

To: David Creery, Chief Administrative Officer

From: Amy Humphries, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer/City Clerk

Re: Strategic Priorities Mid-Term Update

AIM

To provide a mid-term update on progress being made towards Council’s strategic priorities.

BACKGROUND

The City of Woodstock’s [Strategic Plan](#) was adopted by Council in 2013. It is a 20-year plan which establishes a collective vision to guide Council and staff in creating a desired path for the community to 2031.

At the start of this term of Council, Council reviewed the current Strategic Plan and agreed its key elements remain relevant. Instead of a complete overhaul of the Plan, Council held a “Strategic Priorities Re-alignment Workshop” to reconfirm the direction and update the strategic priorities for this term of Council.

Identifying Council’s strategic priorities for the term provides for:

- Alignment with organizational goals: The strategic priorities serve as the guiding framework for the municipality’s overall direction. Identifying these priorities ensures that the operational plans, budgets, and activities align with the goals set by Council.
- Resource allocation: Strategic priorities influence how resources are allocated within the municipality, including through the budget process.
- Effective decision-making: Understanding the strategic priorities enables informed decisions that support Council’s objectives.
- Focused action plans: Shorter-term strategic priorities often address immediate challenges and specific projects that a municipality faces. By understanding these priorities, staff efforts can be focused.

The outcome of the Strategic Priorities Re-alignment Workshop was an updated list of 9 priority action items, 3 of which are existing action items in the Strategic Plan, and 6 of which are new action items. The identified priorities set the vision and strategic direction for staff to work towards operationalization and implementation. The public was also invited to provide feedback and identify the objectives they felt were most important. Overall, there was a strong alignment between Council’s priorities and public input.

The top 5 objectives and associated 9 priority action items adopted by Council in June 2023 are as follows:

Priority Objective A - Provide a safe community for all

Associated Action items:

- 1.5 Partner to support the development of a campus of services around addiction, mental health, and transitional housing (NEW)
- 1.6 Promote equity, diversity and inclusion throughout the community (NEW)

Priority Objective B - Enhance the vibrancy of the downtown core

Associated Action items:

- 7.1 Update the property standards by-law
- 7.5 Support the creation and intensification of residential units in the downtown (NEW)

Priority Objective C - Promote Woodstock as a place to attract and retain business

Associated Action items:

- 8.1 Develop additional strategies to attract new business

Priority Objective D - Promote and implement green initiatives

Associated Action items:

- 13.1 Expand waste diversion initiatives
- 13.3 Focus on the goals of the Community Energy Plan (NEW)

Priority Objective E - Provide the necessary resources to support community and economic growth (NEW)

Associated Action items:

- 18.1 Amend the Official Plan and Zoning By-law to allow for increased residential density (NEW)
- 18.2 Pursue a boundary adjustment to maintain a 25-year residential land supply (NEW)

Additional information about the Strategic Plan and re-aligned priorities can be found on the [City's website](#).

COMMENTS

The term of Council reached the midway point on November 15, 2024, serving as a good opportunity to provide Council with a progress update. An update allows Council members to track the advancement of key priorities, make informed decisions, and adjust strategies if necessary. An update fosters accountability and transparency on how resources are being utilized and whether objectives are being met.

A high-level 18-month progress update for each of the 9 strategic priorities is attached to this report outlining the work that has been done since June of 2023. This update reflects a snapshot in time of progress made to date. Work in all of these priority areas is underway and ongoing, much of which will require future Council reports for Council's consideration and direction or specific requests through the budgeting process.

RECOMMENDATION

That Woodstock City Council receive the Strategic Priorities Mid-Term Update report as information.

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Approved by: David Creery, P. Eng, M.B.A, Chief Administrative Officer

COMMUNITY GOAL: ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF LIFE

Priority Objective A: Provide a safe community for all

Lead Resource: CAO

Action Item	Steps
1.5 Partner to support the development of a campus of services around addiction, mental health, and transitional housing (NEW)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•In partnership with the County of Oxford and local support services, support ways to develop programs, services, and space to address addiction, mental health and homelessness.•Support the creation of Additional Residential Units (ARUs) in the existing residential supply.•Support the creation of transitional homes.

Mayor's Social Well-Being Task Force

- The Task Force was established in 2023 with a mandate to partner with community agencies to address the social well-being of the City and to work in conjunction with Safe and Well Oxford. The Task Force supports Action Item 1.5 by bringing together partners to coordinate and carry out activities that help vulnerable populations and improve community safety.
- The Community Social Well-Being Reserve Fund was established for the purposes of accelerating solutions to issues affecting the social well-being of the City with an annual budget of \$150,000.
- Priority for 2023 funding was given to lead and support a coordinated encampment response program in order to partner to support those living in encampments and dealing with addiction, mental health and homelessness - <https://www.cityofwoodstock.ca/en/encampment-response.aspx>

Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment (HART) Hub Funding Application

- Council provided a formal resolution of support for the Oxford Health Team (OHT) application for HART Hub funding. Such a facility would have a significant impact by improving care and access to services for people experiencing homelessness, addiction, and mental health challenges.

ARUs

- Revisions were made to the Official Plan policies and zoning provisions in October 2023 and July 2024 to more broadly permit the development of ARUs

throughout the City. These policy and zoning changes support the goals and actions identified in the City of Woodstock Housing Pledge submitted to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing in December 2023.

Building Faster Fund

- In November 2024 Council voted to direct \$1.99M from Ontario's Building Faster Fund (BFF) to support the creation of a homelessness service centre in partnership with Oxford County.
- Oxford County Council has directed that County staff prepare a report on how the BFF funding can be used for the development of a homelessness service centre with a focus on transitioning people out of homelessness within the County of Oxford.

On the horizon

- Work closely with the Safe and Well Oxford Steering Committee on the five-year redevelopment of the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan and the development of priority risk areas.
- Support Oxford County in the development and implementation of a Homelessness Response Strategy, including improvements to the shelter system.
- Partner with Oxford County on the creation of a homelessness service centre.

COMMUNITY GOAL: ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF LIFE

Priority Objective A: Provide a safe community for all

Lead Resource: Director of Human Resources

Action Item	Steps
1.6 Promote Diversity, Equity and Inclusion throughout the community (NEW)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Provide DEI training to Council and staff.•Develop a DEI employee recruitment plan.•Consider the creation of a DEI Committee.•Explore joining the UNESCO Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities.•Support the Safe and Well Oxford DEI Action Coalition in developing a Strategy and Inclusion Charter for all communities across Oxford.•Work with the DEI Action Coalition to develop public awareness campaigns to overcome myths, ignorance, discrimination and racism.•Host cultural special events to encourage engagement between cultural communities.

DEI Policy

- Council adopted a new Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Policy in April 2023, outlining the City’s commitment to create a workplace culture where employees feel valued, equal and respected.

UNESCO Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities

- The City joined the UNESCO Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities in December 2023.

Safe and Well Oxford DEI Action Coalition

- Rather than creating a separate DEI Committee, City staff joined the Safe and Well Oxford DEI Action Coalition, which includes members of the community, community partners, and municipal staff. This allows for collaboration on local initiatives and shared resource creation to avoid duplication.
- Council endorsed Safe and Well Oxford's first Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Charter in June 2024 as a guiding framework for promoting diversity, equity and inclusion within the organization and community.

Woodstock Art Gallery

- The Woodstock Art Gallery prioritized equity, diversity and inclusion as one of its Strategic Initiatives in its five-year Strategic Plan (2021–2026).
- In 2022, 2023, and 2024 the Gallery exhibited work by Indigenous artists from the permanent collection in Oxford County Chambers and presented to County Council in honour of National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.
- Representation of women and IBPOC artists has been increased in the permanent collection.
- Various EDI training has been provided to Board and staff members.
- The Gallery is an accredited Rainbow Registered organization recognized by Canada's LGBT+ Chamber of Commerce for meeting stringent criteria attesting to diverse and inclusive practices.
- Various improvements have been made to the physical building to be more inclusive (i.e. Gender-neutral washrooms, braille signage, baby changing tables in both men's and women's washrooms).

On the Horizon

- Once the recruitment process for the Director of Human Resources is complete, the promotion of DEI will be revitalized. This includes delivering DEI training to both Council and staff. The Director will collaborate closely with the Coordinator of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Oxford County to tap into expertise and exchange resources. Additionally, a DEI Action Coalition page is under development for the Safe and Well Oxford website, which will provide training opportunities and DEI resources. Leveraging these resources, along with support from the UNESCO Coalition's network, will facilitate collaborative sharing.
- City staff are working to develop a process for identifying and celebrating/commemorating Days of Significance in the community.
- Strategies to seek more diversity in the recruitment process for Council's board and committee members will be considered in 2025 in preparation for recruiting members for the new term of Council.

ECONOMY GOAL: CREATE A DYNAMIC, DIVERSIFIED ECONOMY

Priority Objective B: Enhance the vibrancy in the downtown core

Lead Resource: City Engineer

Action Item	Steps
7.1 Update the property standards by-law	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Review property standards for downtown properties•Update and enforce property standards as required•Create a Vacant Building By-law to and enforce standards for vacant properties

Property Standards By-law

- Council approved the creation of a new Manager of By-law Enforcement staff position, commencing July 2024. The Manager is currently reviewing the property standards by-law and recommended updates will be presented to Council in Q1 of 2025.

Elimination of the Vacant Unit Rebate Program

- A rebate program that allowed qualifying property owners to apply for tax relief for vacant or partially vacant properties was eliminated by Council in September 2023. The change takes effect in 2025. Without the tax relief, there is more incentive for property owners to find tenants who will actively use the space.

Vacant Building Registry By-law

- A by-law was created in July 2023 which requires owners to register vacant buildings with the City and work to ensure the buildings are secure, appropriately maintained, and monitored on a regular basis. The by-law aims to encourage the timely redevelopment of vacant buildings and reduce issues associated with derelict properties.
- An enforcement blitz for the by-law was scheduled for late November 2024. Unfortunately, it could not proceed as planned because the by-law requires that Orders be sent via registered mail. The blitz will move forward once the current mail strike concludes.

ECONOMY GOAL: CREATE A DYNAMIC, DIVERSIFIED ECONOMY

Priority Objective B: Enhance the vibrancy in the downtown core

Lead Resource: Economic Development Commissioner

Action Item	Steps
7.5 Support the creation and intensification of residential units in the downtown (NEW)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Review the Central Area to determine appropriate boundaries for the Central Business District and Entrepreneurial District.•Consider increasing the permitted height and densities in the Central Area.•Review parking supply as needed as intensification occurs.•Improve and increase multi-purpose public amenity space in the Central area.

Sale of Surplus Municipal Land

- Surplus municipal land in the downtown has been sold to support the creation of residential units:
 - Former Hydro Building 16 Graham Street – the sale included a requirement for a minimum of 100 new residential units to be constructed.
 - McQueen Street – a portion of this road was sold to facilitate additional residential development.
 - Former Capitol Theatre – Council supported an Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendment to facilitate the Oxford County development of an 8-storey residential development.
 - Former Small Business Centre 453 Dundas Street – the proposal included renovating the upper two floors into new residential units.

Planning Reviews and Reports

- As outlined in the City of Woodstock Housing Pledge, a Zoning By-law review is underway with the goal of providing options to increase density in the City. This will include a review of the overall parking restrictions framework throughout the City.
- A report to provide options for revisions to the Central Business District and Entrepreneurial District is underway and planned for Q2 of 2025. The report will take existing stable residential neighbourhoods and opportunities for intensification into consideration.
- A report outlining current permitted heights and densities in the downtown, and options to implement broader housing densities as of right in the Central Area is underway and planned for Q2 of 2025.

Existing Programs

- The downtown parking supply was reviewed in 2020 and staff conduct on-going parking counts to monitor demand within the system. The most recent count showed a 50% usage rate.
- CIP funding is allocated to residential intensification - 25 new units have been built since November 2022.

On the Horizon

- Phase 1 of the Streetscape Master Plan will commence in April 2025, helping to draw investment to the downtown.
- Council approved the purchase of 478-484 Dundas St. Acquiring this property is a significant step towards achieving the vision outlined in the Streetscape Master Plan which envisions a continuous civic space and possible City Hall expansion. This is a long-term, strategic investment in the downtown that positions the City effectively to offer enhanced programming and events, further helping to draw investment to the downtown.

ECONOMY GOAL: CREATE A DYNAMIC, DIVERSIFIED ECONOMY

Priority Objective C: Promote Woodstock as a place to attract and retain business

Lead Resource: Economic Development Commissioner

Action Item	Steps
8.1 Develop additional strategies to attract new business	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Support local businesses with workforce attraction in partnership with community organizations•In partnership with community boards and business groups, develop strategies to attract new businesses to Woodstock•Focus on attracting businesses to the downtown•Leverage the Small Business Enterprise to support and mentor micro and small businesses•Define and maintain a business-friendly environment•Market Woodstock as a prime location to do business in and beyond the City•Continue partnerships with other regional economic development agencies to leverage resources•Develop a brownfield or adaptive re-use strategy for vacant or underutilized sites•Maintain an inventory of vacant space available for rent/lease/purchase•Maintain an inventory of serviced or serviceable vacant or industrial land•Seek opportunities for additional land acquisitions or partnerships with industrial/ commercial developers

Industrial Land

- Land sales to a diverse group of businesses in the new Alyea Business Park commenced in 2023. 67 of the 85 acres available have been sold. Proceeds from these sales will help fund the development of future business parks.
- Development of a new Northeast Industrial Park (Corlette) is on-going.
- An inventory of serviced or serviceable vacant or industrial land is maintained to provide to prospective developers.

Workforce Attraction

- City of Woodstock staff Chair the Elgin Middlesex Oxford Workforce Planning & Development Board.
- Staff participate in various career expos and are members of regional workforce related groups.

Business Attraction

- The Downtown Development Officer is focused on targeted recruitment and strategy development for attracting businesses to the downtown.
- Economic Development participates in the Fam Tour Series as an investment attraction initiative, including partnering to provide FAM Tours in the downtown.
- Staff are pursuing new geographies beyond Woodstock's traditional markets. This includes attending the world's largest Food Show in Dubai.
- The City is partnered through the Southwestern Ontario Marketing Alliance (SOMA) with the London Economic Development Corporation as the Electric Vehicle Triangle (TEVT) to pursue the value chain business that may end up supplying the Power Co. investment in St. Thomas

ENVIRONMENT GOAL: PROTECT AND ENHANCE OUR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Priority Objective D: Promote and implement green initiatives

Lead Resource: Director of Public Works

Action Item	Steps
13.1 Expand waste diversion initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•In partnership with the County, explore ways to expand and promote waste diversion initiatives•Consider implementation of a curbside organics collection program•Review options for recycling program changes due to the Extended Producer Responsibility model, including recycling receptacles in public spaces and downtown•Review options for safe cigarette disposal receptacles•Consider options for water filling stations at City events

Recycling

- Starting January 1, 2026, Producers will be responsible for curbside recycling collection and the City will no longer provide recycling service.
- The City currently provides curbside collection services to several non-eligible sources, such as industrial, commercial, institutional, and the downtown. These sources will not be included in the Producer Responsibility Blue Box regulation model. Oxford County is currently contemplating how to establish collection of non-eligible sources for existing locations currently receiving this service. The level of service approved by County Council will form part of the County Waste budget.

Organics

- Green cones have been promoted through the WOW magazine and City website.
- Oxford County is considering implementing curbside collection of food and organic waste starting in the spring of 2027. A decision has not yet been made if this service will be provided by the City or a County contractor. The City is ready to launch organic waste collection services on January 1, 2026, pending approval from Oxford County. Municipalities are required to meet sector-specific waste reduction and resource recovery targets, which include a 50% reduction in waste and recovery of food resources.

Special Events

- The Woodstock Environment Advisory Committee performed a waste audit at the 2023 Canada Day event and made recommendations on ways to reduce waste at City events. Staff continue to work towards these recommendations.
- Water refilling stations are now offered at City events.

On the Horizon

- County Council will be considering options for addressing recycling collection for non-eligible sources.
- Once more is known regarding the collection of non-eligible sources, staff will investigate recycling receptacles on City property, including in the downtown.

ENVIRONMENT GOAL: PROTECT AND ENHANCE OUR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Priority Objective D: Promote and implement green initiatives

Lead Resource: CAO

Action Item	Steps
13.3 Focus on the goals of the Community Energy Plan (NEW)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Engage and educate the community to raise awareness regarding energy consumption and conservation•Promote efficient and green transportation by considering active transportation options, electric vehicles and other solutions•Demonstrate leadership in energy conservation programs•Explore options for EV charging stations•Consider inclusion of solar panels on municipal buildings

EV Charging Stations

- In 2023, the City of Woodstock applied for funding through the Electric Vehicle (EV) ChargeON Program but was not successful. Staff reached out to request feedback on the grant submission to increase the chances of success for future intakes. Staff continue to monitor grant opportunities.
(Note: In November 2024 the Ontario Government announced 68 new provincially funded electric vehicle charging stations for Oxford, 49 of which are in the City of Woodstock.)

Energy and Conservation Demand Management Plan

- In June of 2024 Council adopted a 2025-2029 Energy and Conservation Demand Management Plan, outlining the next phase for implementing improvements to facilities which reduce energy consumption, greenhouse gas emissions, and the associated costs in conjunction with the capital budget and planning process.
- Specifically, the Plan focuses on rooftop unit replacements and installation of automated HVAC systems which offer improved efficiency and reduce energy consumption while maximizing performance levels.
- Upgrading lighting throughout the City is also incorporated to improve energy efficiency.

Solar

- The City has 13 existing solar installations across the City.
- Transit installed 6 new solar panels to power lights at dark bus stop locations in 2024.

On the Horizon

- The Transit Department plans to install 12 new solar panels at bus shelters in 2025-2027.
- One of the biggest barriers to advancing initiatives under this priority action item is the lack of a dedicated staffing resource. City staff have connected with Oxford County's new Coordinator of Community Environmental Sustainability, who was hired in July 2024, to share Woodstock's 2016 Community Energy Plan, tap into expertise, request support, exchange resources, and facilitate collaboration.

COMMUNITY GOAL: ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF LIFE

Priority Objective E: Provide the necessary resources to support community and economic growth (NEW)

Lead Resource: CAO/PLANNING

Action Item	Steps
18.1 Amend the Official Plan and Zoning By-law to allow for increased residential density (NEW)	•Review and update the Official Plan and Zoning By-laws

Housing Pledge

- Woodstock was asked by the province to submit a housing pledge outlining the strategies, actions and initiatives that will be taken to achieve its housing targets. Council held a special meeting in November 2023 to explore gentle density strategies and brainstorm initiatives and barriers to creating more homes in Woodstock. Council approved [Woodstock's Housing Pledge](#) in December 2023.

Official Plan and Zoning- By-law Review

- The Housing Pledge outlines Council’s commitment to considering Official Plan Policy revisions and Zoning By-law provisions to support intensification. Oxford County Planning staff are currently working on reports for Council’s consideration.

ARUs

- Revisions were made to the Official Plan policies and zoning provisions in October 2023 and July 2024 to more broadly permit the development of ARUs throughout the City.
- Information has been made available to the public to assist with the process of creating an ARU within existing dwellings.

Sale of Surplus Municipal Land

- The necessary planning studies are underway to re-zone a portion of the land formerly used by Golf North to high-density residential. This land will be offered for sale through an Expression of Interest process.

On the Horizon

- Staff will explore options for Council's consideration regarding new Community Improvement Plan grant/incentive programs to increase affordable housing, rental housing and other desirable forms of housing to areas of the City outside of the Central Business district.
- Consider the development of a Brownfields Community Improvement Program to encourage the re-purposing of former commercial or industrial buildings to residential where appropriate.

COMMUNITY GOAL: ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF LIFE

Priority Objective E: Provide the necessary resources to support community and economic growth (NEW)

Lead Resource: CAO

Action Item	Steps
18.2 Pursue a boundary adjustment to maintain a 25-year residential land supply (NEW)	•Strike a Committee of Council to participate in negotiations •Engage with neighbouring municipalities

Township of Norwich

- In May 2023, Council invited the Township of Norwich to enter into boundary adjustment discussions to explore options for adjusting the City’s boundary to the South. The Township of Norwich accepted the invitation and established a boundary adjustment committee, which met over many months, ultimately proceeding to a statutory public meeting in June 2024.
- After receiving considerable public comments through various consultation processes, Norwich and Woodstock agreed to a revised ‘minimalist approach’ which, once finalized, would bring 106 acres into the City of Woodstock to allow for the realignment of Patullo Avenue.
- The proposal must still be approved by Oxford County Council and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.
- The anticipated effective date is January 1st, 2026.

Township of East Zorra-Tavistock

- In May 2023, Council invited the Township of East Zorra-Tavistock to enter into boundary adjustment discussions to address the critical need for housing. The Township of East Zorra-Tavistock indicated they will consider the invitation once they have completed their Secondary Planning and Strategic Planning processes.
- Staff put forward a recommendation to ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to establish a Commission, however that motion was not supported by Council.

On the Horizon

- Oxford County is currently completing an updated Comprehensive Review which will identify the additional land needed to maintain the 25-year land supply.