



TOWNSHIP OF WEST LINCOLN STRATEGIC PLANNING

KEY STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

April 11, 2023

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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Township of West Lincoln is one of the twelve lower tier municipalities in the Niagara Region of Ontario, Canada. West Lincoln is Niagara's largest municipality by land area (387.02 square kilometers) and is comprised of many rural communities such as the hamlets of St. Ann's, Silverdale, Bismark, Caistorville, Fulton, Grassie and Wellandport, among others. Smithville is the largest urban centre in the Township and serves as the principal area for growth in the industrial, commercial and residential sectors.

Characterized by a number of key attributes including prime farmlands, natural heritage areas, and principal residential and business areas, West Lincoln is a progressive municipality known for its strong community, agriculture and nature.

The current population of West Lincoln is 15,454¹, and is rapidly growing. According to growth projections, the Township is expected to see a considerable increase in population to 38,370 residents by the year 2051. In particular, Smithville will see the most significant population increase, which is forecasted to grow more than four times its current population in the next 30 years². (See Appendix A for a breakdown of population growth, households and employment forecasts for the Township of West Lincoln and Smithville 2016-2051).

In addition to significant population growth, West Lincoln is forecasted to see considerable change in its demographics in the coming years. Population trends indicate that the number of older adults living in the

The Township of West Lincoln is forecasted to see considerable growth, change, and an increase in diversity in the coming years. This will require thoughtful and purposeful strategic planning to ensure that it continues to be a thriving place to live, work and play.

¹ Based on population in 2021. Source: West Lincoln webpage: <https://www.westlincoln.ca/en/living-here/about-west-lincoln.aspx>

² Township of West Lincoln Master Community Plan (Smithville), 2022

Township is increasing. Simultaneously, the Township is experiencing a large influx of new, younger, diverse residents moving into the area – a trend that is expected to continue exponentially in the future, especially as the Federal Government continues to prioritize immigration to Canada.

In total, West Lincoln is home to 5,295 households, with a mix of urban and rural houses. The majority of the Township’s residents own their own home, with a homeownership rate of 89.9%, compared to the Ontario average of 68.4%³. The median after-tax income of households in West Lincoln is \$92,000, considerably higher than the Ontario average of \$70,100⁴.

The employment industry of West Lincoln is varied, with a mix of trades, transport, sales and service, manufacturing, construction, retail, and management operations. Agriculture is one of the most important industries and employers in West Lincoln, with 391 farms operating in the Township in 2016⁵.

As a municipality, West Lincoln’s past and current Councils have been proactively monitoring and carefully responding to these trends to position the Township for manageable, incremental, and strategic growth that is viable and that also preserves the Township’s unique charm and natural and agricultural assets.

STRATEGIC PLANNING OVERVIEW

Context

In 2019, the Township of West Lincoln adopted a 10-year corporate strategic plan to guide its work through to 2029. The plan is centred around 6 key priority areas as follows:

1. Strong Transportation Connections
2. Support for Business and Employment Opportunities for Residents
3. Strategic, Responsible Growth
4. Local Attractions
5. Community Health and Safety
6. Efficient, Fiscally Responsible Operations

³ Source: i) West Lincoln data – West Lincoln webpage: <https://www.westlincoln.ca/en/build-and-invest/community-profile.aspx>. ii) Ontario data – statistics Canada: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220921/mc-b001-eng.htm>

⁴ Source: Based on 2020 data, Statistics Canada *Median after-tax income, Canada and Provinces, 2016-2020* <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220323/t002a-eng.htm>

⁵ Source: <https://www.westlincoln.ca/en/build-and-invest/community-profile.aspx>

Using the 6 priority areas as a framework, the 10-year plan was bundled into short, medium, and long-term initiatives in a 3-year planning cycle, with the first planning cycle running from 2019-2022. During this time, the Township of West Lincoln accomplished and surpassed all of the 25 goals set out and approved by Council.

Currently, West Lincoln is embarking on a strategic planning process that will guide its operations for the next planning cycle, which will run from 2023-2026. The strategic planning process will include an assessment of achievements and lessons learned, a review and revision of current priorities, as needed, the identification of new priorities given the Township's evolving context, and the establishment of concrete goals and deliverables for the next 4 years.

The new strategic plan (2023-2026) will be informed by consultation with diverse stakeholders to garner strategic information, advice, and feedback related to the Township's future directions, including:

- A review of relevant Township demographics, data and trends, as well as relevant reports and plans
- Compilation of feedback from interviews with 7 members of West Lincoln's Council (including the Mayor) and 7 members of West Lincoln's senior management team
- Interviews with 16 individuals identified as key community stakeholders and leaders well poised to provide input
- Community engagement through a public survey that has been disseminated widely
- Council and senior management team participation in two planning sessions in April 2023, to undertake a visioning refresh process (tied to the 10-year plan) and to identify Council's focus regarding key initiatives and outcomes for the coming term

The *West Lincoln 2023-2026 Corporate Plan* is set to be completed by the end of June 2023, and will be used to guide year-to-year business planning for the next 4 years.

Planning Process: Stakeholder Consultation

The purpose of this document is to summarize feedback gathered from the interviews with members of the Township of West Lincoln's Council and senior management team, as well as key community stakeholders as it relates to the development of the *West Lincoln 2023-2026 Corporate Plan*. Feedback from the public survey has been compiled in a separate report through West Lincoln's communications department.

Please see Appendix B for a list of Councillors, senior management staff, and key stakeholders who were consulted, and Appendix C for the interview questions that guided the discussions.

The consultation feedback within this document is structured as follows:

1. A consolidated SWOT, which presents **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats**
2. A summary of key strategic issues, trends and priorities that need to be addressed as part of the planning process
3. Final advice and recommendations with respect to what stakeholders feel is important regarding the planning process and the creation of a focused and impactful strategic planning document for the Township of West Lincoln

The feedback is at times divergent and reflects different perspectives, experiences, and perceptions of the various stakeholders who were interviewed. The varied perspectives highlight the different relationships stakeholders have with the Township of West Lincoln and reflect the complexity of the work that will need to be considered throughout the planning process.

Additionally, while some recommendations secured through the consultation fall outside of the Township's mandate and scope of work, they have been included because the Township has the potential to act as a catalyst, influencer, and partner in instigating great outcomes for the community in those areas identified.

SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

STRENGTHS

West Lincoln is geographically well-positioned and rich in assets

- West Lincoln is a beautiful place to live. It encompasses prime agricultural land, provides a natural habitat, and is well situated with proximity to St. Catharines, Grimsby, Lincoln, Pelham, and Hamilton. It is also nestled up to Niagara's wine region and rich fruit belt.
- The Township has a mix of rural land, pockets of small communities or hamlets, and a small developing urban area (i.e., Smithville) which provides residents a choice with respect to the setting they want to live in. During COVID, many large city dwellers moved to West Lincoln.
- Compared to many other municipalities in Ontario, West Lincoln's affordable housing, safe communities, and amenities such as the West Lincoln Community Centre and new arena, recreational and drop-in programs, parks, schools, and green space, etc. make it a great place to live and raise a family.

West Lincoln has a small town feel that "draws people in" with its sense of community

- West Lincoln is rich with history, character, and is home to friendly and welcoming people. As one stakeholder notes, *"...I love the town and I love the people...you can go to Tim*

Hortons and see people you know and the next thing you know there is a whole group of people chatting...some often do not know each other."

- The Township has historically benefitted from a very strong sense of community cohesion and engagement. Although this waned during COVID, there has been a recent resurgence of community cohesiveness in recent months (e.g., through well-attended events such as the Santa Claus Parade and tree lighting ceremony) with positive responses from the public and requests for more community engagement activities moving forward.
- The Township's agricultural roots are celebrated and supported by the community.
- Some community engagement takes place through the Township's municipal planning initiatives (e.g., public consultation through the urban boundary work, the Age-Friendly Advisory Committee has recently been restarted, Community Engagement work, the Budget Engagement Survey for residents, etc.).

The Township is proactively engaging in municipal planning projects and studies that focus on sustainable growth and environmental conservation

- West Lincoln is collaborating with the community through public consultation and stakeholder engagement, to proactively plan for growth that is sustainable and focused on environmental conservation. Consultation stakeholders identified a number of these initiatives, including:
 - The Smithville Master Community Plan and the related Master Plans (Transportation, Water and Waste, Subwatershed Study & Stormwater) were undertaken to form a comprehensive and coordinated planning process that will ensure Smithville will grow over the next 30 years.
 - Sustainability: West Lincoln has prioritized adaption planning for climate change, which is applied and proactively integrated into its work (e.g., identifying emerging risks that may impact residents, ecology, and environment and working to mitigate these risks, including planning for more extreme heat days and mitigating the impact on vulnerable populations, etc.).
- West Lincoln undertook a refresh of its economic development plan in 2020 with input from the public, business leaders, and regional economic development representatives to guide economic development from 2020 to 2023. The plan "*Building Capacity, Building Connections*" explores the needs of local businesses, reviews needs against resources to identify opportunities for Township support, leverages resources, funding, and program support, and identifies potential partners. Recommended directions were set and the work to implement the recommendations commenced, creating a foundation for more focused work in the area over the coming 4 years.

The Township of West Lincoln Council and employee base are key assets

- The Township's new Council is seen to be a strong leadership group and the Mayor is noted as a major asset and strength to the Township.
- The Township has strong leadership – the CAO and senior management staff are very well-regarded and recognized for their dedication and hard work.
- Municipal staff are dedicated, responsive, community-focused, nimble, and able to “wear multiple hats.” Some specific comments included:
 - As one Councillor stated, *“the planning department is doing an excellent job with its staff and capacity.”*
 - Another stakeholder mentioned that the Township's Communication *“...is amazing and the press releases are absolutely fantastic”*; and
 - The IT group has given virtual public access to all Municipal meetings; and
 - The 2019 website renewal project has allowed residents to report concerns through the webpage, resulting in easier access to information and fewer inquiries over the phone.
- Work and connectivity between the municipality's departments has increased over the past few years, resulting in an increased culture of collaboration.
- West Lincoln successfully achieved all of its goals and stated outcomes during its last strategic planning cycle and during a time of great turbulence due to COVID.
- West Lincoln has been exploring enhancing human resources, to prepare for future staffing and organizational needs as the Township incrementally grows (e.g., acquisition of a designated HR staff member, updating HR policies to meet current legislative standards, creatively addressing organizational capacity needs and efficiencies).

WEAKNESSES

West Lincoln's transportation infrastructure needs immediate attention

- Almost all consultation stakeholders identified the Township's lack of public transportation and limited transportation routes in, out, and around West Lincoln as a major weakness. Similarly, survey respondents of the *Township of West Lincoln 2023 Budget Engagement Survey* identified infrastructure repairs and replacements and road maintenance as the two areas where they would like to see tax dollars spent (See Appendix B for a full list of all respondent's data).
- Specifically, stakeholders identified the following gaps related to West Lincoln's transportation infrastructure:
 - The lack of public transportation deters businesses from moving to West Lincoln since many employees need transit to get around.

- o More high-volume roads are needed to support current and future growth and provide easy access into and out of the Township, including:
 - An escarpment crossing that provides a direct route to access the QEW, to increase accessibility to Smithville & West Lincoln;
 - A Regional Road 20 By-Pass; and
 - Upgrading of rural roads to support increased traffic (currently many are gravel or dirt and require upgrades to chip and tar to support increased traffic).
- o Development of alternative routes to ease congestion in downtown Smithville is needed, particularly as this area is seeing rapid growth, in addition to traffic calming strategies.
- o Road development/enhancement to increase access and connection between the urban and rural areas of the Township is needed (e.g., small rural roads not designed for large transport trucks, traffic in downtown Smithville due lack of alternative routes through the city).
- o Roads in industrial park require maintenance.
- o As a heavily vehicle-based community, planning for parking is and will continue to be a critical issue going forward.
- Many areas in West Lincoln lack walkability, with limited sidewalks, pedestrian crosswalks, and safety measures. For example, Industrial Road has a very high volume of pedestrians and does not have a consistent sidewalk; Regional Road 20 is traffic heavy and pedestrians are required to climb over highway railings and snow banks to reach businesses.
- Traffic calming measures and controls are needed in a number of residential neighbourhoods across the Township.

There is a lack of housing options available within the Township, particularly affordable housing, which is a major barrier to growth

- Most consultation stakeholders identified the need for affordable housing in West Lincoln, including affordable rental units and housing geared to income, as a pressing priority that requires immediate attention (currently West Lincoln only has 1 geared to income housing complex).
- The current housing stock consists mostly of single-family homes, resulting in limited choice for people who need or want other types of housing (e.g., single level floor plans, smaller homes such as condos, apartments, etc.).
- The lack of current zoning for high-rise buildings in West Lincoln needs to be addressed, particularly since high density housing has been identified as a Provincial priority (i.e., development of high-density housing). This is further complicated by the fact that West Lincoln's fire service is not legislatively prepared to address fires in high-rise buildings and will require additional investments in equipment and training.

- West Lincoln lacks housing for seniors who require additional home-based supports (e.g., Supportive Care Housing, Long Term Care housing), and residents who need this type of housing often have to move out of the Township. As a large segment of West Lincoln's population ages, the need for residential care housing will drastically increase in the coming years. Supportive care housing, the development of a long-term care home in the Township, and a dedicated Senior's Centre were identified as significant needs in the community.
- There is a need for West Lincoln to continue to advocate to the Region and Province with respect to housing affordability and housing access and to develop partnership with key external stakeholders, including developers, to help play a catalytic role in housing development.

More emphasis could be placed on economic development strategies

- In recent years, some stakeholders perceive that West Lincoln has missed opportunities to enhance its *public service infrastructure*, which would have benefitted its residents. Some consultation respondents believe that West Lincoln needs to be more politically savvy. Specifically, stakeholders noted a number of development projects in neighbouring municipalities that would have been beneficial to have in West Lincoln:
 - A new, large high school built in Grimsby, resulting in the closing of West Lincoln's only high school (Provincial grant: \$50.4 million);
 - New West Lincoln Memorial Hospital in Grimsby (Provincial funding: \$140 million); and
 - Funding to invest in hospice care for expansion to the McNally house.
- If West Lincoln wants to grow, it needs to continue to focus on creating *opportunities to attract and retain businesses and employees*. For example, stakeholders identified the following gaps:
 - West Lincoln's commercial development strategy needs to be strengthened to secure land zoned for commercial, make more productive use of existing buildings for commercial ventures, and acquire new businesses that create and increase the variety of jobs to West Lincoln;
 - West Lincoln needs a plan to create sustainable jobs that attract and retain the Township's residents. Currently, West Lincoln has a high number of its residents working from home at jobs outside of the Township compared to other municipalities (and is sometimes described as a bedroom community). Creating more local jobs that are attractive to West Lincoln's population (especially competitive wages and a variety of work opportunities) was identified as a priority by many consultation stakeholders;
 - The Township needs a plan to attract new industry. This would first require addressing the shortage of natural gas at the Industrial Park and having "shovel ready" sites approved for development for potential industrial partners;

- While nestled up to Niagara's tourism region, West Lincoln is not promoted as a tourist destination and lacks amenities that could leverage the Township's tourism industry. West Lincoln currently does not have any hotels or bed and breakfasts, which hinders the Township's ability to attract people to the Township to visit. There are currently no incentives for this type of industry to invest in West Lincoln; and
- With respect to the availability of employment lands, the recent Municipal Comprehensive Review has added employment lands to the Township for future employment growth, including approximately 60 hectares (149 acres) of urban employment lands (gross) and 36 hectares (89 acres) of rural employment lands (gross) in the Hamlet of Fulton. The need to commute should be offset by business growth in the Township, which will help towards achieving a complete community.
- More attention is needed with respect to asset management activities to ensure the Township has a sustainable plan for infrastructure and service, to meet the current and future needs of West Lincoln. For example, the Public Works Yard needs updating, Wellandport and Abingdon Halls need updating, etc.
- Tax base enhancements could help generate more funding for projects, and could be accomplished through strategies that attract and retain industrial and commercial business to the area.

More services and supports for residents are needed

- The Township is currently lacking retail stores and services, requiring residents to go outside of the Township (e.g., Grimsby or Lincoln) to shop due to the lack of options (e.g., West Lincoln currently only has 1 grocery store, the West Lincoln Farmers' Market in Smithville). There is a desire to see the Township proactively create business development strategies to support the growth of these services.
- West Lincoln is experiencing a drastic shortage of childcare services, with very few licensed daycares in the municipality. Although Council has begun to address this issue by advocating to the provincial and federal governments, a lack of staff for childcare centres, a lack of space for childcare facilities, and the rapid growth and influx of young families in the area is driving a need for increased childcare services at a rate that cannot be met.
- There is a shortage of physicians for the current residents of West Lincoln, in the Township and across Niagara. Currently, the Township's one medical office is not sufficient to meet the needs of the population, making it hard to find care and forcing residents to go out of the Township to find a family doctor or seek care from Emergency Departments or Urgent Care.
- There is a lack of social service supports in the Township (e.g., mental health, housing shelters, youth services, charitable organizations, etc.), and plans and resources to focus on these services in the future are limited.

- There is a need for more Emergency Medical and Police Services to support the growth in West Lincoln, which will need to be budgeted for (e.g., the current replacement of the second fire hall will require more staff and volunteer firefighters, growth in the Township will require more police officers and paramedics, as well as administration and support staff for these services). Some stakeholders encourage the Township to play an increased advocacy role in these areas.
- There is a need for enhancement of the municipal service infrastructure to support growth; this includes Transportation, Trails, Parks, Water, Wastewater, and Storm Water Management, and recycling pick-up in industrial areas, which currently is not a service provided by the Township.
- There is a desire for more recreation activities that are accessible for residents *of all ages* (e.g., Healthy, Safe, and Strong program at WLCC is full, which demonstrates a need for these types of activities; families currently leave West Lincoln for specialized children's recreation programs and activities, as they are not offered in the Township).

Recent events caused strong division within West Lincoln and severed its strong community bonds

- During the last term of office, a number of public incidences occurred that created contention and division within Council and the community (divergent perspectives related to COVID-19 vaccinations and public health responses as well as the Freedom Fighters movement). While this has been resolved as a result of the new Mayor's leadership, stakeholders note that continued work needs to be done, *"to heal rifts."*
- In addition to challenges faced by Council and senior management related to the above noted contention, the community of West Lincoln also became divided by COVID, resulting in a division between residents who were pro-vaccination and those who were anti-vaccination. There has also historically been contention in the community related to PCBs (Polychlorinated Biphenyls), Ontario Waster Management Corporation Facility, and wind turbines. These incidents have acted over time to sever the strong community bond and cohesiveness in West Lincoln. There is a strong need for purposeful work to be done to rebuild community relationships in West Lincoln and rebuild the Township's image. Many respondents wish to see the Township do more recreational and community engagement activities to bring the community together.

West Lincoln's capacity is stretched

- West Lincoln's current staffing complement is not adequate to keep up with the demand for services, which impacts the Township's ability to work proactively. As one senior manager commented, *"...[we] are so busy, we do not have the staff resources to work proactively on grants and innovative opportunities. There is not enough time and resources for 'forward*

thinking’.” Another community stakeholder mentioned that the “...*lack of City staffing has caused delays.*”

- With current incremental pressures from Bill 109 and Bill 23, we are competing with much larger municipalities for the same planning staff.
- West Lincoln could benefit even more from improved software systems for mapping applications, data management, and electronic records management, which would increase staff efficacy and streamline processes.
- West Lincoln is not seen as a competitive employer compared to other municipalities because it cannot offer competitive wages, which makes recruiting and retaining staff a significant challenge.

Some operational processes could be improved within the Township of West Lincoln to make it more responsive to the community

- Perceived long wait times, complicated regulations, and “red tape” at the Township related to land development approval, zoning changes, building and other permits, as well as Municipal processing shortfalls impede businesses’ development and will hinder the Township’s ability to attract developers, investors, and businesses to the area.
- The Township is lacking a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion strategy and sensitivity training for its Council and senior management team. This is something that should also eventually be integrated into all the work done by the Township of West Lincoln.
- Better communication between some Municipal departments could improve processes (e.g., Planning Department and Engineers could be working more closely together).
- West Lincoln could benefit from *more regularly* gathering feedback, insight, and perspective from its key stakeholders (e.g., businesses, community organizations, residents, etc.) on an ongoing basis to identify and address community issues and needs as they arise.
- More comprehensive data collection and analysis is needed, to better understand West Lincoln’s current and future needs and make data informed decisions (e.g., statistics, demographic data, collection of data through community engagement activities such as the Township of West Lincoln 2023 Budget Engagement Survey, a commercial gaps analysis, etc.).

OPPORTUNITIES

There is opportunity for West Lincoln to increase and enhance its community spaces and places

- There is opportunity for significant improvements to be made to the Township’s downtown spaces in various ways (increased walkability, creation of more benches and family friendly spaces or squares, accessible walking and biking paths, coffee shops/meeting places, etc.).

As one Councillor noted, “...we don’t need to be building just homes, we need to be building a community.” Another stated, “...we need complete communities.”

- There is great opportunity for West Lincoln to create one or a number of community “hubs,” which could offer integrated services and opportunities for diverse residents of all ages to come together. Community hubs could also help to increase community cohesiveness and engagement. This could be developed in existing buildings, or West Lincoln could investigate the development of a multi-use centre that could also be used as a cultural centre for community events, youth activities, festivals, etc. Community “hub” offerings could include:
 - Increased recreation activities (for children, adults, seniors, families, etc.);
 - Opportunities for volunteerism in the community;
 - Cultural events;
 - Community gathering spaces for events, social service provision, programs, etc.;
 - Employment services;
 - Childcare; and
 - Health services.
- West Lincoln has a number of existing public spaces that could be enhanced to attract a larger segment of the community, such as:
 - Wellandport Park,
 - Development of leash-free dog parks in existing green spaces, and
 - Improved access to library spaces (increase in library hours at the 3 libraries).
- There is opportunity for West Lincoln to increase its green space (particularly in Smithville) through watershed planning, as well as a continuation of current efforts, such as planting trees on Township-owned properties (in collaboration with Land Care Niagara) and conservation and naturalization of lagoons.
- West Lincoln could expand its recreation offerings through innovative use of space (e.g., outdoor workout spaces, greater use of the libraries and other community centres).
- Based on the aging demographics and current demand for seniors programming, West Lincoln could explore promoting the development of a senior’s centre in partnership with others.
- West Lincoln could promote the expansion of the Farmers’ Market from Smithville into other areas, such as Wellandport or Caistor.
- West Lincoln has a number of Township assets (e.g., community halls, vacant land), which should be closely reviewed to see whether or not they are surplus to the Township’s needs or should be repurposed.

West Lincoln could build community cohesion through various engagement strategies

- Consultation stakeholders identified the following opportunities for West Lincoln to improve communications, community engagement, and rebuild community cohesion:
 - Developing targeted outreach strategies to connect with residents who may not be connected to the community (e.g., residents who work from home, rural residents, new residents, youth, seniors, etc.);
 - Using a variety of general public engagement/communication strategies to keep residents up-to-date on current events (e.g., exploring current and new social media avenues; leveraging opportunities within the community centre; utilizing hubs in the Township (like hardware stores) to relay information; leveraging municipal services available online, posting information on televisions at doctor's office, etc.);
 - Hosting more community events to promote the Township, increase morale, and promote a renewed sense of community (similar to Poultry Fest, Santa Claus Parade, etc.), including activities that highlight and celebrate West Lincoln's diversity; and
 - Increasing/enhancing the number and variety of community-based programs offered through the Township (e.g., Healthy, Safe, and Strong Program for older adults).
- West Lincoln needs to find innovative opportunities to bridge the residents who have lived in West Lincoln for a long time and residents who are new to West Lincoln, to create community cohesion and engagement. Similarly, strategies to bridge the urban and rural divide within the Township need to be explored.

West Lincoln can leverage its unique assets to bring people to the Township

- West Lincoln is a unique Township with a variety of offerings and niches that could be leveraged and promoted as part of a West Lincoln Tourism strategy as a destination for visitors, such as:
 - Leveraging the Township's agricultural heritage as a point of interest for visitors, including promotion of the Farmers' Market, promotion of local farm produce/activities at farms, etc.;
 - Enhancement of downtown areas to attract tourists (e.g., creating a walkable downtown area that attracts commercial ventures, including coffee shops, bakeries, restaurants, boutiques, and recreational activities for visitors); and
 - The Region could increase the Township's visibility to visitors driving nearby, by promoting destinations/attractions on highway signs.
- West Lincoln's proximity to wine country could be used to bring visitors into the area, as one stakeholder stated, *"...we need to make West Lincoln a destination! Not just somewhere people come when they get lost on their way to Niagara Falls."*

West Lincoln can strengthen its community focused planning approach by more deeply engaging a wider range of stakeholders in the community and incrementally readying itself for development and growth

- West Lincoln could engage in more inclusive, thoughtful planning processes, to more deeply understand the current and future needs of West Lincoln, such as:
 - Frequent consultation with businesses and industry, to gain perspective on how the Township can better work with and meet the needs of businesses (e.g., there has not been enough natural gas for the industrial park for the last 6 years; however, this issue was not brought to the attention of the Township until recently);
 - Continuous engagement with farmers, to understanding their changing needs and how they can best be supported by the Township;
 - Working with special interest people and groups (e.g., Age Friendly Advisory Committee, Mayor's Youth Advisory Committee, Heritage Committee, etc.); and
 - Public engagement activities and accessible platforms, to allow for ongoing resident feedback.
- West Lincoln could consult and collaborate with various planning professionals (e.g., experts on climate change, economic sustainability, sustainable infrastructure growth, etc.) from within the Township and Region, as well as through collaboration with other subject matter experts, to help guide and strengthen its community planning strategies.
- West Lincoln can build on the economic development work achieved through the implementation of the 3-year 2020 *"Building Capacity, Building Connections"* Plan. This will require reviewing, updating and refreshing recommendations in the plan, to leverage new opportunities related to:
 - Establishing programs and activities to encourage business retention, expansion, and attraction in a range of industry sectors and business sizes;
 - Developing and managing the infrastructure required to attract and retain a broad range of investments;
 - Leading community development initiatives that create a supportive environment for resident and business attraction and retention efforts;
 - Increasing awareness and positive perception of West Lincoln as a quality place to live;
 - Leveraging community resources and regional programs to enhance economic development efforts; and
 - Leveraging the Twenty Mile Creek for Community and visitor opportunities.

West Lincoln could increase its capacity through strategic partnerships and collaborations

- Consultation stakeholders identified a number of strategic partnerships and collaborations that West Lincoln could explore as a way to increase its capacity, create efficiencies, and deepen its impact through:

Municipal Partnerships

- West Lincoln could identify and leverage existing partnerships and engage in joint strategies with surrounding municipalities. Specifically, stakeholders identified Lincoln, Niagara Region, Welland, St. Catharines, and Grimsby as potential partners to:
 - Strategically plan large-scale, long-term infrastructure growth projects (e.g., sewer, water, transit). For example, there is opportunity for West Lincoln to take a leadership role in advocating for the development of a one-tier water/wastewater system for the area (i.e., to make water and wastewater a utility at the regional level); and
 - Work with developers for mutual benefit. This will provide opportunity for resource sharing and cost savings, and may attract developers who do not want to be working with a large number of small municipalities.
- There is opportunity to capitalize on and expand existing collaborations with West Niagara, to create service and cost efficiencies and to share resources and solutions (e.g., joint work that is currently taking place with libraries and the fire department).

Other Partnerships

- West Lincoln needs to continue to work collaboratively with the Provincial and Federal governments (e.g., to advocate for increased provincial/federal funding, to leverage cost sharing opportunities with the government for capital asset projects such as road repairs and upgrades rather than using debenture funds, etc.) This will require work within the Township, to foster more influential relationships at the provincial and federal levels of government and strong political leadership at the Township level.
- West Lincoln should continue to leverage synergies between different departments within the Township (rather than working in silos) to increase efficiencies. While staff note that collaboration is strong between departments, it can also be improved.
- There is opportunity to explore potential partnership between the Township of West Lincoln and its businesses, industries, not-for-profit sector, etc., to increase efficiencies, create incentives, and achieve mutual benefit. Examples of potential partners identified by stakeholders included: the Agricultural Society, Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Agriculture, and local farmers.
- One stakeholder advocates for the Township to work with farmers to support farmland drainage strategies, to maximize farmland in the area (despite the fact that

is not in the Township's mandate), and points to efforts undertaken in the Township of Wainfleet as a best practice.

There is opportunity for West Lincoln to be innovative with its response to emerging needs and concerns in the Township

- West Lincoln could explore innovative housing ventures:
 - A number of stakeholders believe the Township could be more creative in its development strategies (e.g., proactively pursue multi-use buildings/sites/high-rise structures⁶, engage in strategies to diversify the housing stock, multi-use zoning, etc.); and
 - One key community stakeholder suggested the development of “employment housing”: a partnership between the Township and large businesses to provide subsidised, affordable housing options for their employees who cannot afford housing in the area.
- The Township could engage in ongoing strategies and incentives to attract businesses to the area and create jobs (e.g., invest in business development strategies to create space and provide support for start-up businesses, support the expansion and diversification of agriculture, provide support for innovation initiatives [an Innovation Park]). Elements of this work would be best informed by a commercial gaps analysis of the Township.
- There is great opportunity for West Lincoln to inventory its current assets and determine how they can best be utilized, for example:
 - Repurposing and revitalizing developed land. This could be part of a downtown revitalization plan that aims to bring businesses and consumers back into the downtown; and
 - Enhancing current spaces for multiple purposes (e.g., conversion of old fire hall to multi-use building, social services, community groups, day care etc.).
- The Township could proactively invest in youth priorities to (e.g., action plan for the attraction, engagement, and retention of youth, including employment opportunities).
- The Township could work with the agricultural community to support drainage strategies, to maximize farmland and to identify and promote agricultural opportunities in the area.
- Agricultural tourism and tourism generally.
- Encourage and support innovation, value added diversification, new agricultural venture, hemp, hops, etc.

⁶ Should the Township pursue higher density housing strategies, it will need to invest in its fire services through the purchase of appropriate vehicle(s) and equipment to support high-rise fires as well as training for fire fighters. Additionally, more staffing will be required to ensure fire services has the capacity needed to respond to community need.

THREATS

Limited funding and budget restraints will pose challenges for West Lincoln

- The rapid influx of people moving into West Lincoln from other locations, due to current affordability of housing, is putting pressure on the Township to provide the range of services that those from larger cities expect (e.g., recreation, parks, programs, services).
- Significant growth is quickly changing the Township, which will require West Lincoln to be proactive in responding to the diversity of future needs, including budgeting for the future.
- Overall, reductions in government funding and the downloading from the federal and provincial government to municipalities often result in West Lincoln having fewer resources to provide the same or increased level of services to its residents. Council and senior management will need to be strategic in managing its limited resources. This will require proactive budget planning, to balance the need for financial investments while being accountable to the taxpayers and respecting budget limitations.
- Development requires up-front fees for engineering and planning (i.e., from Planning and Public Works budgets), which will require West Lincoln to be well prepared with a plan to proactively manage its budget.
- Bill 23⁷ makes fundamental changes to the land use planning system in Ontario. Municipalities are no longer eligible to receive development charges (historically paid by builders), to help cover the cost of municipal infrastructure to support affordable and subsidized housing. This will result in a significant budget shortfall, and will impact West Lincoln's affordable housing related project planning.

Significant growth in West Lincoln may have unintended negative outcomes

- Should West Lincoln embrace rapid growth, this may result in the Township losing its “small town” feel and charm, heritage, and may result in a loss of identity, community, connectedness, and uniqueness. As one stakeholder noted, *“People moving in are not getting involved in the community...two community service clubs that used to run in Smithville have closed down...people just don't feel connected to the community in the same way as when it was smaller.”* Another stakeholder stated that there is a risk of West Lincoln, *“...losing its identity as an agricultural municipality...this is its history and legacy.”*
- There is a possibility that West Lincoln could be amalgamated with surrounding municipalities. This direction would come from the province of Ontario, and West Lincoln

⁷ Bill 23, the *More Homes Built Faster Act* was passed by the Government of Ontario on November 28th, 2022. This legislation is part of the government's plans to achieve construction of 1.5 million homes by 2032. For more information about this Bill see <https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/bills/parliament-43/session-1/bill-23>

should be proactively prepared for this possibility. At a minimum, there is an expectation that West Lincoln may need to provide services jointly with other municipalities.

- Urban boundary expansion may have unintended negative consequences, such as:
 - Bill 23 will allow for municipalities to expand onto greenbelt spaces;
 - Housing being built on productive farmland, destruction of natural land, disappearance of wildlife species, etc.; and
 - Loss of agricultural land will affect the Township's agriculture industry and add uncertainty for farmers (in addition to affects of climate change, etc.).
- Significant residential development may further exacerbate the current lack of services/businesses (e.g., grocery stores, gas stations, restaurants) to meet the demand from residents.

The current economic state will have negative impacts on West Lincoln and its residents

- Lack of housing affordability is a big threat that has been identified by a large majority of stakeholders, which is a trend that is expected to continue as the rate of population growth in the Region exceeds the rate of housing development, creating competition and driving prices up.
- The current economic downturn (increased inflation, higher interest rates, etc.) will have a number of negative effects that West Lincoln needs to proactively plan and budget for (e.g., increased need for social services, such as the food bank, shelter/transitional housing, etc.).
- Many not-for-profit organizations qualified for COVID funding/grants that are not being offered anymore, and this will impact services (e.g., West Lincoln Community Care started housing program during COVID, but it is currently on hold due to lack of funding, etc.).
- The need to accept townhouses, stacked and back-to-back; more dense housing types are a change for the current community to understand and accept.

KEY ISSUES, TRENDS, AND PRIORITIES

Based on consultations with the Township of West Lincoln's key stakeholders, the following key strategic issues, trends, and priorities have been identified as important to address in the *2023-2026 Corporate Plan*. For a detailed breakdown of priorities identified by Council and the senior management staff, please see Appendix E.

- West Lincoln needs a strategic framework that outlines its long-term plan **for managed, sustainable, and balanced growth**, with concrete strategies that focus on:
 - a. Creating an optimal balance of residential (both urban and rural), industry, agriculture, and commercial spaces;
 - b. Maintaining a focus and prioritization on agriculture while nurturing growth in other sectors such as business, service, and industry;
 - c. Ongoing urban growth boundary planning;

- d. Thoughtfully planned houses and communities that include adequate parks, recreation spaces, and green spaces and are accessible and walkable;
 - e. Purposeful planning to revitalize downtown areas; and
 - f. Environmental considerations (e.g., Greenbelt protection, preservation of green spaces, etc.).
- Growth needs to take into consideration the increased diversity of residents as the Township grows and plans proactively for community development, particularly with **infrastructure and services that are widely accessible** for all (e.g., accessible community design, variety of programming and activities available, opportunities for residents to celebrate their cultures, support and services for certain populations, such as childcare services, retirement homes, etc.). This work is best informed by integrating a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion lens into the planning process, to better understand and respond to the variety of needs of residents.
- Another matter to be reviewed with growth is **policies around by-law** adherence based on community desires.
- **Transportation** is a significant priority that needs to continue to be addressed, including strategies for:
 - a. Public transportation planning;
 - b. Increased walkability and safety;
 - c. More high-volume roads, to support current and future growth and provide easy access into and out of the Township; and
 - d. Upgrading of rural roads to support increased traffic.
- West Lincoln needs to prioritize **access to housing** with a specific focus on affordable housing, subsidized housing, and high-density housing (as per provincial direction).
- West Lincoln needs to advocate to ensure **adequate levels of social services** are available and can meet the demand of the Township as it grows (e.g., physicians, community services, childcare, health and social services, emergency services, such as police, bylaw adherence, firefighting).
- In its response to significant growth, there is a continued need for the Township to **enhance its infrastructure** to meet current and future needs (e.g., sewer, water, wastewater, recycling programs, phone/internet, etc.), which needs to be carefully planned through strategic capital investment projects.
- The Township can engage in a number of various **economic development strategies** (e.g., incentives to bring new business into the region, increase amenities and services, create jobs, etc.).
- There is a need for **community engagement strategies** to increase community cohesiveness (to bridge the urban/rural divide, bring together people from different age groups and cultures, etc.) and to allow all residents to feel a sense of belonging and sense of place.

Based on the findings of the consultation process, the 6 priorities identified in 2019 are still relevant as follows:

1. Strong Transportation Connections
2. Support for Business and Employment Opportunities for Residents
3. Strategic, Responsible Growth
4. Local Attractions
5. Community Health and Safety
6. Efficient, Fiscally Responsible Operations

However, a new set of goals, initiatives, and outcomes need to be established for the *West Lincoln 2023-2026 Corporate Plan*. This work will be undertaken by Council and senior management in the month of April 2023, so that a new plan can be approved and rolled out by the end of June 2023.

FINAL STRATEGIC PLANNING RECOMMENDATIONS

The following provides a summary of consultation stakeholders' final advice and input as it relates to the strategic planning process.

- There is a need for West Lincoln to create a **shared vision and plan** for the Township, supported by clearly defined priorities. This includes a shared vision related to how and where the Township will grow, its future identity, etc. This will require Council and senior management to be innovative, proactive, and visionary, and to communicate its work to the community in a compelling and frequent way.
- As government funding decreases and more fiscal responsibility is downloaded onto the municipality, West Lincoln will need to be **innovative and proactive in its budget planning processes**. Partnerships and investments should be strategic, intentional, and aligned with the Township's long-term vision and priorities.
- **Public involvement through meaningful engagement** should be prioritized on a more regular basis, to more deeply understand and plan for the needs of the Township.
- As part of the upcoming strategic planning process, West Lincoln would benefit from **an in-depth internal review** of its current resources and capacity, identify gaps and potential for increased efficiencies (e.g., need for streamlined municipal processes, the need for a performance evaluation process, the creation of a succession plan, a focus on employee retention, etc.).
- Most importantly, **West Lincoln's Council and senior management team must first turn inwards** and purposefully work as a cohesive team driven by a shared vision and plan for the Township.

Appendix A: Population, Households, and Employment Forecasts for Township of West Lincoln and Smithville

Population Forecast	2016	2021	2026	2031	2036	2041	2046	2051	2021-2051
Township of West Lincoln	14,870	16,370	20,010	25,530	27,420	31,240	34,730	38,370	22,000
Smithville	6,250	7,140	10,770	14,270	18,140	21,940	25,410	29,030	21,890
Households Forecast	2016	2021	2026	2031	2036	2041	2046	2051	2021-2051
Township of West Lincoln	4,970	5,330	6,760	8,190	9,730	11,300	12,670	14,060	8,730
Smithville	2,160	2,435	3,855	5,275	6,810	8,375	9,740	11,125	8,690
Employment Forecast	2016	2021	2026	2031	2036	2041	2046	2051	2021-2051
Township of West Lincoln	4,330	4,460	5,550	6,260	7,250	8,280	9,340	10,480	6,020
Smithville	1,805	1,860	2,860	3,480	4,385	5,330	6,305	7,360	5,500

Source: Township of West Lincoln Master Community Plan (Smithville), 2022

Appendix B: Stakeholder Consultation List

Township of West Lincoln: Council and Senior Management Staff (in alphabetical order)

Name	Position
Terry Bell	Councillor, Ward 3
Shelley Bradaric	Councillor, Ward 2
Joann Chechalk	Councillor, Ward 2
Mike DiPaola	Director of Public Works and Recreation
Donna DeFilippis	Treasurer/Director of Finance
Cheryl Ganann	Mayor
Bev Hendry	CAO
Tim Hofsink	Acting Fire Chief
Vanessa Holm	CAO of the Library
Mike Rehner	Councillor, Ward 1
William Reilly	Councillor, Ward 3
Joanne Scime	Director of Legislative Services/Clerk
Brian Treble	Director of Planning & Building
Jason Trombetta	Councillor, Ward 1

Key Community Stakeholders

Name	Position	Organization
Peter Budd	Developer	Budd Developments
Anthony Chiarella	Vice President	Marz Homes
Chris Frere	Community Leader	Silverdale Community Hall
Mike Keizer & Chaundra Perkins	Owners	Smithville Home Hardware
Satinder Klair	Director of Children's Services	Niagara Region
Denise Potter	Executive Director	West Lincoln Chamber of Commerce
Jo Pacinda	Retail & Sales Director	Domaine Queylus
Bob Reece	Owner	Touchdown Willy's Tap & Grill
Bryan Rose	Executive Director	Niagara Community Foundation
Beth Shaw	Executive Director	FORT
Janelle Van Halst	President	West Lincoln Chamber of Commerce
Cathy Vitucci	Farmer	Land Owner
Sharlene Volpatti	Manager, Client Services & Food Bank	West Lincoln Community Care
Fred Vrugteveen	General Manager	Niagara Pallet
Steve Witt	President	Stanpac
Albert Witteveen	Regional Councillor	Niagara Region

Appendix C: List of Interview Questions

Corporate Planning Interview: Questions for 1-1 Consultations with Council

1. As you reflect on the past planning cycle, what are some of the learnings that should be integrated into future planning?
2. In terms of our context, what has changed since 2019 when the 10-year Corporate Plan was initially created?
3. What trends (demographic and other), changes, and issues do you see emerging now and over the coming 5 to 10 years that will have an impact on West Lincoln?
4. What did you hear on the campaign trail that needs to be considered in this corporate planning process?
5. What are your top issues and priorities for Council in the coming 4 years?
6. Where are there opportunities for West Lincoln to enhance services and programs to have a greater impact?
7. What specific deliverables would you like to see Council achieve during its term?
8. What are the municipality's current strengths, assets, and competencies to build on and leverage moving forward? Conversely, what are key weaknesses, challenges, or constraints that need to be addressed?
9. Are there natural synergies, alliances, or partnerships that Council and the municipality should be pursuing, in order to more strategically achieve its mandate and enhance its impact in the region?
10. In what ways do you think West Lincoln can be innovative in its response to emerging community needs and issues?
11. What final recommendations can you share to ensure this planning process is successful?

Corporate Planning Interview: Questions for 1-1 Consultations with Senior Management

1. As you reflect on the past planning cycle, what are some of the learnings that should be integrated into future planning?
2. In terms of our context, what has changed since 2019 when the 10-year Corporate Plan was initially created?

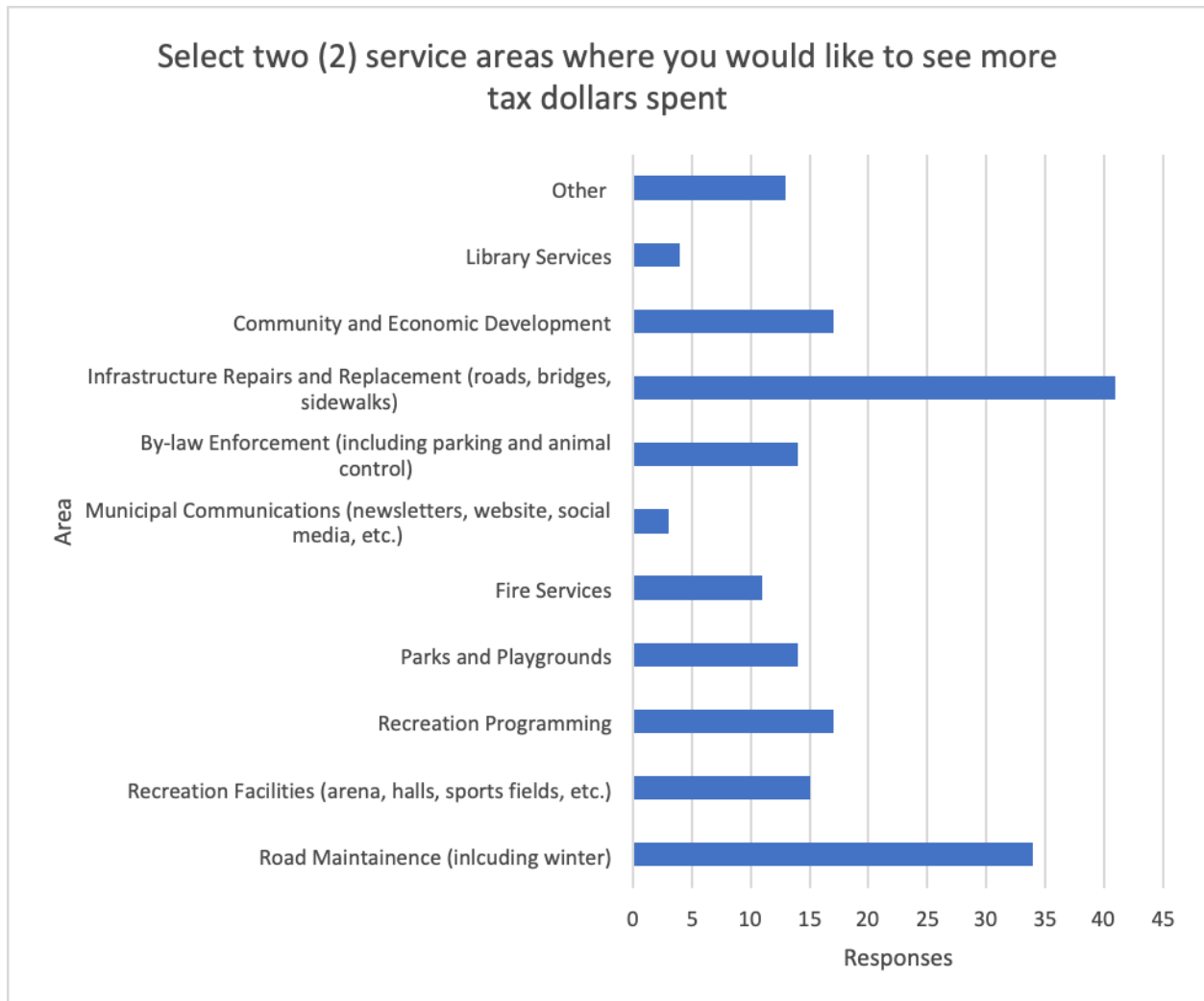
3. What trends (demographic and other), changes, and issues do you see emerging now and over the coming 5 to 10 years that will have an impact on West Lincoln?
4. What have you heard from the public and broader community that needs to be considered in this corporate planning process?
5. What are your top issues and priorities for West Lincoln in the coming 4 years?
6. Where are there opportunities to enhance West Lincoln's municipal services and programs to have a greater impact?
7. What specific deliverables would you like to see achieved during Council's term?
8. What are the municipality's current strengths, assets, and competencies to build on and leverage moving forward? Conversely, what are key weaknesses, challenges or constraints that need to be addressed?
9. Are there natural synergies, alliances, or partnerships that Council and the municipality should be pursuing, in order to more strategically achieve its mandate and enhance its impact in the region?
10. In what ways do you think West Lincoln can be innovative in its response to emerging community needs and issues?
11. What final recommendations can you share to ensure this planning process is successful?

Corporate Planning Interview: Questions for 1-1 Consultations with Community Stakeholders

1. What trends (demographic and other), changes, issues, and opportunities do you see emerging now and over the coming 5 to 10 years that will have an impact on West Lincoln?
2. What do you think are the top issues and priorities for West Lincoln in the coming 4 years?
3. Where are there opportunities to enhance West Lincoln's municipal services and programs to have a greater impact?
4. What specific deliverables would you like to see achieved over the next 4 years?
5. In what ways do you think West Lincoln can be innovative in its response to emerging community needs and issues?

Appendix D: Township of West Lincoln 2023 Budget Engagement Survey

Question completed by 82 residents, skipped by 20 residents



Source: 2023 West Lincoln Budget Survey Results

Appendix E: Strategic Priorities Identified by Council and Senior Management Staff

Councillors/Mayor

- A. **Sustainable, managed growth** and development, with a focus on creating spaces and places that enhance the community and promote community cohesion (e.g., recreation, green spaces, gathering places, etc.) as well as a focus on stewarding and protecting agricultural lands and West Lincoln's natural habitats
- B. **Preservation of West Lincoln's agricultural sector and lands** as well as its rich natural habitats
- C. **Road and infrastructure upgrades** (e.g., upgrades and work on highway 20 corresponding with sewer work, truck by-pass, converting higher traffic gravel roads to chip and tar, calming traffic strategies, sewer, water and waste, etc.)
- D. **Economic development**, including strategies to grow employment opportunities in West Lincoln and to attract more industrial and commercial/retail partners
- E. **Downtown revitalization**, which would include the creation of a downtown core to engage current residents and attract new people to the Township
- F. **Strategic, visionary, and innovative recreation** planning and community spaces and services that engage all ages, including a focus on child care, access to medical services, etc.
- G. **Community engagement strategies** to increase West Lincoln's cohesiveness as a Township (with a focus on the urban/rural divide)
- H. **Conservation projects**
- I. **Public transportation**
- J. **Capital investments and asset management**
- K. **Public safety**
- L. **Potential amalgamation with other municipalities and/or strategies to develop joint efforts with other municipalities**

Senior Management

- A. **Managing growth** in West Lincoln while preserving its unique attributes (e.g., mix of urban, rural, agricultural) through thoughtful, well-planned, proactive responses to projected growth (e.g., creation of a framework for strategic, proactive planning for significant growth projections, investment in the Township's planning department to ensure it has the resources to be proactive and responsive to the increasing need for services)
- B. Purposeful planning for West Lincoln's **downtown core areas**, with a focus on creating a vision for these areas and a plan to promote them as an asset in the Township
- C. Continued focus on developing a variety of **recreation activities** for diverse groups (e.g., seniors, youth, children, families, etc.)
- D. **Roads infrastructure**, including updating rural gravel roads, ditches, and development of accessible transportation linkages for West Lincoln (e.g., better access to the QEW, etc.)
- E. **Strategic and community planning** (e.g., focus on walkability, understanding what residents want in their community, strong asset management planning to ensure sustainable funding for future plans/projects)
- F. **Capital investments and asset management**
- G. **Conservation projects**, including green space planning (could be included in the Township of West Lincoln's Parks and Trails Master Plan)
- H. **Housing and housing affordability**
- I. **Economic development**, including strategies to grow employment opportunities in West Lincoln, strategies to attract and retain staff, etc.
- J. **Succession planning** within the Township of West Lincoln, to ensure business continuity and transfer of knowledge as well as a more robust human resource infrastructure
- K. **Collaboration and resource sharing** by leveraging opportunities within the Township and with other municipalities and partners, to share resources, knowledge, etc.
- L. **Sourcing of new revenues and grants as well cost efficiencies**