

RURAL OXFORD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

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1 Introduction

Strategic Planning is a critical consideration for all organizations. It is used to focus the organization's finite energy and resources and ensure that the board and staff are working toward common goals and agree on the intended outcomes. The strategic plan also provides the tools to assess the organization's progress towards statement goals and allows the organization to adjust direction in response to a changing environment.

The Rural Oxford Economic Development Corporation (ROEDC), also known as Rural Oxford represents the five rural townships of Blandford-Blenheim, East Zorra-Tavistock, Norwich, South-West Oxford and Zorra in Oxford County, Ontario. The Board of Directors is comprised of two representatives from each member municipality.

The Rural Oxford Strategic Action Plan provides a five-year roadmap for the organization, outlining where ROEDC want to go, the actions needed to progress towards those goals and how it will determine if it has been successful.

2 Creating the Strategic Action Plan

Rural Oxford's Strategic Action Plan was developed in three phases.

Phase 1 Research: The project began with a review of background strategies, data, research, and reports to provide an understanding of ROEDC's priorities and economic development goals.

Phase 2 Consultation: Stakeholder consultation included Interviews with all ROEDC board members and a survey of the business community. The key findings of thee in Phase 1 and Phase 2 were summarized in the Background Discussion Report in September 2021.

Phase 3 Action Plan Development: Board members participated in a facilitated workshop in September 2021 to determine the board's priorities and key actions required to achieve the board's vision. The final phase includes the preparation of a draft strategy for board feedback and final revisions for the five-year action plan.

3 Vision and Mission

This strategic plan is built on the foundation of the vision and mission previously established by the Rural Oxford Board of Directors.

A vision statement is a short sentence describing the desired future that Rural Oxford is ultimately working towards. The Mission Statement is a one-sentence statement of what Rural Oxford does and why. Together they provide a clear picture of what Rural Oxford wants to achieve and how it intends to do it.

The ROEDC board reviewed the vision and mission statement as part of the Strategic Priorities Workshop and determined that they should continue to o provide the direction and foundation for the organization as previously established.

3.1 Vision

Rural Oxford... Where people and business prosper.

3.2 Mission

To support business growth and development across Rural Oxford.

4 Strategic Priorities

Strategic priorities are those items that must be addressed if Rural Oxford is going to be successful in achieving its vision.

The Board of Directors met on September 24, 2021, to establish ROEDC's strategic priorities. They reviewed the background discussion report including economic and demographic trends and a summary of the stakeholder consultation. Together the board established the following priority areas:

- **Investment ready community** (infrastructure & services): Ensuring Rural Oxford has the infrastructure and services required to support investment in their municipalities.
- **Workforce development:** Addressing existing and prospective business needs for staff to operate effectively.
- **Development–friendly policies and processes:** Reviewing policies and processes to facilitate and expedite development.



5 Goals and Objectives

Goals are the broad aim or end-result that Rural Oxford wants to achieve in support of its mission. **Objectives** are the action-oriented outcomes Rural Oxford wants to achieve related to the related goal. The following goals and objectives provide the framework for the Rural Oxford's Strategic Action Plan. The **strategic actions** outlined in the next section detail the specific steps required to realize the related goals and objectives.

	Goal	Objective
	**Business retention, expansion and attraction**	Foster economic growth and leverage sector strengths.
	**Awareness and promotion**	Increase awareness of Rural Oxford, its value proposition, and services for prospective and existing businesses. Promote Rural Oxford's local businesses.
	**Collective Strength**	Advocate for policies, processes and programs aligned with Rural Oxford's economic vision.

6 Strategic Actions

	**A. Business retention, expansion and attraction**	Foster economic growth and leverage sector strengths.

1 Business Retention & Expansion

1.1 Develop a sector specific, structured business outreach strategy
1.2 Solicit and support business inquiries and requests for assistance
1.3 Compile, maintain and share up to date information on government funding, programs and resources for Rural Oxford's small and home-based businesses, key industry sectors and new exporters
1.4 Promote local business and partner on shop local programs

2 Investment Attraction

2.1 Conduct an investment readiness assessment for each member township
2.2 Create an inventory of available industrial and commercial land and buildings for prospective investor inquiries
2.3 Provide confidential site selection services for prospective investors
2.4 Identify and engage with local businesses, prospective investors, and key influencers to provide updates on Rural Oxford's economic news and opportunities for investment
2.5 Assist prospective investors to navigate funding, planning and development processes
2.6 Continue to participate in regional investment attraction activities in partnership with Oxford Connection
2.7 Explore the potential for a Community Improvement Plan to leverage business investment

3 Workforce Development

3.1 Help employers promote jobs and co-op placements in Rural Oxford
3.2 Connect businesses with workforce development supports and resources
3.3 Support, promote and engage in County and regional workforce development initiatives

	**B. Awareness and promotion**	Increase awareness of Rural Oxford, its value proposition, and services for prospective and existing businesses. Promote Rural Oxford's local businesses.

1 Making the Case for Rural Oxford

1.1 Compile and promote data that demonstrates Rural Oxford's value proposition
1.2 Provide local businesses, prospective investors, and key influencers with regular updates on new investments, available properties, residential development, and servicing enhancements.
1.3 Continue to promote available commercial/industrial land and buildings
1.4 Continue to promote local businesses, employers and industries
1.5 Compile good news stories/testimonials profiling local business and the benefits of doing business in Rural Oxford
1.6 Provide promotional material on the benefits of living in Rural Oxford to support employer recruitment efforts

2 Digital Marketing

2.1 Continue to build and refresh the Rural Oxford website
2.2 Maintain community profiles and links to the individual websites for the Rural Oxford Townships
2.3 Develop an updated digital marketing campaign and schedule incorporating videos, social media, and paid ads
2.4 Provide regular updates to member municipalities, Oxford County, community, and regional economic partners

	**C. Collective Strength**	Advocate for policies, processes and programs aligned with Rural Oxford's economic vision.

1. Collaboration

1.1 Build and maintain supportive relationships with Community Futures Oxford, Oxford Small Business Centre, Tourism Oxford, Elgin Middlesex Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board, Western Ontario Wardens Caucus, Oxford Federation of Agriculture, neighbouring economic development staff and committees, RTO 1, and other economic development stakeholders

1.2 Work with Oxford County planning staff to create a policy framework that supports a balance of industrial, commercial, agricultural, and residential uses in Rural Oxford

1.3 Advocate for expanded infrastructure such as full load roads, natural gas and broadband to support existing and prospective business needs

1.4 Work with Oxford County planning staff to identify solutions to support more flexible policies and permitted on-farm uses and agriculture-related business growth in Rural Oxford

1.5 Work with Oxford County planning staff and member municipalities to develop expedited approval processes for business investment

1.6 Invest in economic development training for ROEDC board members and staff

1.7 Monitor and leverage OMAFRA's demographic and economic data and rural economic development programs

1.8 Participate with Oxford Connection investment attraction initiatives

1.9 Engage and actively partner on local and regional advocacy issues affecting Rural Oxford

2. Governance and Administration

2.1 Coordinate ROEDC board meetings and related administrative functions

2.2 Support audit and finance committee meetings and reporting

2.3 Provide economic development activity updates at every board meeting for the board and rural Councils

2.4 Explore opportunities for external funding to support Rural Oxford activities

7 Conclusion

The Rural Oxford Strategic Action Plan provides a roadmap for the ROEDC for the next five years. It includes a series of tangible actions that will support business growth and development across the region and establish Rural Oxford as a place where people and business prosper.

Upon approval of this strategy, the ROEDC will create an implementation plan that outlines the key partners, proposed time frame for implementation, estimated budget and priority for each strategic action. This implementation plan will provide the basis of the annual workplan.

Five years is a long time and recent experience with the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that a lot can happen in a short time that can dramatically change the trajectory of the economy and a strategic plan. Rural Oxford will need to review this strategy annually to ensure that the assumptions and the current economic framework continue to support ROEDC's established goals, objectives, and strategic actions.