers various grant programs aimed at revitalizing and supporting economic development with a number of goals including: façade and building improvement, efficient and strategic use of land, housing supply, economic growth and diversification, agricultural and agri-business uses and design and environmental sustainability. The Township started their CIP program in 2015, and the program underwent a revamp in 2023. Historically, a budget of $30,000 was allocated annually, but that amount decreased to $15,000 in 2025. Interest in the program dropped off significantly following the COVID-19 pandemic, however, inquiries have started to increase again.

Active 2025 programs include:

- **Study Grant Program:** To promote the undertaking of studies, plans, assessments, and architectural/design drawings that determine the site-specific potential/feasibility of adaptively reusing, rehabilitating, retrofitting, converting, improving or redeveloping existing buildings, and/or developing vacant property. This program provides a 50% cost share for up to two projects, contributing up to a maximum of $7,500 for an individual project, or $12,500 between two projects.
- **Building Improvement Grant Program:** To promote the maintenance and physical improvement of existing commercial, mixed-use, institutional, industrial and agricultural (with a retail commercial and/or agri-tourism component) buildings. This program provides a 50% cost share for up to two projects, contributing up to a maximum of $10,000 for an individual project, or $12,500 between two projects.
- **Rental Housing Grant Program:** To promote improvements to the quality of the existing rental housing stock and increase the supply of rental housing via renovation of existing upper floor/rear rental residential units, conversion of existing commercial and mixed-use building space to rental residential units, and construction of new rental residential units. This program provides a cost share of up to 50% for up to 4 units for up to $10,000/each.
- **Rental Housing Development Charge (DC) Program:** To increase the supply of rental housing in the Township's Central Business Districts (CBDs) and other key sub-areas and ensure said residential units are maintained as rental residential units for a minimum of 20 years. The Township can establish a maximum grant contribution but it is not currently identified.
- **Tax Increment Equivalent Grant Program (TIEG):** To encourage "substantial" rehabilitation, redevelopment, development, infill and intensification projects. This program will provide an annual tax increment equivalent grant (TIEG) for five years after project completion equal to a percentage of the increase in the Township portion of property taxes as shown below generated by the completion of a "substantial project" where the proposed and "as built" substantial project achieves the minimum evaluation score specified in the TIEG Program.

Table G.1: TIEG Amounts

YEAR	TIEG AMOUNT (% of Township Property Tax Increase (Increment) Resulting from Project
1	100%
2	80%
3	60%
4	40%
5	20%

- **Façade & Property Improvements Program:** To support the rehabilitation and enhancement of façades, signage, and storefronts for existing commercial, mixed-use, institutional, industrial, and agricultural buildings with retail or agri-tourism elements. It also encourages improvements to landscaping, driveway access, and parking, especially along public street edges, to boost visual appeal and create a safer, more welcoming pedestrian environment.
- **Fergus Downtown Illumination Grant Program:** To support the economic revitalization and visual enhancement of the downtown core, in an effort to create a vibrant, welcoming atmosphere.
- **Brownfields Tax Assistance Program (TAP):** To encourage the remediation and substantial rehabilitation, adaptive reuse, and development/redevelopment of brownfield sites (where actual contamination has been confirmed). The financial assistance is provided in the form of tax assistance, a cancellation of part or all of the property taxes on a property that is undergoing or has undergone remediation and development, to assist with the payment of the cost of environmental remediation and/or risk assessment/management. This program applies only to properties requiring environmental remediation and/or risk assessment/management.

These programs focus on improving properties beyond regular maintenance, promoting economic growth, sustainable development, and addressing housing supply challenges. For full details, refer to **the Township's CIP page**.

APPENDIX H

STRATEGIC PILLAR 5: **Destination Development & Visitor Management**

CURRENT REALITY & OPPORTUNITIES

This section provides the background information on Centre Wellington's current reality and opportunity as it relates to **DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT AND VISITOR MANAGEMENT** as a strategic pillar of the EDTS.

TOURISM EXPERIENCES

The historic, charming downtowns of Centre Wellington are a primary draw for visitors to the township. These walkable, aesthetically appealing areas offer local shopping, dining and entertainment. While these activities make for memorable day trips, there is generally not enough activity to drive overnight stays, particularly when these assets are viewed as singular attractions. Without connecting visitors to other activities in Centre Wellington—considering downtown areas as a gateway to nature, arts and culture, and immersive experiences—these urban centres are largely underutilized for driving positive tourism impact, outside of major festivals and events.

Beyond the downtown areas, the Elora Gorge and Grand River—managed by the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA)—are core attractions. The River is activated by a number of independent businesses that provide experiences such as paddling, rafting and tubing. One outfitter offers ziplining, rappelling and ice climbing. Another offers equipment rentals, including bicycles. These businesses drive economic activity and represent potential for packaged outdoor experiences. The case for nature-based tourism is made all the more appealing by the trails through and around the township, which attract cyclists and hikers in the warmer months and snowshoers & cross-country skiers in the winter months. Additionally, Belwood Lake Conservation Area, also managed by the GRCA, offers powerboat and sailboat access, and is also a destination for swimming. The Elora Quarry (again, a GRCA asset, available six months of the year) is another option for swimming, picnicking and hiking. Sustainable use of these natural resources through environmental stewardship and visitor management strategies is crucial to maintaining their long-term appeal.

Other notable local experiences include the two golf clubs within the township (plus others in close proximity), plus a selection of special events and evening entertainment hosted by local businesses.

A plethora of festivals and events throughout the year set Centre Wellington apart as a small community, including (but not limited to):

- Arts & music-focused
- Culture-focused
- Gastronomy-focused
- Cosplay-inspired
- Special interest-focused

These play a crucial role in defining Centre Wellington's brand as a destination and are largely volunteer-run. The social and economic impact of festivals and events is further maximized with enhanced coordination between festival organizers and local businesses to create themed packages, pre- and post-event experiences, and extended programming that encourages overnight stays.

This potential for strategic cross-collaboration is a recurring theme in Centre Wellington. If visitors aren't aware of the breadth of things to do locally, they are left to engage with few aspects of the destination rather than exploring its full range of offerings. To maximize their economic impact, visitors need to be given a reason to stay longer. Packaged tours, themed routes and content, and itineraries are tactical solutions, even more successfully facilitated by: working with existing experience providers; supporting existing businesses on creative experience development initiatives; and attracting new experience providers.

Specific themes and opportunities emerge from analyzing The Tourism Asset Map (Appendix M), namely 1. nature and outdoor recreation and 2. arts & culture, offering a starting point for

developing clusters. Additionally, the historic downtowns, unique and diverse venues, and beautiful outdoor spaces provide a strong foundation for the township to attract small corporate meetings & events, as well as film tourism. In 2024, Centre Wellington was featured in an episode of The Amazing Race: Canada, and was also a film location for Fubar, a Netflix series starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. This opens the door to future film opportunities. Focusing on both meetings and events as well as film tourism lends to year-round visitation, leverages and bolsters local businesses, and has the potential to generate positive media exposure that strengthens the community's brand.

DEVELOPERS & INVESTORS

As a result of the demand generated by the privately-run 2024 Christmas Market, crowds often spilled off the sidewalks and into the streets, resulting in safety concerns. Visitation resulted in backed-up traffic, parking resources were strained and there was an increased need for waste management. The Township responded to these unforeseen challenges, mitigating impacts to Elora's downtown infrastructure and functionality, and a private shuttle service was also implemented.

While there are conflicting perspectives amongst some Elora business owners, the majority support the Market, given the boost in sales many saw as a result. Still, there are some who do not see the same rise in demand (generally, due to the nature of their business) who dissent, representing a small group whose criticisms are rooted in feeling uninformed and unable to plan. This discrepancy underscores the importance of evaluating strategies and having conversations with stakeholders to determine how businesses might benefit equitably, and potentially through promotional partnerships or creative programming that drives foot traffic across sectors.

Residents have expressed frustration with the event, and anecdotal evidence suggests there was a general consensus to avoid Elora's downtown on the days the market took place. Managing resident sentiment is critical to the long-term sustainability of tourism growth. Community engagement, transparent communication and infrastructure improvements (i.e., pedestrian-only zones during peak events) help balance visitor influx with local quality of life, particularly when paired with strong visitor management tactics.

The Market's success in drawing winter visitors demonstrates the power of well-executed seasonal programming. While these investments give people a reason to visit in what was formerly a slow season, it is critical for the Township and stakeholders to be mindful of the risks associated with over-relying on a singular stakeholder for success. Looking ahead, the Township must be proactive with visitor management investments in order to maintain a positive experience for visitors and residents alike, and protect Elora's reputation. These responsibilities include focusing on waste management, maintaining public restrooms, seeking creative parking solutions and traffic management.

Further, there is an opportunity for the Township to lead and support diversified programming with local stakeholders, to entice visitors compelled by major privately-led events to stay longer and spend more. This is also a valuable exercise in creating conditions for sustainable winter tourism growth should any major private investment cease at any given point.

Finally, the Christmas Market provides an impetus for new-to-Centre Wellington strategies that shift the financial responsibility of tourism development and management from local taxpayers to the visitors themselves. Paid parking solutions, exclusively applicable to non-residents and local property owners, as well as introducing a Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT - see Strategic Pillar 1: Capacity), represent solutions for immediate consideration.

ACCOMMODATION

While there is an opportunity to expand the number of overnight visitor stays in Centre Wellington through experience development, there is a gap in quality, mid-range accommodation options that cater to diverse visitor demographics, including families, small groups and budget-conscious travellers.

There are four traditional accommodators in Centre Wellington, amounting to 86 rooms, at varying price points. Limited options for visitors seeking comfortable yet affordable stays may influence visitors to opt for day trips rather than overnight stays.

Given the lack of capacity, short-term rentals (STR) are seen as a necessity. However, there are growing concerns regarding the community impact, and the need for effective regulation. STR guests may unintentionally disrupt residential neighbourhoods, particularly in the absence of clear enforcement measures. With 206 active STR listings, the Township's planned STR regulations are a critical step in balancing visitor needs with community well-being.

To strengthen local options, there is an opportunity to develop an attraction strategy for accommodators that addresses mid-level needs, keeping in mind that small and independent brands align more closely with the destination's identity. Public-private partnerships, incentives for developers, or adaptive reuse of heritage buildings helps address gaps while maintaining the destination's character. This is addressed in Strategic Pillar 4: Investment Readiness and Infrastructure.

VISITOR INFORMATION SERVICES & INFRASTRUCTURE

There is a Tourism Information Centre at 10 East Mill St. in Elora, operated by the Township. From January to February, it is open Wednesday to Sunday, 11 a.m. - 4 p.m., and every day with the same hours from March to December. A visitor services representative is on-site during that time to guide visitors and answer queries. There are also public toilets available here.

In Fergus, there is a self-serve visitor information centre at the Weigh Scale Building on Provost Lane, where visitors also find toilets. Additionally, the box office team at the Fergus Grand Theatre is trained as tourism information assistants. Plus, local businesses often receive inquiries from visitors, though there is an opportunity to provide them with more visitor information resources.

Other key visitor amenities include:

- **Public toilets:** Available at three locations in Fergus and five in Elora, though operating hours vary seasonally.
- **Free public wifi:** Provided in downtown Elora and Fergus, supported by partnerships with local Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) and Regional Tourism Organization 4 (RTO4). This initiative is particularly valuable in encouraging visitors to share their experiences online, contributing to organic, user-generated destination marketing.

While visitor services and infrastructure generally meet tourism demands, the 2024 Elora Christmas Market demonstrates the Township's limited capacity to effectively tap into large-scale visitor influxes. With continued tourism growth and increasing visitation during peak events, there is an opportunity to consider additional visitor services, such as pop-up information booths and enhanced placemaking to enhance the visitor experience.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND BUSINESS SUPPORT

The Township currently offers a Winter Experience Development Program to support local tourism businesses, in collaboration with RTO4. This program offers up to $3,000 to visitor-friendly organizations seeking to create unique experiences for residents and visitors alike. In 2023-2024, there were eight project submissions, four of which were supported by the program. In 2024-2025, there were six applications, three of which were supported and now provide examples of the value of this program in testing ideas and positioning applicants for evolution and success.

The Community Investment Fund is another financial support channel, supporting initiatives that address local challenges through innovative, locally driven solutions, as well as arts, culture, festivals and events.

To maintain relevance and impact, it is important to frequently review financial supports to understand if it equally meets the needs of stakeholders and destinations at large and, through stakeholder engagement, to identify barriers that might be preventing broader uptake. Workshops and offering assistance to applicants in developing strong proposals are possible opportunities, as is pairing funding with mentorship programs to help businesses and organizations approach these opportunities with longer-term goals in mind.

SUPPORT NETWORKS

The Fergus and Elora BIAs, the Chamber of Commerce, the County of Wellington and Regional Tourism Organization 4 (RTO4) are all relevant partners to Centre Wellington's tourism initiatives, each playing a distinct yet complementary role. The Township also has an established tourism committee comprised of local tourism business operators.

The County leads rural tourism development initiatives, leveraging Fergus and Elora as urban hubs that connect to experiences further afield. This positioning makes Centre Wellington a key hub in the regional tourism network, meaning that strategic alignment between stakeholders is critical for cohesive visitor experiences. RTO4 provides both strategic and financial support, with initiatives such as the Winter Experience Development Program, visitor data collection services, and a resident sentiment survey for the Township. Access to this type of data is crucial for informed decision-making, helping to define tourism priorities that are responsive to visitor profiles and needs.

While the Centre Wellington tourism team has invested in fostering strong relationships with each of these organizations and tourism stakeholders across the community, there are no systems in place to facilitate cross-collaboration or resource sharing, apart from festivals and events. When it comes to organizational collaboration, the gap is particularly notable between the Elora and Fergus BIAs; while there is Township representation present at every BIA meeting, there is no defined process to facilitate investments in joint or supporting efforts that would be mutually beneficial and enhance visitor flow across both areas. Monster Month, a signature event in Elora, could be better leveraged by Fergus through its own haunted history, creating a more immersive and extended experience for visitors.

Similarly, coordinated marketing campaigns promoting complementary experiences rather than isolated events encourage visitors to explore both communities rather than just one. There is an opportunity for the Township to lead these conversations and work with the BIAs to identify strategies for streamlining resources and leveraging existing investments for greater impact across the township as a whole. Without structured collaboration, the communities within Centre Wellington are missing opportunities to amplify existing investments and enhance the overall visitor experience. These efforts are also critical in bridging the divide between Fergus and Elora that continues to be perceived within the community.

It is important to recognize that the goal here is to leverage each community's unique strengths rather than expect one to assimilate into the other.

VISITOR PROFILES & BEHAVIOURS

Using EDTS survey data as an indicator of overall visitor trends, findings highlight a strong tendency towards day trips, with 80% of visitors staying for only one day, 17% staying for two days/one night, and fewer than 2% staying for multiple nights.

While high volumes of day visitors contribute to immediate economic activity, overnight visitors typically generate higher per capita spending by supporting accommodations, more experiences, and local services. Encouraging longer stays—through expanded accommodations, multi-day itineraries, and packaged experiences, as previously discussed—drives greater returns.
Primary visitor draws include shops, restaurants, nature and festivals, with a subset of visitors motivated by visiting friends and relatives (VFR). This reinforces the importance of experience-driven tourism development, positioning local businesses, attractions and events to better capitalize on visitor interest.

Until recently, visitors were primarily drawn to Centre Wellington in the summer months. With the introduction of the Kat Florence-owned and operated Christmas Market in December 2024, Elora saw visitor numbers it historically only sees in the summer months. Embracing the opportunity to tap into this new seasonal demand and interest positions Centre Wellington to reduce the pressure on summer infrastructure and helps to increase business resilience for local tourism operators.

PARKING

One of the most pressing concerns among visitors and residents alike is parking availability, especially during peak tourism periods. There are parking lots throughout the township in addition to street parking. New, privately-owned and managed lots are expected to be built in the coming years. Currently, Centre Wellington provides three hours of free parking, with enforcement from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily, seven days a week.
This approach presents two major challenges:

1. Free parking incentivizes prolonged vehicle stays, reducing turnover and limiting availability for new visitors; and
2. Local taxpayers perceive that their money is subsidizing tourism, impacting benefits for themselves.

Introducing a visitor-paid parking strategy works to alleviate congestion, improve parking availability and generate sustainable revenue to be reinvested into tourism infrastructure, visitor services and community improvements.

REGENERATIVE TOURISM AND SUSTAINABILITY

The Township's tourism team invested in a Global Destination Sustainability Movement (GDS) Index Assessment in 2023, which measures and benchmarks a destination's sustainability initiatives. As a result of this assessment, a Sustainability Action Plan was developed to guide next steps, which is currently being implemented. This provides a framework through which sustainability goals are translated into measurable outcomes and ongoing improvements, ultimately enhancing environmental stewardship and community resilience.

DATA

Reliable, consistent data collection is necessary for effective destination development and visitor management. In 2023, the Elora & Fergus Tourism Information Centre (located in Elora), Wellington County Museum and Palmerston Railway Heritage Museum, managed by the Town of Minto, aligned their visitor data collection methods to establish a more cohesive understanding of who is visiting the area and general information about them. This localized approach is now complemented by mobile data analytics provided through an RTO4 program, providing deeper insights into peak visitation periods, visitor origins, length of stay and high-traffic areas. These efforts lay the foundation for a more data-driven approach, enabling the Township to make more deeply informed decisions about visitor services, infrastructure investment and marketing strategies. For example, point-of-sale data provides a clearer picture of how tourism translates into economic activity—how much money is being spent, which sectors are benefitting most and the distribution of visitor spend between businesses and urban centres.

Data is further valuable in understanding the efficacy of Township initiatives from a business perspective and resident perspective.

As established, small businesses are key drivers of Centre Wellington's tourism economy. A formal mechanism for gathering input allows for the Township to be responsive to actual needs rather than providing funding, education or other supports based on assumptions. Tracking trends over time also positions the Township to identify emerging challenges among businesses, adapt strategies accordingly and create targeted programs that maximize benefits for businesses and the broader tourism economy.

As this EDTS strives toward a vision where residents appreciate the value tourism brings to the community, the success of achieving this vision through the work laid-out in this Plan must be measured. This is possible through Community (Resident) Satisfaction Surveys, particularly using an approach that analyses how residents are engaging with public spaces, how often they are visiting the downtown areas based on the season and their general sentiment around tourism. These insights allow the Township to assess whether tourism initiatives are fostering positive community engagement and identify areas where adjustments may be needed. This data also helps inform policies and programs that balance visitor activity with local quality of life, maintaining an alignment between destination development and community priorities.

Data-based recommendations are addressed in **Strategic Pillar 1: Capacity.**

APPENDIX I

STRATEGIC PILLAR 6: **Placemaking**

CURRENT REALITY & OPPORTUNITIES

This section provides the background information on Centre Wellington's current reality and opportunity as it relates to **PLACEMAKING** as a strategic pillar of the EDTS.

COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION

Insight gathered from community engagement initiatives points to a sense amongst many long-standing residents that they've lost the downtown areas of Centre Wellington to tourism. Simultaneously, there is a general resistance to change and an undercurrent of fear that further growth will shift the social fabric. These sentiments reflect a broader challenge often faced by communities aiming to balance local identity with economic growth. When residents feel disconnected from their core spaces, a perceived gap in social cohesion influences resistance to future initiatives. Addressing these concerns requires intentional strategies that reinforce community ownership of shared spaces while accommodating change in a way that aligns with evolving local values.

Placemaking provides a framework through which to foster connected, welcoming communities, addressing these deep-rooted concerns. While there is ample opportunity within the core urban areas for such initiatives, activating residential neighbourhoods to bring the essence, excitement and connection people seek through downtown experiences closer to home helps to distribute vibrancy more evenly across the municipality and strengthen neighbourhood pride.

As a few examples: In Belleville, ON, the Rotary Club hosts an annual Porchfest, whereby residents in the East Hill neighbourhood volunteer their front yards to host musical performances by local talent. Spectators move around the neighbourhood, from one performance to another. In one Halifax neighbourhood, the community came together to develop an outdoor, community-operated film screen space on the rear wall of the local community centre. It was used for presentations, movie nights, community and regional arts events, as well as for outdoor learning opportunities. Street painting, mural projects and tree planting initiatives are other placemaking initiatives to be embraced on a hyperlocal level, to bridge gaps between long-standing and new residents, while extending the community's vibrancy beyond the downtown areas.

These types of initiatives enhance social capital, encourage civic participation, and contribute to the perception of neighbourhoods as active and engaged spaces. They also contribute to increased walkability, safety and economic stimulation by drawing people into shared spaces in new and engaging ways.

PUBLIC ART AND INSTALLATIONS

Public art serves as more than a decorative feature; it reinforces a community's identity, fosters civic pride, and contributes to a strong sense of place. When strategically placed, art installations activate underutilized spaces and create new focal points for community gathering. Key public art pieces in Elora include:

- "The Letter," an installation outside of the Post Office that dates back to the 1990s;
- The "Elora Portfolio" AJ Casson sculpture inside of the tourism office;
- "Who's In Charge," more commonly referred to as "The Tall Man," located in the Elora Greenspace;
- The Running Girl in O'Brien Park;
- The art student art installations in the Sportsplex;
- The sculpture of the child and books behind the Fergus Library; and
- The Love Locks by the Kissing Stone in Fergus.

All of these sites are mapped out in a self-guided "Elora Art Walk" curated by The Elora Centre for the Arts, which also features a number of retail galleries. The Art Walk additionally includes information about the Elora Sculpture Project, which is group of volunteers that hosts an outdoor exhibition that runs from May through October each year. The Project is hosted in partnership between the Township of Centre Wellington, the Elora BIA, the Fergus BIA, the Elora Fergus Arts Council, and the Elora Centre For The Arts, and supported by corporate sponsors (Kat Florence, Granite) and site sponsors.

Further, Elora Centre for the Arts also has its own art walk onsite, with a variety of installations trailing through its grounds. Each piece is accompanied by a plaque to share the story behind it. Providing contextual information enhances engagement and deepens public appreciation of the artwork, creating more meaningful experiences.

The Elora Fergus Arts Council has been fostering the community's arts scene since 1989, and leads a number of arts related initiatives including the Elora Fergus Studio Tour, Insights Juried Arts Exhibit, Art in Public Places and the Elora Writers' Festival.

Various local events are based around public art and installations, most notably, October's Monster Month in Elora, whereby imposing Halloween decor is erected throughout the streets. A notable opportunity when it comes to events like Monster Month is building a Centre Wellington-wide narrative, whereby complementary experiences are also taking place in Fergus, distributing economic and social benefits more equitably.

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

As explored in "Destination Leadership and Visitor Management," festivals and events are a core part of Centre Wellington's identity amongst locals and visitors. Beyond the entertainment value, festivals are catalysts for economic activity and drive community engagement.

These festivals largely connect to elements of the local rural, Scottish or artistic identity of the area, embodying a strong local brand and essence. Organizers host successful events with limited staffing capacity. The viability of many festivals and events relies on volunteer support, with many of these volunteers being local retirees. As volunteer bases age, sustaining these events long-term may require targeted recruitment strategies, youth engagement initiatives, and broader community partnerships to diversify leadership. Actions to address this challenge are outlined in the Centre Wellington Culture Workplan.

There is an opportunity to leverage public spaces to create activations and satellite events connected to popular festivals and events to extend the excitement more wholly throughout the community. For example, while Elora en Plein Air is taking place, there could be a muralist live-creating a piece along the river in Fergus. Or, during Fergus's Tartan Day, the Elora BIA can work with stakeholders to create events to complement existing activities and strengthen the appeal. Expanding event footprints enhances accessibility, distributes crowds, and creates a more marketable festival environment.

STORIES AND HISTORIES

The historic facades of Elora and Fergus define the local charm, and act as a backdrop to primary visitor experiences such as shopping and dining. In fact, both downtown cores—as well as the Belwood Historical Village Core—are identified as **significant cultural heritage landscapes** in the Township's 2019-2021 Cultural Heritage Landscape Study. In addition to the downtowns, other areas, sites and corridors were identified by the study. Among them are the Grand River Corridor, Cataract Trailway and Trestle Bridge Trail, Salem, a select number of cemeteries, the Elora Gorge & Elora Quarry, Elora's Victoria Park & Crescent, Fergus's Victoria Park, the hamlet of Oustic, and other residences, estates & neighbourhoods.

Recognizing notable points throughout the community beyond those formally noted in the Cultural Heritage Landscape Study, there are various locations where passersby stop to read plaques that recount the history of an area or describe a particular point of interest. While many of the points in the study are already core to the tourism narrative, there is an opportunity to leverage this resource to create thematic trails and tours, connecting locals and visitors alike more deeply with local stories. Interactive storytelling approaches—such as augmented reality experiences, oral history recordings, and community-driven heritage projects—enhance engagement and help local narratives remain relevant for future generations.

Uniquely, Fergus is frequently regarded as one of the most haunted towns in Canada, with paranormal stories abound. Such folklore offers a distinctive cultural touchpoint to further explore through storytelling projects such as historic walking tours or even creative writing initiatives, reinforcing a strong sense of place.

Centre Wellington participates in Ontario Culture Days, a province-wide initiative that celebrates local creativity and cultural engagement. These free, interactive arts and culture events provide an accessible platform to showcase the diverse talents of local artisans, performers, and cultural organizations, reinforcing the township's identity as a creative hub. The 2024 programming lineup featured a range of activities, including artisan showcases, outdoor performances, guided tours, and activations in unique spaces. While Culture Days provides a concentrated period of cultural activation with widespread promotion, there is an opportunity to expand these efforts throughout the year, integrating them into a broader cultural strategy that fosters ongoing engagement with the local creative sector, as recommended within the 2024 Centre Wellington Culture Work Plan.

The Wellington County Museum and Archives, a national historic site, is located in the community and tells the stories of Wellington County's people and places, "and services for the historical, educational, and artistic interests of [its] communities."[66] The Museum hosts a variety of programs, including tours, speaker series, kids' camps, and educational workshops, in addition to larger-scale activations such as the annual Christmas Market and Multicultural Festival. These events position the museum as both a cultural and economic asset, attracting diverse audiences and generating foot traffic that benefits nearby businesses. From a placemaking perspective, there is an opportunity for the Township to further collaborate with the Museum to develop storytelling initiatives within the community that connect back to Museum exhibits or as an anchor for placemaking initiatives.

PUBLIC SPACES AND ACTIVATIONS

Beyond festivals, events, public art and installations, there are few public space activations throughout Centre Wellington. While there are significant publicly owned parks and open spaces, these can be further utilized as platforms for cultural, social and economic activity.

Most recently, a My Main Street Grant supported a placemaking project in Fergus, focused on architectural lighting. While this was not specifically a tourism grant, illuminating façades enhances the nighttime ambiance, improves public safety, and contributes to a sense of place. This demonstrates the potential for small-scale interventions to have a meaningful impact on the urban experience.

Given the publicly-owned parks and open spaces throughout Centre Wellington, there is a largely blank canvas for the Township to integrate play, interactivity and community-led programming throughout. Placemaking initiatives—whether public performances, artistic crosswalks or small-business pop-ups—deepen one's experience with a place, fostering a greater sense of connection and respect. For locals and visitors, this fosters stewardship and care for the community and contributes to a more engaging and economically dynamic urban environment.

APPENDIX J

STRATEGIC PILLAR 7: **Brand Identity, Marketing & Communications**

CURRENT REALITY & OPPORTUNITIES

This section provides the background information on Centre Wellington's current reality and opportunity as it relates to **BRAND IDENTITY, MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS** as a strategic goal of the EDTS.

BUDGET

When it comes to marketing, Centre Wellington's economic development marketing budget is $45,000, and invested in the following areas (varying on an annual basis):

- Ads in site selection and business promotion magazines
- CRM system (Executive Pulse)
- Sponsorship
- Local advertising
- Data mapping

The tourism team's marketing budget is also about $45,000, allocated to:

- Promotion and marketing campaigns
- Collateral design & printing
- Photography & videography
- Walking tours
- Tourism product development
- Data collection & analysis
- Sponsoring tourism projects with sustainability goals
- Tourism development partnerships
- Website maintenance + media tools

DESTINATION BRAND

"Centre Wellington" is the primary brand used in economic development outreach initiatives, while "Elora & Fergus Tourism" is the label applied to the tourism efforts. The depth of brand identity, however, does not extend beyond these labels, with no defined brand stories, tone and voice or audience segments identified in either case. Additionally, Elora & Fergus Tourism does not have a distinct visual identity (i.e., logo, brand colours, typography); rather, the Centre Wellington corporate logo is used with a different label. To maximize the impact of communications and engagement with external audiences—i.e., non-residents, non-local investors, non-local business owners, etc.—communities often develop destination brands, separate from the main corporate brand. Considering this sort of investment has potential

to enhance the Township's ability to create compelling, consistent messaging with a level of sophistication that resonates with its target audiences, and becomes particularly relevant with an established DMO.

To advance the community's standing as a destination—applicable to prospective visitors, residents, investors and the like—the Township should consider investing in a destination brand that provides a visual identity, supported by a defined voice and essence, to guide approaches to storytelling on key platforms and outlets such as Centre Wellington websites, social media platforms and printed resources. The absence of a defined destination brand is a recurring gap identified throughout this section.

MARKETING CHANNELS AND INVESTMENTS

Social media

The Township's Communications team manages its various social media channels. There is a dedicated Facebook page, primarily focused on informing and engaging the community around things happening in the township, plus administrative items such as road closures, taxes, sanitation and community services, as examples.

There is no dedicated corporate Instagram page, however, there is a dedicated tourism account on the platform, @EloraFergus. This page is meant to be aspirational and includes imagery featuring local businesses and scenes to appeal to the visual sense of prospective visitors. There are no dedicated social media channels for economic development.

Distinguishing the destination brand from the corporate brand where relevant—with each serving a clear purpose and audience—allows for more meaningful and productive marketing and storytelling initiatives, and improves the impact of those efforts appealing to external audiences.

The Centre Wellington website

When it comes to business attraction, development, and retention, the Centre Wellington website contains a section on "**Doing Business**," which includes links to information on applications, licenses, permits and policies, available properties, doing business with the Township, advertising and sponsorship opportunities, community profile, current development applications, planning and permits, starting and growing your business, Township financial incentives and zoning. The **"Start and Grow Your Business" page** provides various resources. These include lists of available properties, lists of financial incentives, and an information page outlining business supports available in Centre Wellington. These resources are complemented by those from the Provincial and Federal governments.

Much of the content is strictly informational. There is an opportunity to build out resources and a digital hub to clearly paint a picture for prospective investors about Centre Wellington's

“why”—why choose to establish a business here, why choose to live here, etc. This connects to the aforementioned need for a defined destination brand, which supports economic development efforts equal to tourism efforts.

The corporate website also has a “Tourism” page, which directs visitors to EloraFergus.ca, various maps and other visitor information content. An “Explore CW” section provides further information, linking to various other pages of information, including but not limited to: food & farm gates, entertainment & nightlife, festivals & events, family fun, ‘for the adventurous,’ and more. These pages are equally valuable to new and prospective residents as they are to visitors. In fact, the content available on the corporate website provides more detailed information about experiences in Centre Wellington than the dedicated tourism website, EloraFergus.ca.

LiveandWorkCW.com

The Township economic development webpage links to liveandworkcw.com, which serves as a resident attraction tool. Currently, the website contains information about available jobs in Centre Wellington and available housing for sale or rent. Employers, landlords and realtors directly input available jobs and properties. It also contains an interactive map which maps the jobs and properties. Lastly, the website contains some additional links to third-party property listings and links to featured listing partners. The website is branded with Centre Wellington colours and logos.

The map is innovative, showcasing geographically where employment and living intersect, however, the website overall has several challenges. Despite being linked to the Township’s website under the section about living and working in Centre Wellington, the website does not appear to be up to date, and jobs currently listed are dated from 2022. As jobs and properties need to be input directly by employers, landlords and realtors, the onus falls on the community to be aware of the website and have the capacity to separately input their employment listings in there. As a result, the number of listings is very low and users prefer to search for properties or employment on other more fulsome platforms, such as realtor.ca or indeed.com. Similar platforms in other communities have utilized RSS feeds to integrate additional employment data to create a more fulsome site and encourage increased local utilization. Additionally, the overall design and functionality of the site is not user friendly and would benefit from updating.

There are also several opportunities to enhance and maximize the value of this website. Throughout the EDTS engagement period, many residents noted that they have difficulty finding information about basic services and engagement opportunities that exist in Centre Wellington. At the same time, businesses want to share information about their products and services with new and existing residents.

This website could be used to showcase just that, with the information packaged in a manner that is engaging and enticing for potential, new, and longer-term residents. Visuals could include photos and video content of living and working in the community, including showcasing local employers. Revitalizing the website to serve as a tool for residents to find important information about the community while serving as a workforce attraction tool would be a useful repurposing of this website that could serve to better integrate and engage residents in economic and other opportunities. However, if the Township is no longer updating or utilizing this additional website, references to this website from their primary Township site should be removed.

EloraFergus.ca

There is room to refresh the Township's tourism website, EloraFergus.ca, to align with the quality of other similar-scale destinations in Ontario, which is a task already being considered by the tourism team, in partnership with RTO4. While the EloraFergus.ca site was developed to be low-maintenance, it does not represent the sophistication of Centre Wellington's tourism, nor does it adequately showcase the essence of the destination overall. Currently, the way information is presented is not intuitive, and the user experience is fragmented.

A new direction for the website is well-served to embrace more thoughtful storytelling that features sites, experiences and people. There is also an opportunity to provide theme- or interest-based itineraries. Content development is important to building brand awareness to new prospective visitors, while also improving the research stage of the customer experience journey.

Traditional marketing: Tourism

Centre Wellington's tourism team produces a simple, printed Discover Elora Fergus resource annually—a two-page pamphlet that includes a map and points to key sites. A trails brochure, Township maps, and walking tours postcards are also amongst the printed collateral produced by the tourism team. Existing assets are a strong example of where a destination brand would be impactful; there is currently no consistency in design. While simple, this solution enhances the appeal, memorability and sophistication of the destination.

In addition to the Township-led Visitor Guide, WHA Publications—which owns the Wellington Advertiser—also produces a visitors guide and tourism-focused website. These elements use the brand, "Grand and Gorgeous." While this is a revenue-generating project for the business, it does create confusion about the brand narrative and ownership of tourism promotion, from a customer journey perspective. It also suggests a duplication of efforts. There is an opportunity to explore collaboration with WHA, for the sake of continuity, avoiding consumer confusion and streamlining resources.

Traditional marketing: Economic development

The economic development team has a library of resources to support their marketing and communications efforts, available for printing and online, as follows:

Community Profile
The Community Profile hosts a plethora of facts about the Township of Centre Wellington that would be of interest to potential investors. It includes statistics on general location, climate, demographics, labour force, transportation and shipping, taxes and utilities, planning and development-related fees, business support programs and services and quality of life information. While the document is host to important facts, it is lengthy and in some cases directs users to other locations, such as websites, for current information making it a timely and lengthy exercise to review all of the content. Additionally, the document is from 2023, thus the information is out of date.

Quick Facts
The Centre Wellington Quick Facts sheet provides potential investors with a snapshot of Centre Wellington, focusing on location, demographics, labour force, key sectors, major employers, educational attainment, and income statistics, as well as providing a brief introduction to the community and its assets. The document is also visually appealing, aligning with Centre Wellington's brand colours. The sheet is dated 2023; to be most effective, it should be updated annually, or the date removed. Lastly, the document features agriculture, construction, professional scientific and technical services, retail trade and health care and social assistance as key economic drivers. It does not include key sectors such as manufacturing and tourism, which would be beneficial to highlight.

Business Park Sales Sheet
The Business Park Sales Sheet includes standard information about business park features like servicing, uses, zoning, acreage, terms, and pricing, as well as contact information, site imagery and a mix of facts showcasing community assets. For a traditional marketing tool, it addresses the essentials, although there is no "wow" factor and no link or connection to further information outside of contacting the Township.

Business Support Infographic
The Business Support in Centre Wellington infographic is a visually appealing document that tries to simplify the business development support landscape in the Township for those looking for resources for their business. There are several opportunities to improve the document, including reducing the amount of text, improving readability, and adding additional resources, such as employment resources (i.e. Agilec and Second Chance Employment). It would also be valuable to link to the Township's "Doing Business" webpage to better connect them with the full scope of information the Township can provide.

Economic developers are increasingly leveraging technology, digital tools, and artificial intelligence to enhance their investment attraction efforts and marketing efforts, such as virtual site tours and extended reality, digital marketing, and enhanced lead generation (Further examples are detailed under Strategic Pillar 1: Capacity). These advancements enable more efficient data analysis, targeted marketing, and strategic decision-making.

Newsletters
The Township's tourism team does not currently send a newsletters to stakeholders, nor does it have a visitor-facing newsletter. Though the team does not currently have capacity to manage this additional task, a newsletter for visitor promotion is a valuable initiative to consider as human resources expand.

Business-led marketing
While some local businesses make small investments in marketing, many stakeholders suggest that their marketing capacity is limited—whether because of human or financial resources. This points to an opportunity for the Township to offer local businesses channels and opportunities for marketing to relevant audiences.

Recently, large investments in destination marketing specifically have been made by local private investors, ultimately driving awareness of and visitation to the township.

APPENDIX K

Peer Review: Economic Development Strategy

The previous Economic Development Strategic Action Plan was prepared in 2018 by McSweeney and Associates. Since then, Centre Wellington has experienced significant change including growth in tourism visitation, the COVID-19 pandemic, and periods of inflation & economic uncertainty.

At the time, the Action Plan highlighted Centre Wellington's strategic opportunities such as location, economic diversity, a skilled workforce, the growth potential and quality of life, as well as Centre Wellington's key challenges—an aging population, infrastructure limitations, workforce retention, income disparities and affordable housing. Those opportunities and challenges remain relevant today and would benefit from intervention.

Of the key actionable items within the action plan, a number of items remain relevant, including:

Focus on Target Sectors:

- Agricultural and Agri-Business: With Centre Wellington's strong agricultural base, the emphasis on innovative agricultural, agritourism, and on-farm businesses remains highly relevant.
- Tourism and Arts: Leveraging tourism, arts, and culture as economic drivers continues to align with Centre Wellington's unique assets, such as the Elora Gorge and vibrant downtowns.

Investment Readiness:

- The need to increase the supply of shovel-ready industrial lands and establish investment readiness through updated infrastructure and clear zoning policies is still critical for economic growth.
- Supporting the availability of high-speed internet and broadband is vital in the current digital economy.

Workforce Development:

- Attracting and retaining a younger, skilled workforce remains a significant priority, particularly with demographic shifts toward an aging population.
- The proposed collaboration with schools and universities to educate students about careers in agricultural and other sectors remains relevant.

Downtown Development:

- The focus on enhancing the distinctiveness and sustainability of downtown Fergus and Elora continues to resonate, as these areas are integral to Centre Wellington's identity and economic potential.

Collaboration:

- Encouraging partnerships between Township and County economic development teams to avoid duplication of efforts remains a valid strategy for optimizing resources.

Areas that are increasingly outdated include:

Communication Strategies:

- The emphasis on traditional communication methods, such as brochures and physical marketing materials, is less impactful in the digital age. Greater focus is placed on digital marketing, social media campaigns and interactive web content.

Economic Development Corporation Feasibility Study:

- While an Economic Development Corporation was suggested to improve funding and implementation, this idea may not align with the Township's scale and available resources. It could risk duplicating existing functions performed by the Township and County.

Generic Actions:

- Some recommendations, like conducting feasibility studies for sports tourism or accommodation, appear generic and lack specificity. More actionable steps are needed to address these gaps directly.

Overarchingly, the action plan has a number of strengths, such as comprehensive demographic, labour and transit data, clearly defined target sectors (e.g. agriculture, manufacturing, tourism), a strong assessment of strengths and local assets, and its presentation was appealing and accessible. There are also a number of areas that could be improved upon, which the EDTS seeks to address, including the addition of case studies, consideration for inclusion and diversity, a more global context, and the implication of more digital tools to support implementation.

APPENDIX L

Economic Development Asset Map

ORGANIZATION	ACTIVITIES/FEATURES	LOCATION	TYPE OF ACTIVITY
Township 'Doing Business' Website	• Hosts information about Township financial incentives, a community profile, resources to start and grow a business, planning and permits, available properties, doing business with the municipality, community partners, and a business directory.	Virtual	General
Wellington County Economic Development	• Has an economic development office that supports member municipalities. • Hosts monthly regional meetings with business development partners and support organizations. • Supporting the development/operation of current regional, rural transit program. • Supporting a workforce talent attraction program for newcomers. • Member of Ontario Food Cluster. • Runs BR+E program, however, supports municipalities without an EDO first to avoid any conflict over relationship management.	Wellington County	General
Western Ontario Wardens Caucus	• Serves as a unified voice for the 15 upper and single tier municipalities in Southwestern Ontario, advocating for their collective interest. • Is committed to advancing affordable housing, infrastructure enhancements, workforce development for economic growth, and initiatives addressing mental health, addictions, and homelessness. • Supports economic development projects across its large rural geography.	Southwestern Ontario	General
Boundless Accelerator	• Award-winning accelerator that offers entrepreneurs expert mentorship, resources, education, events, and connections to help them build innovative, sustainable ventures.	Guelph	Business Retention/ Expansion
Business Centre of Guelph Wellington	• Provides business consulting, events, workshops & seed funding programs to businesses in the County of Wellington and City of Guelph. • 40% of client load comes from Centre Wellington. • Township currently provides an annual contribution towards operations in recognition of the service provided to local businesses, and at regional meetings hosted by the County of Wellington. • Interested in working with the Township to expand supports available to the small business community.	Guelph	Start-Up, Business Retention/ Expansion
Centre Wellington Chamber of Commerce	• A member-driven non-profit organization which serves as a resource to support business growth through promotion, advocacy, networking and educational opportunities.	Fergus	Business Retention/ Expansion
Elora Business Improvement Association	• A non-profit business association that is a steward of downtown Fergus. • Runs events, promotes businesses within their catchment, collaborates with the community and municipality, and advocates on behalf of their members to create an environment for business to thrive.	Elora	Business Retention/ Expansion

ORGANIZATION	ACTIVITIES/FEATURES	LOCATION	TYPE OF ACTIVITY
Wellington Federation of Agriculture	• Represents Centre Wellington Farmers who are part of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. • Advocates on behalf of the local agriculture sector and supports youth entering the sector through a bursary program.	Wellington County	Sector Support
Centre Wellington Business Park	• Lots ranging from 1 to 5 acres, available for $450,000 an acre. • Services include water, sewer, hydro, natural gas, and fibre optic service. • Zoned M1 for general industrial use. • 33 acres available out of a total of 60 acres.	Fergus	Investment Attraction and Business Retention/Expansion
University of Guelph Research Innovation Office	• Supports businesses through technology transfer, industry research partnerships, innovation, entrepreneurship, and knowledge mobilization. • Hosts the Industrial Liaison Program (ILP) to provide access to research expertise and resources to help companies nurture growth with innovative ideas. • Collaborates with private and public-sector partners to convert research into commercial opportunities. • Can support investment attraction efforts.	Guelph	Investment Attraction and Business Retention/Expansion
Groves Memorial Community Hospital	• Rural hospital providing acute care to patients from Centre Wellington and surrounding communities. • Offers a comprehensive range of surgical, inpatient, and outpatient services, including 24/7 emergency and obstetrical care	Aboyne	Quality of Life + Business Retention/ Expansion
Guelph-Wellington Local Immigration Partnership	• A coalition of over 70 individuals representing various groups in the community, including newcomers, ethno-cultural organizations, service providers, businesses, and the public. • Works together to create a more welcoming and inclusive community for immigrants by focusing on meaningful employment, service coordination and access, grassroots connections, and research.	Guelph	Quality of Life
Agilec	• Offers free employment services to both job seekers and employers. • Provides a local job board and online resources to support finding employment and employees. • For employers they offer leadership, team, and professional development training. • For job seekers they offer career transition assistance (i.e. cover letter and resume writing, interview preparation assistance, etc.) and vocational rehabilitation.	Fergus	Workforce Development

ORGANIZATION	ACTIVITIES/FEATURES	LOCATION	TYPE OF ACTIVITY
Second Chance Employment	• Offers free employment services to both job seekers and employers. • Provides a local job board and resources (online and in-person) to support finding employment and employees. • Offers a focused youth-skill building program that provides minimum wage fr participants during the duration of the training.	Fergus	Workforce Development
Wilfrid Laurier University	• 20,000 students. • Specializes in undergraduate degrees in arts and science, music and music therapy, business and economics; master's degrees in arts, business, economics and social work; and doctoral degrees in social work, geography and history.	Waterloo	Workforce Development
Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin	• A community directed, non-profit corporation leading Waterloo Region, Wellington and Dufferin County in their approach to workforce development and labour market planning. • Collects labour market information, hosts resources for job seekers and employers, and undertakes annual projects to support the labour market.	Cambridge	Workforce Development
University of Guelph	• University with 30,000 students. • Specializes in a range of disciplines including physical and life sciences, arts and humanities, social sciences, business, agricultural and veterinary sciences. • The Wood Centre offers several programs and resources for students interested in pursuing entrepreneurial ideas. The Hub is the University's student incubator offering U of G students and alumni funding, dedicated office space and access to experienced entrepreneurs.	Guelph	Workforce Development
University of Waterloo	• Post-secondary institution with approximately 42,000 students. • Has a strong reputation in engineering, computer science, math and science.	Waterloo	Workforce Development
Conestoga College	• 32,000 students across campuses. • Offers a full range of career-focused education, training, and applied research programs. • Offers employee training. • In process of developing tools and resources to support small business growth.	Guelph	Workforce Development

APPENDIX L

Tourism Asset Map

This Centre Wellington Tourism Asset Map presents tourism assets based on the following criteria:

1. Local assets that are currently considered key tourism drivers;
2. Businesses, venues or events that offer visitor experiences (workshops, activities, entertainment, learning, etc.);
3. Key accommodators, including select unique short-term rental options that may also be considered visitor experiences; and/or
4. Assets with potential to be leveraged to develop themed packages, content and experiences to attract high-value visitors, as recommended in the EDTS.

Each is marked as follows, so to indicate an opportunity to explore themes as follows (if applicable):

- Arts & culture
- Corporate
- Nature & the outdoors
- Culinary
- Film

ORGANIZATION	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION	SEASON	MANAGED BY	CATEGORY
Belwood Lake Conservation Area	Belwood	• 12km long reservoir – the largest water body • Offers boating, fishing, hiking, cycling, picnicking, swimming, and hunting • Day use only	Year Round / Full service, May - October	GRCA	Natural Attraction
Belwood Lions Pyke Derby	Belwood	• Annual fishing competition hosted on Belwood Lake, running for 43 years (as of 2025)	May	Private	Experience
Best Western Plus Fergus Hotel	Fergus	• A 33-room property, with max 4 guests per room • An on-site luxurious salon and spa, complimentary full hot breakfast, guest laundry facility, fitness centre and a variety of rooms including suites with sofa beds as well as mobility accessible rooms • Guest rooms all include a 39-inch LED TV with cable, microwave, mini-refrigerator, large work desk, and free high-speed Internet access • A business center is available 24/7	Year Round	Private	Accommodation
The Bicycle Tailor	Fergus	• Offers off-the-shelf, semi-custom and fully-custom bicycles, professional service & repairs, bicycle rentals, and a curated collection of parts and accessories	Seasonal	Private	Experience

ORGANIZATION	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION	SEASON	MANAGED BY	CATEGORY
Bissell Park	Elora	• Riverfront Park, with a trail loop including a river boardwalk • Hosts a variety of community activities including a weekly seasonal farmers market, and is also home to a multi-use pad and outdoor ice rink • Complete with accessible washrooms	Year Round	Township of Centre Wellington	Natural Attraction
Blown Away Glass Studio	Elora	• A retail space offering events & workshops	Year Round	Private	Experience
Breadalbane Inn and Spa	Fergus	• Historic building of Scottish architecture dating back to the 1850s, now operating as an inn with seven suites • Hosts weddings for up to 80 • Gastro pub and restaurant onsite	Year Round	Private	Accommodation
Christmas Market	Elora	• Free event running Friday-Sunday (plus select Thursdays) from the end of November to the end of December, led by Kat Florence • Features holiday lights throughout the community, cedar huts offering artisan goods, food and drink, plein-air fire tables live music performances, and daily weekend Christmas matinee movies at the local historical cinema	November - December	Private	Experience
Craft Gin Festival	Elora	• Ticket event hosted in connection with the regional Craft Gin Trail • Features artisan makers, live music and food vendors, plus opportunities to sample craft gins from across the region.	June	Private	Event
Downtown Elora & Fergus	Elora, Fergus	• Feature historic properties, retailers, restaurants, cafes, public art, events and waterside experiences	Year Round	Township of Centre Wellington + Private	Experience
Elora Centre for the Arts	Elora	• Hosts galleries, exhibitions, classes, workshop, an outdoor art trail, and events (i.e., Elora Adventure Film Festival, Elora Fergus Studio Tour, En Plein Air Festival, etc.) to create an open and accessible space to access the arts in the community • It is a key partner to many arts-based events in the community	Year Round	Township of Centre Wellington	Experience / Venue

ORGANIZATION	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION	SEASON	MANAGED BY	CATEGORY
Elora Cataract Trailway	Community-Wide	• A 47 kilometre Elora Cataract Trailway that connects the Grand and Credit watersheds, available for hiking, biking or horseback riding • Access points include Gerrie Road near County Road 18 (Elora), on-street through Fergus (parking on Gartshore Street near Forfar Street East and on Beatty Line near Hill Street West) and through the Belwood Lake Conservation Area.	Year Round	Private	Experience
Elora Distilling Company	Elora	• Craft distillery in a historic downtown building • Offers vodka, gin, whiskey and seasonal liquors, made on site • Guests can taste, buy bottles and take tours	Year Round	Private	Experience
Elora Farmers' Market	Elora, Fergus	• Community farmers market hosted every Saturday featuring local produce, food products, artisans, and more	Year Round	Community Group	Experience
Elora and Fergus Downtown Shuttle Program	Elora, Fergus	• A weekend shuttle service provided during peak tourism hours (11am - 5pm) during the summer months, operating between key locations including: Grand River Raceway, MacDonald Square, Elora Centre for the Arts/ Bissell Park, Wellington County Museum and Archives, Fergus Marketplace and the Centre Wellington Sportsplex • Includes a 'Talent on Board Program,' providing entertainment for rides that features local musicians with a focus on promoting emerging young talent as well	Seasonal	Township of Centre Wellington	Service / Experience
Elora Festival of Singers	Elora	• Presents world-class choirs and vocal ensembles over two weeks in July solo concerts and in collaboration with guest artists and ensembles • Includes solo concerts and in collaboration with guest artists and ensembles	July	Community Group	Event
Downtown Elora & Fergus	Elora, Fergus	• Feature historic properties, retailers, restaurants, cafes, public art, events and waterside experiences	Year Round	Township of Centre Wellington + Private	Experience
Elora Gorge Conservation Area & Lookout	Elora	• Spectacular natural gorge with 22m high cliffs • Offers hiking, cycling, paddle sports, fishing, picnicking a splash pad and tubing activities. • Hosts 450 campsites • Total alcohol and cannabis ban	May - October	GRCA	Natural Attraction

ORGANIZATION	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION	SEASON	MANAGED BY	CATEGORY
Elora Paddle Co.	Elora	• Offers 45-minute kayak and canoe rental experiences	Seasonal	Private	Experience
Elora Quarry Conservation Area	Elora	• Limestone quarry with 12m high cliffs • Offers swimming, hiking, and picnicking • Day use only	June - September	GRCA	Natural Attraction
Elora Rapids	Elora	• Provides Elora Gorge river tubing adventures and sunset kayaking tours on the Grand River	Seasonal	Private	Experience
Elora Ski & Cycle	Elora	• Provides equipment rentals, such as bikes, skis and boards, as well as equipment tune-ups	Year Round	Private	Experience
Elora Tours	Elora, Fergus	• Offers Fergus Ghost Walks, Historical and Lantern Walks, and step-on guide services for Coach Tours as opportunities arise	Year Round	Private	Experience
Elora Mill Hotel and Spa	Elora	• 175-year-old recently refurbished mill building providing accommodation and event space • 30 guest rooms and suites, a luxury spa, three restaurants, and banquet facilities for weddings and special events • Provides public access to the 'Tooth of Time" waterfall in Elora • In 2020, named the number one spa and wellness destination in Canada – and number two in North America by spasofamerica.com. • Offers special events and weekly experiences for guests and the public	Year Round	Private	Accommodation
Fergus Golf Club	Fergus	• Offers 27 holes for all skill levels • Has capacity to host tournaments and business outings	Seasonal	Private	Experience
Fergus Grand Theatre	Fergus	• Municipal performing arts centre hosting diverse group of rental clients every year, and presenting a series of curated events, representing the best and brightest in Canadian music, theatre, and other performing arts • Seating for 252 people, including some accessible options • Hosts summer camp theatre program	Year Round	Township of Centre Wellington	Experience / Venue

ORGANIZATION	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION	SEASON	MANAGED BY	CATEGORY
Fergus Scottish Festival and Highland Games	Fergus	• A three-day cultural festival, running for 70+ years • Includes a parade, entertainment, social events, food & drink and more	August	Community Group	Event
The Fieldstone Barn and Farm Wedding Venue	Elora	• Offers farm experiences such as a sunflower field (August-September), alpacas and corn mazes (August-October), as well as a Fall Festival & Artisan Market over one weekend in October • Hosts events such as farm-to-table dinner events, private concerts, etc. • Offers 4 luxury safari tents for glamping experiences, each with a queen sized bed with a Sealy foam mattress, private covered deck, espresso machine, coffee and tea, bluetooth speaker, fan, hammock, picnic table and hot tub	Seasonal	Private	Experience / Venue
Food Day Canada	Elora	• Gastronomy event, featuring "Canada's longest BBQ"	August	Private	Experience
The Gorge Cinema	Elora	• Attached to Kat Florence Hotel, The Gorge Cinema is Canada's oldest continuously operating repertory movie theatre • Hosts scheduled viewings • Available for private rentals, with capacity up to 105 guests	Year Round	Private	Experience
Grand River	Centre Wellington	• 270km river flowing from Dufferin County, through Centre Wellington, into Lake Erie • Provides boating, hiking, fishing, and snowshoeing related opportunities • Crossing the entirety of the community, it is considered a valued asset, requiring protection, while at the same time balancing the public's desire to access it for recreation	Year Round	GRCA	Natural Attraction
Grand River Raceway + Elements Casino Grand River	Elora	• Offers live harness racing (Mon, Wed, Fri in season), simulcast racing, a casino, regular event programming, an on-site restaurant and shopping • Also home to the GrandWay Events Centre	Year Round	Private	Experience

ORGANIZATION	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION	SEASON	MANAGED BY	CATEGORY
Grand River Outfitting & Fly Shop	Fergus	• Offers fly-fishing, archery lessons and guided day trips	Seasonal	Private	Experience
Harmony Meadows Alpaca	Belwood	• Offers alpaca experiences (guided pasture tours, hand feeding), and alpaca products	Seasonal	Private	Experience
Highland Pines Campground	Belwood	• 700 sites spread across 200 acres of property on the shores of Lake Belwood • Over 120 campsites with water, power, and sewage hookups, as well as access to all park amenities	Seasonal	Private	Accommodation
Kat Florence Hotel	Elora	• Recently restored property, offering 7 suites • Connected to The Gorge Cinema • Owned and operated by local investor, Kat Florence	Year Round	Private	Accommodation
Meadows Music and Arts Festival	Fergus	• Two-day music festival, taking place at the Centre Wellington Community Sportsplex • Includes local food and drink vendors	May	Private	Event
Monster Month	Elora	• Month-long celebration filled with Halloween themed parades, events, craft corners, decorations, and fun for all ages • Includes 80+ self-illuminating creatures that form “Tim Murton’s Twilight Zoo” placed around downtown Elora • Twilight Zoo has been displayed for over 20 years and as visitors started to come from all over to see the displays, related events and tourism grew as a result	October	Community Group	Event
One Axe Pursuits	Elora	• Offers recreational adventures including ice climbing, the Zipline Extreme, urban rappelling, rock climbing, ice climbing, zipline, cliff rappelling, urban rappelling and mountaineering • Offers group and private lessons • Special focus on corporate team building	Year Round	Private	Experience
Rural & Urban Trails	Community-Wide	• A number of loops and there-and-back trails that venture through Centre Wellington’s urban and natural spaces, including: Trestle Bridge Trail, Cottontail Road Trail, The Aboyne Trail, Elora Catarct Trail, Elora’s Upper Gorge Trailway, River Loop, Bissell Park Loop, Riverwalk Loop and Trails Loop.	Year Round	County of Wellington, Township of Centre Wellington	Natural Attraction

ORGANIZATION	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION	SEASON	MANAGED BY	CATEGORY
Riverfest	Elora	• Established in 2009, annual music festival held in Bissell Park • Over 15,000 people attended in 2023 (2024 faced severe weather challenges)	Mid-August	Private	Event
Steampunk Festival	Fergus	• Free event featuring performances, food and activations, appealing "to those interested in the unique science fiction sub-genre of steampunk" • Also includes select ticketed events	September	Community Group	Event
Templin Gardens	Fergus	• Designated a garden of cultural and heritage significance • Beautiful gardens, intriguing stone features and walkways along the Grand River	Year-Round	Township of Centre Wellington/Fergus BIA	Experience / Venue
Victoria Park	Elora	• Offers views of the Gorge, and stairs down to the river	Year Round	Township of Centre Wellington	Natural Attraction
Wellington County Museum and Archives	Aboyne	• Features stories of the people and places of Wellington County • Mandate is to serve as a cultural centre, providing resources, programs, events, exhibits, support, and services for the historical, educational, and artistic interests of our communities • Museum is a National Historic Site, located in the oldest remaining rural House of Industry and Refuge (or 'Poor House') in Canada • Located on a 190 acre campus with trails, green spaces, and other buildings hosting County, administrative, and service uses • Offers snowshoe rentals for $5 per day to explore the museum's trails, including the 1.5-kilometre Aboyne Trail	Year Round	County of Wellington	Experience
Wicked Welly Farm & Apiary	Belwood	• A farm stand and farm property, offering workshops and events • Set to expand programming and experiences	Seasonal	Private	Experience
Wild Winds Golf Club	Rockwood	• 18 hole golf course • Capacity to host business events and tournaments	Seasonal	Private	Experience

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