

A STRATEGY FOR THE FUTURE



Submitted by:

Mohawk College Enterprise



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Executive Summary

Township of West Lincoln

“Our Future Naturally”

In the summer of 2011, the Township of West Lincoln’s Mayor and Township Council initiated an exercise for the development of a new 10-year community strategic plan. Based on the direction of Council, the Township’s Chief Administrative Officer, along with key administrative staff, developed a request for proposal and engaged the services of Mohawk College Enterprise Corporation (MCE) and its consultancy team, MCC Group and Alegna Project Strategists, to undertake an extensive community consultation process that would result in the development of a new 10-year strategic plan for the Township.

The official kick-off commenced in January 2012 with a community consultation process that was carried out in the months of February, March and April. This process included preliminary key stakeholder engagement and a series of presentations and interviews (Phases 1-3). Submission of this draft report to the Planning Committee brings closure to Phases 4 and 5 of this project.

A key component to MCE’s methodology and approach for the development of the Township of West Lincoln’s community strategic plan was to ensure clearly articulated guiding principles and values that expressed Council’s relationship with community and the need for an open and transparent process. MCE ensured that public interest was respected at all times and every effort was made to avoid any potential for community conflict, particularly in relation to; rural/urban divide, green energy (i.e. wind turbines) and religious and cultural issues.

Over the course of this initiative, some very important messages and commonly recurring themes emerged from the community feedback. Township Council, administration and citizens of West Lincoln will have an opportunity to address strategic direction, priority goals and objectives prior to final adoption by Council.

The feedback will support directions that will advance common interests for the Township of West Lincoln.

It is important for Council and Administration to harness the enthusiasm that was generated throughout this process, to embrace innovative ideas and to work towards effective implementation of common strategic goals.

The results of this exercise will lead the Township of West Lincoln to advance the community on a long-term journey that will prove to be beneficial for years to come.

Introduction

A Strategy for the Future

The Township of West Lincoln has been in existence for over 40 years. West Lincoln is comprised of a collection of somewhat isolated and separate rural communities consisting of the Hamlets of St. Ann's, Silverdale, Wellandport, Bismark, Caistor Centre, Caistorville, Fulton, Abingdon, Grassie, the Village of Smithville and others. It is a community rich in history with deep-rooted generations. The Township of West Lincoln also represents the largest geographical land base within the Region of Niagara and is primarily rural with agriculture being the largest economic driver.

Recent changes and external factors have brought West Lincoln to a present-day crossroads and it is the desire of the current Council (elected in 2010) to approve a 10-year strategic plan which will guide current planning and decision-making; not only for this term of Council but for future Councils as a sustainable, achievable plan, informed by the community regarding planning directions and decisions to be undertaken.

Given the potential growth projections and exponential growth that is occurring in the municipalities surrounding West Lincoln, this is an opportune time for the Township to develop a community strategic plan that will provide a road map of strategic priorities that will guide development.

The Township of West Lincoln is a blended community of many different perspectives, beliefs and interests. Many citizens are long-time residents with families who have lived in the area for generations. Given the extensive geographical span of the Township, West Lincoln provides services to a mosaic of varied interests from each of its geographical districts (hamlets) that are often at odds when determining a unified vision for the Township.

Visioning and strategic planning are essential processes for the Township of West Lincoln. There are effective ways to ensure that the Council will harness the positive energy and enthusiasm from all citizens who participated in the process through the development of this strategy.

Based on community input, this Strategic Plan has a number of key initiatives that have been linked to three key pillars:

- ***Quality of Life***
- ***Economic Prosperity & Tourism***
- ***Managed Growth & Protection of Natural Assets***

Each pillar is supported by strategic objectives to inform policy development. In addition, we have provided key actions for consideration to support the achievement of each strategic objective. It will be vitally important for the Council to approve and work collaboratively with the administration in the effective implementation of the recommendations.

The strategic plan is based on long-term, ambitious goals. It will be essential for Council and Administration to embrace the strategies, participate in implementation and drive a number of ongoing strategic directions to ensure its success. Council and Administration have a unique opportunity to focus on making the vision of its citizens become a reality; preserving the treasured values of this deeply historic, rural community and initiating strategic actions to ensure West Lincoln is a thriving community well into the future.

In today's global economy, to remain passive is simply not an option.

With the downturn of the economy in the past few years, there is tremendous pressure on municipalities to reduce and in some cases eliminate certain costs. These are challenging times for our governments, at all levels and in all sectors. Governments are continuously being pressured by both rising costs and increased demands, and while the community is fully aware that growth is inevitable and is likely to continue, the Township has a unique opportunity to carefully manage the anticipated growth while protecting and preserving the historical, rural and natural environment its residents have come to know and expect.

The challenge will be to take proactive steps by embracing and shaping opportunities for residents, rather to accepting the status quo or just addressing whatever happens to come along.

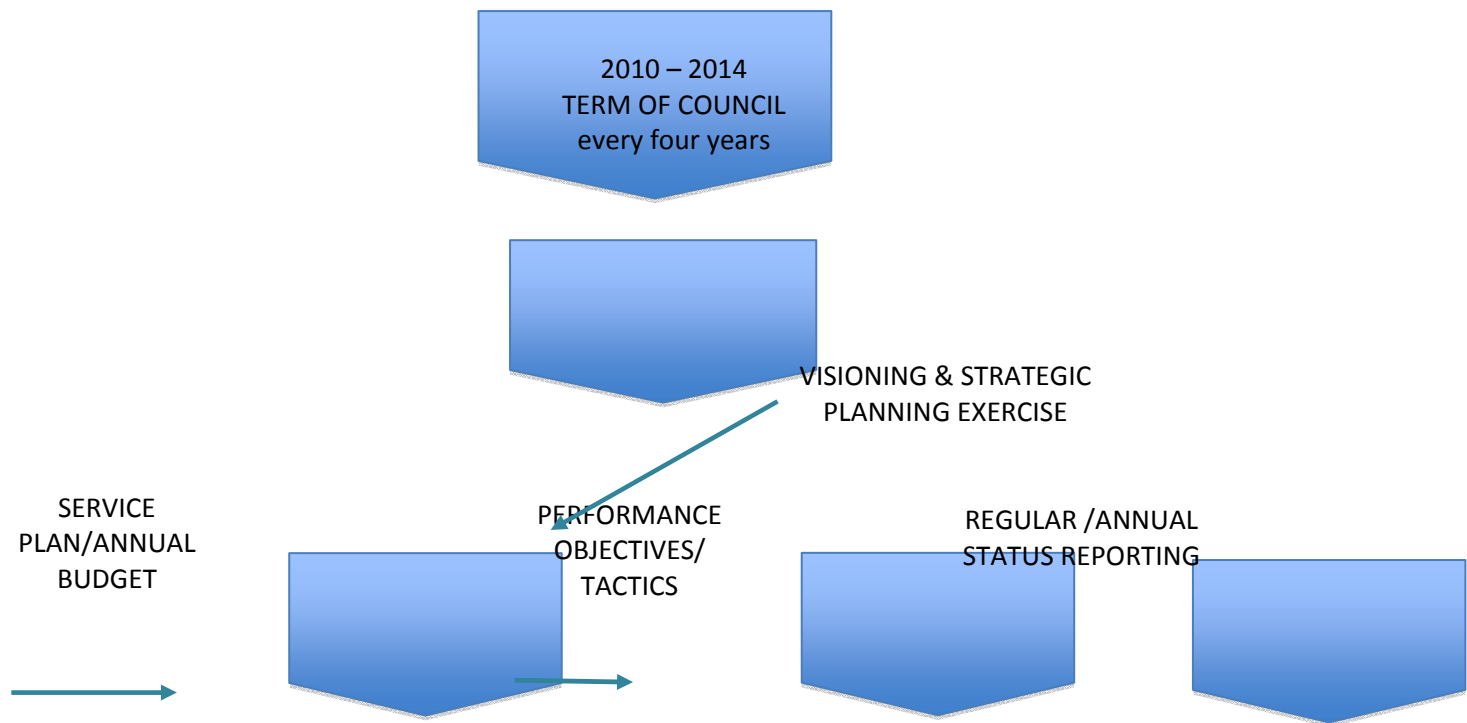
Competitive, prosperous, well-positioned and managed communities are communities that are stronger for it and achieve better long-term results.

Council must continuously work toward sustaining the quality of life and place for the citizens of the Township of West Lincoln, focus on making the vision real and invest in the future of the community.

Strategy Framework

The Strategic Plan for the Township of West Lincoln is a guide for Council and Administration that lends particular focus to providing services and programs to its citizens. Each of the three pillars identified is further defined by specific strategic objectives.

The pillars and strategic objectives also provide a framework for the community services provided and the Township's commitment to maintaining and enhancing quality of life and place.



Service plans are living documents and are typically aligned with annual operating and capital budget planning and administrative performance objectives.

The implementation of performance objectives commonly referred to as tactics will measure the overall success in achieving the actions, and meeting strategic objectives as defined in the strategy.

Performance indicators for the Township will also form the basis of a report card on progress as part of the municipality's commitment to being accountable to the citizens.

Vision, Mission and Values

Guiding our future naturally

Vision

The Township of West Lincoln has a far-reaching expanse of land that is rich in rural and agricultural heritage. It has a history that has been built by providing residents and newcomers with a safe, caring and self-supported community.

Recent growth is a testament to the quality of life offered in this community, coupled with excellent proximity to urban centres and the amenities they offer.

The Township of West Lincoln is a community defined by its:

- Quality of life
- Entrepreneurial nature of both pioneers and current residents
- Environmental and natural resources
- Historical and cultural roots

A VISION FOR OUR FUTURE:

“The Township of West Lincoln will be a community that values our heritage, preserves our environmental and natural resources, fosters entrepreneurial spirit and provides excellent quality of life.”

The Township of West Lincoln will continue to be a sustainable community in which to live, work, play, raise a family, retire and enjoy quality of life.

Mission

The Township of West Lincoln has a large land base that is rich in rural and agricultural heritage. It has a history that has been built on providing residents and newcomers with a safe, caring, and self-supported community.

The Township of West Lincoln is a culturally and religiously diverse community.

The Township will grow and prosper through sophisticated, leading-edge technologies associated with the farming and agricultural industries, green companies, entrepreneurs, small-to-medium-sized business, tourism and new residents.

The Township will work towards an expanded scope of employment opportunities to create local jobs for its citizens through innovation and clean technology, including alternative energy related industry, environmental technologies and processing of agricultural products.

Job opportunities in industries have economic spin off and financial benefit as well as contribute toward creating new jobs and re-skilling existing jobs.

OUR MISSION:

“The Township of West Lincoln will attract new residents for its quality of life in a rural and natural environment, support new and entrepreneurial business opportunities, attract visitors, and enhance our cultural and agricultural assets.”

Values

In addition to establishing, providing and sustaining a high quality of life for its residents, the Township of West Lincoln will be driven by embracing the following values:

- Respect and respond to the diverse generational needs of residents
- Encourage protection of our natural environment
- Support initiatives that promote farming, agriculture and entrepreneurial eco-tourism
- Leverage our natural environment attributes and fosters healthy active lifestyles
- Embrace technological advances and explore green sector opportunities
- Strive to remain a safe, caring, and friendly community

Voice of the Community

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Community Outreach and Civic Engagement:

Integral to the development of a new strategic plan is community outreach and civic engagement. Throughout the consultation process, over 350 people participated by providing comments, attending open houses, attending one-to-one interviews and focus groups, completing telephone and online surveys.

The community-building exercise provided a variety of opportunities for the public to participate and was a co-operative effort between Council, the Township, MCE and the broader community.

In the course of our extensive consultations we collected several suggestion box comments. These suggestions, which were operational in nature, have been provided to the CAO for future consideration.

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| Official kick-off and public engagement stage of the strategic planning project formally launched at the Council meeting on January 23, 2012. | Council meeting was televised and included onsite media coverage. Media interviews were conducted with both the Mayor and CAO. |
| Leadership Interviews | Mayor and members of Council and the Senior Administration Team participated in 1:1 interviews |
| Public Notification: Property Tax Billing | A letter outlining the strategic planning and consultation process and objectives for this exercise was mailed to all property owners and businesses. Distribution of notices was sent to all residential households and businesses throughout the Township. The primary objective was to provide information and encourage participation from across the community. |

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| <p>Media Release and Dedicated Website page launched</p> | <p>Media Release issued to all media outlets and a dedicated website page on the Township’s website was launched.</p> |
| <p>Online Survey Deployed</p> | <p>Customized questionnaire with 12 targeted questions. Link to a dedicated page from Township’s home page.</p> |
| <p>Random Telephone Surveys</p> | <p>Approximately 200 random telephone survey calls to residents throughout West Lincoln were conducted. The calls were made over a two-week period ranging between the hours of 9:00 am to 8:00 pm and two Saturdays. The phone numbers were selected at random from Canada 411 and a favourable 25% participation rate was achieved.</p> |
| <p>Given limited access to Internet, specifically in the agricultural areas and rural hamlets, hard copy surveys were distributed and provided to 10 locations throughout the community. Surveys available February 11 – March 9</p> | <p>The locations where surveys were provided included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town Hall • Smithville Public Library • Caistor Public Library • Wellandport Public Library • Early Years Centre • Chamber of Commerce (at AGM also) • Legion Villa I • Legion Villa II • Family Health Team office • West Lincoln Arena |
| <p>Project Lead attended a number of focus groups and community-based meetings to present information about the strategic planning project as well as to engage citizens and receive input.</p> | <p>The following organizations participated in the consultation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage Committee and Historical Society • Chamber of Commerce • Library Board • Grade 10 Civics class, South Lincoln High School • Wellandport Community Meeting • Caistor Community Meeting • Smithville Community Meeting • Silverdale Community Meeting • West Lincoln Community Care • 4H Club |

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| <p>Additional Outreach Engagement</p> | <p>Written submissions were accepted at community meetings, committee meetings, and the Township office. Individual citizens who made known that they wished to provide input and were unable to attend a community meeting were contacted directly by the Project Lead.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total number of hard copy responses: 78 (includes 24 youth specific) • Total number of telephone responses: 50 • Online surveys: 22 • Total number of participants in the focus groups: 21 • People interviewed one-to-one or via email correspondence: 12 • Community consultations (open houses and community group meetings): 60 |
| <p>Attended and engaged in a roundtable discussion with the Region of Niagara's Senior Administration Team</p> | <p>Prepared a customized questionnaire and solicited feedback from the Senior Administration Team</p> |

A significant sampling of opinions over the course of the public consultation process and the results of the final strategy are a culmination of common and recurring themes as it relates to strategic direction, priorities and a frame-work for Council and key stakeholders in its decision-making process.

It will be incumbent upon Council and the Administration of the Township of West Lincoln and other key community stakeholders/special purpose/interest groups to work in collaboration for effective implementation of this strategic plan.

The Strategies

West Lincoln Today: Challenges

In reviewing input from the broad consultations undertaken, the following challenges emerged, and together with additional research, these challenges informed the development of the pillars and strategic objectives.

West Lincoln is predominantly a farming and bedroom community. Residents define themselves in terms of the hamlets or neighbourhoods they live in or their family origins. Many citizens are deeply rooted in the community and the vastness of the geographic footprint leads to challenges in relating to the urban core located in Smithville.

The Township is also experiencing turmoil as the impending implementation of industrial wind turbines (IWT) is being contested. Many describe this issue as pitting neighbour against neighbour. This is a significant statement in a community that treasures peace and quiet, friendly neighbours and defines itself as a caring community. IWT is more than a perceived environmental issue. In West Lincoln the core values that the citizens pride themselves on are unfortunately being tested over this issue.

There is uniform dissatisfaction with the current configuration of the downtown core in Smithville. The municipality needs to focus its limited financial resources on redevelopment of the core to provide broader access to amenities and a designated gathering place. This would help stimulate local commercial and tourism activities and also provide accessible venues for leisure activities for the benefit of all citizens, youth and seniors in particular (walkable trails, skate park, bike racks for cyclists, splash pad, playground, etc.).

Concurrently, rural residents wish to see their local rural gathering places preserved. Community halls although owned and maintained by the Township, are operated by independent local boards responsible for collection of rental fees and scheduling. Input was received that supported the current arrangements but with the Township taking responsibility for upgrades. However, the arrangement needs to be reviewed and ownership realigned with responsibilities and financial management streamlined.

There is a need for support for local entrepreneurs and providing opportunities for local businesses: developing partnerships that will provide tools, and necessary training to explore and support entrepreneurship and small business start up.

Fostering the agri-tourism industries would allow the Township to leverage its natural assets, strong agricultural industry, and capitalize on the Niagara Region's agri-tourism focus by offering dairy, poultry, cash crop foods and products (milk, eggs, cream, cheese, within Marketing board limitations), specialty animal products (Alpaca fleece, etc). Working with the

Region of Niagara as it evolves its new model of Economic Development and tourism will help foster this opportunity for increased agri-tourism.

Many citizens expressed concern regarding the lack of business tax base contribution in West Lincoln. Notwithstanding that the tax base is shared between the Township and the Region of Niagara, the tax rate to ratio of services is perceived to be high by the residents we spoke with along with Chamber of Commerce business representatives. (In actuality, the residential tax rate has decreased; this is countered by the increase in the value of homes.)

Specifically, there is some concern that a cycle of lack of local employment coupled with increasing residential tax rates will turn the drawing features of a small, safe town in a natural setting into an unaffordable place to live in the future. There is concern that residents may start leaving because of residential taxes and in response to lack of amenities for their family members –youth in particular.

There is widespread agreement that a focus on economic development is required to support future viability and sustainability of West Lincoln. West Lincoln needs to attract industry and commerce to bolster its revenue. There is also an imperative for continued communication to ratepayers to outline the impact of increasing assessment values (as established by MPAC: Municipal Property Assessment Corporation) impacting residential tax rates.

Pillars to Guide Our Future Naturally

Quality of Life

“Developing ways to improve the quality of life in the Township of West Lincoln”

Strategic Objective #1:

Invest in Smithville’s downtown and create a safe, vibrant, pedestrian-friendly core.

Strategy: Conduct a feasibility study for the redesign of Smithville’s core by transforming the downtown to attract visitors and residents, enhance pedestrian safety and stimulate local business.

Why?

Smithville, as the urban centre of the Township, lacks a definitive, safe, attractive and attracting core. The current configuration is unsafe for pedestrians and motorists alike, discourages retail shoppers and lacks a public space to welcome young families, seniors and youth for leisure and recreational activities.

Through the recent Community Improvement Plan (CIP) funding received from the Region, storefront renewal is commencing which increases the aesthetics of the core. However, the current configuration creates a missed opportunity to welcome and engage the new residents who have chosen this community as their home because the core traffic and retail configuration functions as a “pass through”.

West Lincoln has a higher than average* youth population and yet there is no gathering place for youth. There is a lack of amenities such as; a skate park, fitness gym, clothing stores and variety of food outlets (there is a fair divide on the desire to attract a fast-food chain – small town vs. youth employment). (*2006 StatsCan)

Living in a commuter community, youth have an average of three to four hours per day where they are out of school and awaiting their parents to return home from work.

Key Actions:

1. Implement the recent safety study recommendations and include recommendations from the forthcoming Regional Truck Traffic Study as part of the downtown

revitalization plan. Ensure there is a central gathering place for all ages, ie: a park-like setting with small retail access, angle parking, etc - part of a vision for a downtown revitalization plan

2. Implement safe, accessible and pedestrian-friendly walkways and linkages in the downtown
3. Design and incorporate designated bike routes to encourage safe, active and environmentally friendly alternative modes of transportation
4. Incorporate new downtown signage as part of a way-finding signage strategy
5. Undertake a review of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan to incorporate a longer-term development plan of the LeisurePlex Park and Fairgrounds that could attract tourists and further enhance services to citizens of West Lincoln
6. Plan for future office and business development in the core that will attract people to the downtown core
7. Explore creating wireless hot spots in core for to business, citizens and visitors

Strategic Objective #2:

Develop a new brand and communications strategy to promote a unified community that represents all sub-identities for each of its distinct hamlets and wards.

Strategy: Develop a new brand identity to reflect a new unified community which is representative of all hamlets within the Township.

Why?

Currently residents identify with their local neighbourhood or hamlet. While this serves to support and underscore the attributes of strong ties and relationships with neighbours, it also serves to fracture the greater West Lincoln community. Today, there is confusion about the identity of West Lincoln, in addition to a very present rural-urban divide, which impedes the ability for collective gain.

No one hamlet or neighbourhood is self-sustaining and the geographic expanse admittedly makes it challenging for rural residents to identify or even access services in Smithville as they tend to be closer to larger urban centres (i.e. Dunnville, Stoney Creek/Hamilton, St. Catharines, Grimsby). It is imperative to move the community toward a more collective identity to ensure that future planning better serves the greater community as a whole. Special interests and services provided should not be underscoring by a rural-urban divide. There is a need for all

residents to ensure and understand a balance of services as well as the municipality's requirement for fiscal responsibility. West Lincoln is a community on the cusp of change, not unlike many communities across Ontario; demographics and technology are creating new and changing service demands at an accelerated and unprecedented pace.

Key Actions: Develop a branding strategy: create a new visual identity and branding that incorporates sub-branding of all hamlets in order to depict a more unified community

1. Ensure consistent use of West Lincoln's branding on all internal and external communications
2. Encourage the use of visual identity and branding throughout the Township, including the development of a way-finding strategy, a new road signage program at all entrances to Townships and hamlets, and signage on municipal buildings, vehicles etc.
3. Develop a marketing and communications strategy to ensure consistency in communications and to increase currency of information for businesses and residents.
 - Design and develop a new website that promotes the community and includes interaction and stays current with evolving social media
 - Design and develop new marketing collateral
 - Create a tourism signage program in collaboration with the related ministries (i.e. Tourism/Transportation)

Strategic Objective #3:

Increase civic engagement and community involvement through enhanced partnerships, good governance and leadership.

Strategy: The citizens of West Lincoln take great pride and interest in their community and therefore it is important to provide opportunities for enhanced citizen engagement.

Why?

Throughout the consultation process a unified voice emerged which clearly expressed the need for heightened partnerships between the municipality, its' citizens and local businesses to ensure future sustainability. Citizen participation is key for people in communities to voice their opinions and to be heard in decision-making processes that affect their quality of life and their experience of place.

The people who participated and expressed their views were engaged members of the community. They are citizens' who often have a shared understanding of the issues on the table and are able to draw upon their knowledge and experience to develop shared priorities.

Key Actions:

1. Develop a Communication Strategy to support:
 - Creation of opportunities for citizens to participate in decision-making activities
 - Implementation of effective communications and improved flow of information on important community issues impacting citizens
 - Continue to encourage the use of technology and provide effective, efficient ways to engage citizen participation/input/feedback (i.e. new website, online, interactive, social media) and align under communication strategy for increased impact.
2. Establish various citizens' sub-committees of Council (i.e.: Bikeways Committee, Mayor's Youth Advisory Committee, Seniors' Advisory Committee) to increase civic engagement and provide for opportunities to inform and further explore community issues and decisions
3. Improve customer service experience for citizens, business and new comers and evaluate service levels in Township buildings on a regular basis
4. Continue to develop a shared partnership with the Chamber of Commerce

Strategic Objective #4

Create a policy framework that supports affordable living for residents.

Strategy: Working in concert with regional partners to complete a needs assessment and create a policy framework to inform strategies to support engagement of youth, the independence of seniors and the health and well-being of all residents.

Why?

The changing demographics and issues related to poverty in the Township bringing with it significantly more demands on accessible, affordable and limited rental housing stock, and the youth and senior populations are the fastest growing demographics in West Lincoln.

Key Actions:

1. Develop a community services plan as a subset of the Master Recreation Plan informed through previously cited advisory councils, to respond to development and access (both transportation limitations and physical accessibility limitations) for locally offered programs and services
2. Prioritize access to publicly funded programs and services that support health, wellness and independent living and ensure they are financially sustainable. This will support both youth engagement, aging at home and family unification preferences expressed by citizens in community consultations
3. Leverage the strong volunteer nature of the community to develop specific outreach programs to deliver life-skills training to youth and young parents and to address social isolation for seniors, primarily in the rural areas
4. Ensure availability of accessible and affordable rental housing to support appropriate shelter for residents
 - Take advantage of new limited funding* offered by the Region for duplexing (secondary suites) by adapting recently approved policies from neighbouring municipalities in order to benefit from access to the time-limited funding (*early time-sensitive opportunity)
 - Explore a grants-based model with developers to encourage private and non-profit sectors to build new affordable multi-faceted residential/commercial developments (* may be included in current downtown CIP)
 - Explore funding opportunities to offer current landlords and landowners incentives to contribute to the affordable housing stock
 - Explore partnerships with larger municipalities to leverage strategies already implemented (i.e. Hamilton's Affordable Housing Flagship – a partnership of social housing and local real estate, or Provincial Grants to conduct feasibility studies for local groups)
 - Increase familiarity with recent developments reflective of other varieties of urban models and conduct site visits
 - Accelerate uptake on the Region of Niagara's urban planning design guidelines

5. Align future development to established principles of effective community design and neighbourhood planning with a growth focus on complete community, scalable employment and recreation activities to address physical and social needs
6. Ensure new developments include designs to support demands of the new economy related to home-based business and telecommuting
7. Develop a health and social services policy framework which is informed by and in alignment with Region of Niagara Regional Growth Management Strategy, Ontario Places to Grow and Region of Niagara Strategic Plan
 - Strengthen relationships with local physicians to engage and discuss opportunities to expand after-hours medical services to the community (including weekends, evenings)
 - Explore multi public-partner opportunities for the co-development and delivery of social services and public health programs
 - Participate in Regional Age-Friendly Community Strategy to prepare for the burgeoning aging population and to inform the redevelopment of the urban core in Smithville
 - Support the well being of youth through the provisions of readily accessible recreational activities for physical and social engagement to support their overall health and wellbeing for they too are at risk of isolation
 - Increase access to licensed day care to support young families

Economic Prosperity & Tourism

“Creating a vibrant, prosperous and desirable community.”

Strategic Objective #1

Make Economic Development & Tourism a Key Priority.

Strategy: Foster entrepreneurship by creating a business-friendly community that supports job creation, innovation and local tourism opportunities.

Why?

There is significant agreement among business leaders, Council, staff, and residents that economic development is a critical issue for the Township. Past practices have resulted in a need for increased due diligence on the part of Administration which in turn has led to somewhat strained relationships between the business community members and the Township representatives. This has been impacted further by a reported lack of communications and resources to actively pursue economic development and tourism-related initiatives.

Key Actions:

1. Hire an Economic Development and Tourism Officer to work with the Planning Department to create a policy that strikes a balance between commercial and residential assessment that manages the pace of growth.
2. Restore and establish positive relations between Chamber of Commerce (local business community), Council and staff
3. Develop an economic development strategy that addresses business retention and attraction (environmental and agricultural-related commercial and industrial businesses which best aligns with existing business and labour-force skills)
4. Develop a tourism strategy that explores opportunities to promote special events (i.e. community festivals, local culture and heritage)
5. Explore emerging retail trends to meet the needs of transportation-challenged residents – specifically youth, seniors
6. Focus on investment readiness (integrate economic development/tourism landing page from the Township’s home page)

7. Promote local attributes of community to encourage tourism and visitors to the community (i.e. boat launch, cycling, walking, hiking trails, heritage, arts and culture)
8. Work with Region and private sector service partners to implement 100% high speed Internet coverage throughout the Township
9. Strengthen alliances and partnerships with Region and neighbouring communities to further develop and expand investment marketing initiatives in the Greater Golden Horseshoe
10. Seek partnership opportunities with educational institutions and various ministries (i.e. University of Guelph, Brock University, McMaster University, Niagara College, Mohawk College, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), Ministry of the Environment) to explore research and development opportunities, and enhanced training and skills development, specifically in relation to green technology, agri-food and livestock business sectors
11. Prepare a community profile quick facts brochure to market the Township (educate citizens to know what's in their backyard)
12. Support local entrepreneurship through programs and services that promote entrepreneurial activities (i.e. less red tape and provide assistance to start-ups and existing small-to-medium-sized businesses)
13. Explore opportunities with OMAFRA and the Vineland Research Station and facilitate discussion with farmers to create awareness of the financial benefits of locally produced ethno-cultural vegetables and help farmers to learn how to grow them

Strategic Objective #2

Communicate Long Term Financial Strategies and Goals to support Sustainability

Strategy: Ensure there is a long-term financial plan in place for the community that aligns investment strategies for various economic development, heritage, tourism and culture initiatives.

Why?

Given its large geographical land base, the Township of West Lincoln requires both sound financial planning and strategic direction in order for Council and the Administration to fully develop its investment priorities and its capacity to respond to those priorities.

Key Actions:

1. Undertake a community consultation to establish clear communications and expectations regarding capital repairs or expansions for community assets (i.e. community halls and libraries located in various hamlets)
2. Provide clear communications and consult with the citizens on public investment priorities and projects
3. Ensure that community infrastructure, servicing plans and the growth management strategy are strategically aligned with a long-range financial plan
4. Ensure ratepayers have clear and concise information on the financial capacities of the Township and investment of community infrastructure projects, especially as future growth will be primarily in Smithville
5. Explore heightened business attraction strategies which would result in new business to the community

Strategic Objective #3

Increase local employment opportunities to support a live-work-play community.

Strategy: Actively promote local employment opportunities and provide support for expansion of existing business in the Township of West Lincoln.

Why?

As identified in the Growth Management Strategy dated September 2011, the majority of citizens are commuting outside of the community for job opportunities. It is important for the Township to explore and encourage the creation of job opportunities for its citizens.

Key Actions:

1. Attract entrepreneurs and help small-to-medium-sized businesses grow
2. Work with community partners including the Chamber of Commerce, to provide tools and training to support entrepreneurship and small business start ups
3. Work with the Chamber of Commerce to strengthen the downtown area
4. Engage youth and provide opportunities that spark creativity and innovation

5. Partner with Ministry of Economic Development and Trade and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to explore potential educational and learning “how-to” seminars
6. Support home-based business start-ups to foster opportunities within community
7. Participate in local awards celebrations that recognize the importance of local business in the community
8. Consider and develop opportunities to explore the green and clean technology

Strategic Objective #4

Commit to expansion, education and research in the livestock and agricultural business sectors.

Strategy: Explore ways to ensure that agriculture (livestock, cash crops, etc) is at the centre of economic focus for the Township.

Why?

Ontario is considered to be a leader in agricultural innovation, and agri-food is the province’s largest sector. It is a \$33-billion-dollar industry and employs over 700,000 people. Further, the Ontario poultry market remains a competitive and profitable sector. The Township’s heritage is largely linked to poultry and agricultural farming and requires ongoing community investments in order to expand.

Key Actions:

1. Keep and enhance farmers’ market in the downtown core through revitalization process
2. Promote a marketing campaign for citizens and tourists with a focus on safe food, buying local and farm-fresh products
3. Support tourism attractions (i.e. festivals, events, arts and cultural activities)
4. Partner with University of Guelph, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to explore educational programs and services through enhanced research and development opportunities
5. Leverage the emerging epicure retail industry to align with and promote locally grown and produced foods

6. Investigate and participate in the bio-economy in which there is demand for renewable energy sources and the transformation of agricultural biomass
7. Work with livestock farmers to explore green energy alternatives
8. Provide support to local farmers and processors to improve productivity and competitiveness

Managed Growth & Protecting Natural Assets

Strategic Objective #1:

Control and monitor growth in accordance with Official Plan and Growth Management Strategy

Strategy: Working with the Region of Niagara, other government planning bodies, and developers create a long-term growth strategy which supports the essence of the small rural community of West Lincoln.

Why?

It is imperative that the Township continues to approach future planning from a platform of transparency; this would be supported by proactive communication of zoning provisions, amendments and over-arching goals to the residents and developers alike to be developed as part of the overall Communication Strategy referenced previously.

Citizens acknowledge the growth that has recently taken place in West Lincoln as being rapid, and there is tension arising from the past experiences of entrepreneurial driven development and today's more regulated and risk aware climate. Previous inconsistencies related to lot sizes, random zoning adjustments, and amendments to accommodate one-off builds have created a perception of a reactive planning process, which the current administration is moving away from; such efforts need to be accelerated in the face of further growth.

Key Actions:

1. Develop and bring forward recommendations to implement stewardship and educational programs with landowners and business to support land preservation and protection of natural assets
2. Continue to support the efforts of conservation authorities in the regeneration of natural and designated environmental protected assets (i.e. creeks, woodlots, and wetlands etc.)
3. Develop a Capital Plan to ensure infrastructure capacity (waste management, roads, etc.) will have required capacity and resources to maintain existing service demand as well as future service capacity demands
4. Growth tends to follow transportation corridors and therefore all future infrastructure planning must take into account future proposed transportation developments

Strategic Objective #2

Develop access to natural assets (trails, forests, rivers, creeks, wetlands), to allow enjoyment while maintaining and protecting their delicate environmental balance.

Strategy: In addition to the trails master plan currently in development, a master plan tied in to a tourism strategy should be developed to increased protection through controlled access to the many natural assets within the Township. Regular maintenance of trails for walking, cycling, and recreational vehicle use will respond to the citizens' desire for outdoor recreational activities, increase health and wellness and also provide designated locations for such activities thereby reducing the current practice of accessing private properties for off-road activities.

Why?

Covering the largest geographic area in the Niagara Peninsula, West Lincoln is home to a multitude of natural assets including several creeks, rivers, wetlands, and forests. This is coupled with vast expanses of fields and farms. As partners in stewarding these natural assets on behalf of the residents, the Township needs to be proactive in ensuring bylaws support controlled access which both serves to protect these assets and allows for regular enjoyment by residents and visitors alike.

Key Actions:

1. Expand transportation choices with a focus on active transportation,(i.e. walking, cycling, jogging, canoeing)
2. Continue to protect natural assets and rural lands in relation to Official Plan and Growth Management Study
3. Optimize new and existing infrastructure investments that would capitalize on attracting tourists/visitors to the area (i.e. Wellandport boat launch)
4. Explore partnerships for collaborative initiatives in eco-environmental educational programs
5. Manage and protect environmental/natural eco-heritage systems (i.e. Twenty Mile Creek, Welland River)
6. Initiate a transit master plan to include a road network, trails, cycling and sidewalk systems to facilitate movement of both vehicular and pedestrian traffic for the benefit of increased leisure activities

7. Continue to improve air and water quality
8. Shade LeisurePlex with trees

Strategic Objective #3

Facilitate effective community consultations and communications to improve the co-existence of green energy technologies and farming industries.

Strategy: The Township will work towards helping the community better understand the specifics of farm-related green energy initiatives and the co-existence of technological advancements and community benefits.

Why?

Past and current experience (waste management industries, industrial wind turbines) within the Township calls for a continued transparency and forthright civic discussion regarding jurisdiction, costs, benefits, and ultimately alignment with strategic priorities as they relate to future green energy initiatives and industries. Concerns related to issues of possible adverse affects on the collective health of people and livestock need to be addressed by responses from Public Health authorities facilitated through the Communication Strategy above.

Key Actions:

1. Council to provide a transparent accounting of the benefits and costs to the Township directly related to prospective green energy initiatives being introduced
2. Engage with Regional Public Health officials and the Ministry of Health to provide access to independent information for residents related to concerns associated with the “green energy sector” emerging technology
3. Liaise with other rural communities currently housing green energy related products and obtain post-implementation benefits, costs and other implications for the Township, residents and the business community
4. Establish relationships with post-secondary research institutions to facilitate access to research and innovation funding to support local agriculture in greening their farms and businesses. This is expected to bring the added benefit of reducing energy consumption costs thereby increasing revenues and sustainability

Note:

At time of writing this report, the matter of industrial wind turbines (IWTs) remains a provincial jurisdiction with the responsibility of Township representatives to ensure that expressed opinions by all parties related to IWTs are brought forth to provincial counterparts.

As with any controversial issue in a community, there are many perspectives and opinions, and it remains the responsibility of Council to provide stewardship for the best interests of the Township as whole.

Strategic Objective #4

Increase responsiveness of development approvals process.

Strategy: Streamline the current development approval process to reduce cycle times from planning to construction by maintaining current best practices while responding to the entrepreneurial nature of local developers and ensuring the best interests of the Township (taxpayers) is maintained through effective risk management practices and policies.

Why?

Many local developers are not exclusive to West Lincoln and therefore work with a variety of towns and communities. This provides a unique perspective of being able to provide local planning officials with direct insight into alternate practices that not only serve the developers but the Township as well in terms of economic development and new revenue.

Key Actions:

1. Streamline economic development/planning/building processes and procedures to make it easier for business to locate here
2. Work with developers to ensure current development and potential development opportunities move forward in a timely fashion
3. Working with local and new developers, establish clear guidelines for development to help grow the community and therefore the tax base, and outline characteristics to be incorporated in new builds to support the overall characteristics of the Township and its heritage
4. Encourage the exchange of ideas and provide education on farm-based business in order to enhance economic development opportunities
5. Explore opportunities to implement initiatives that continue to promote farm-based business opportunities with Region and neighbouring municipalities

6. Effectively facilitate discussions with stakeholders and provincial authorities that represent the voice of the community

**Strategic Objective #5:
Improve supports for rural infrastructure.**

Strategy: Respond to the importance of a key economic driver within the Township: the agricultural sector by supporting farmers in their infrastructure needs.

Why?

Community consultations and input through surveying suggests strong support for minimal changes to the rural communities and the hamlets within West Lincoln. A key priority emerged regarding the importance of proactive road and bridge maintenance and the need to consider improving the structural form of roads and shoulders to better support the nature of the traffic on these roads. Rural roads undergo heavy usage due to transportation of farm produce, livestock, supplies etc. with both truck and farm vehicles and machinery. Due to the nature of moving farm vehicles, roadside shoulders experience exceptional wear and tear and currently residents report rapid deterioration of roads and shoulders, which compromises transportation efficiency in the rural areas.

Key Actions:

1. Explore infrastructure processes and materials to improve the durability of rural roads and bridges and begin to incorporate in future renewal projects
2. Increase the vigilance required by the Township with respect to working in partnership and on behalf of farmers with the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA) to ensure consistent application of regulations, which directly impact the ability of farmers to provide appropriate drainage for their farms
3. Develop stronger partnerships with local bodies (NPCA, etc.) to advocate on behalf of local farmers
4. Work in collaboration with neighbouring municipalities to advocate for application of consistent policies and practices from these bodies to support the collective agricultural sectors
5. Facilitate the engagement of research bodies and provincial agricultural associations to help inform the development of new solutions to supporting increasing yields from clay-soil farming (i.e. Vineland Research Station and other expertise should be used to benefit West Lincoln without having to create anew)

Key Findings

Informed by our research and consultations, we provide the following key findings:

- Engage in a well-planned growth strategy with shared vision
- Invest in the Smithville downtown core
- Explore re-routing of truck traffic in Smithville
- Invest in economic development and tourism
- Provide incentives to help local business grow
- Explore the green energy and eco-economy sectors

We sincerely appreciated the candour with which residents and business community shared their perspectives on living and working in West Lincoln. This is truly a safe, caring and friendly community that treasures its heritage and its responsibility to preserve the environment. It is determined to learn from past experience and move forward in a manner that values the generations of farmers who founded and built the community.

In conclusion and because at the core of West Lincoln is a caring community, we offer that there is a driving need for the community as a whole, led by the municipal leadership of Council and Administration to proactively develop strategies to address the needs of its most vulnerable citizens. Young unemployed single parents, unemployed single adults and isolated seniors and youth will be best served by a concerted effort to increase the economic prosperity and to increase access to affordable housing, food, recreation, and health and social services.

Common Themes

The Township of West Lincoln enjoys a unique harmony of small town, rural and natural-like setting while being in close proximity to major urban centres. And while the citizens must prepare for growth, population expansion, changing demographics and immigration patterns and increased demands on land uses, the community at large is not ready to embrace rapid change. The Township must:

- Preserve the rural areas (implications for land use planning, servicing, transportation and economic development).
- Reconfigure and create a proper core in the Township urban centre of Smithville by: creating a truck bypass, adding a planned gathering space for family activity, leisure and entertainment gathering and small retail attraction. (*Land-use planning, potential community revitalization/improvement plan, development of architectural controls, examination of transportation routes, traffic management, community/recreational programming*).
- Manage residential growth to preserve the small-town nature of the community. (*Planned residential growth - with priority being placed on intensification within the urban area for a complete community*).
- Develop the natural setting, leveraging rivers and creeks with walking/cycling trails both within the urban core and in the rural areas. (*Establish a trails system and recreational master plan using the attributes noted*).
- *Continue to foster, support and strengthen the agriculture industry as the primary economic driver of the Township*
- Develop, expand, support improved access to recreation and leisure primarily for children, youth and seniors – expand PoultryFest and continue involvement of local business support. (*Recreational master plan consideration to address future recreational infrastructure needs - examine economic benefits respecting festival - tourism attraction potential*).
- Support environmentally responsible industrial and commercial business development that offer primary opportunities to add revenue to the local tax base and support local employment, including employment for youth. (Economic development and tourism strategies required to examine new sector-specific business opportunities as well as desired tourism opportunities.)
- Support and encourage gathering places in rural areas through enhanced partnerships with the Region of Niagara and private sector, providing new activities for seniors,

youth, and families. Further explore and improve high speed Internet access for rural residents. (Partnerships to expand service offerings and programs will be essential and can be expanded to improve access for all citizens and businesses.)

- Exploit local gathering places in natural areas and venues such as; LeisurePlex, local libraries, community halls, Wellandport boat launch and park, as priority for infrastructure enhancements and future development projects. (Place priority on the maintenance and enhancement of existing assets).
- Orient and heighten public awareness of services offered by the Township to support economic development drivers such as: catering to business needs, engaging new and existing business and attracting and promoting new business opportunities. (Examine opportunities for service enhancements through partnerships and technology).

Mapping the Plan

Quality of Life

- Create a safe, vibrant, pedestrian-friendly core
- Develop a new brand and communications strategy
- Increase civic engagement and community involvement
- Create a policy framework that supports affordable living for residents

Economic Prosperity and Tourism

- Make Economic Development & Tourism a Key Priority
- Communicate Long Term Financial Strategies and Goals to support Sustainability
- Increase local employment opportunities to support live-work-play strategies
- Commit to expansion, education and research in the livestock and agricultural business sectors.

Managed Growth & Protecting Natural Assets

- Control and monitor growth
- Develop access to natural assets and protect delicate environmental balance
- Facilitate communication to Improve the co-existence of green energy technologies and farming industries.
- Increase responsiveness of development approvals process.
- Improve supports for rural infrastructure.