

The Corporation of the Township of Rideau Lakes
1439 County Road 8, Delta ON
Tel 1 800 928 2250
Fax 1 613 928 3097
www.twprideaulakes.on.ca

STRATEGIC PLAN

2015 AND FORWARD

Leveraging our Potential

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Mayor's Message

It is my pleasure to introduce the Township of Rideau Lakes' new strategic plan.

The landscape of municipal governance in Ontario has changed significantly in the past 20 years. The pace of this change has only accelerated in the last 10 years, and will continue to accelerate in the future. Municipalities now hold the broad authority and responsibility to effectively determine, deliver, and manage a wide array of goods and services that matter to local residents.

At the same time municipalities must be responsive to the financial, environmental, and social forces that shape our globally connected community.

Municipal governance is complex. It can be challenging, and a tough balancing act. Few organizations are tasked with delivering such a diverse mandate of goods and services.

Since amalgamation we have had tremendous success in integrating our operations, improving our assets, and expanding needed services. This includes new programs such as door to door waste pick-up, road hard surfacing, bridge rehabilitation, and new and improved facilities such as our community centers, harbours, and seniors housing. Strategic investment, wise capital borrowing, and an eye to enhanced efficiency has allowed us to do this while maintaining one of the lowest tax rates in the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville.

I would like to extend my thanks to my colleagues on Council, our Township staff, and our community volunteers and champions. Our community is special. We are a leader among our peers. Our success in defining and delivering progressive rural governance is due in large part to the dedication of these individuals – past, present, and future.

Sincerely,

Ronald E. Holman

Mayor

Strategic Planning Context

WHY PLAN?

Strategic planning offers a means to take stock of where we are today and to explore where we would like to go tomorrow. Strategic planning identifies and charts a course toward our goals and ambitions. Through framing issues and providing a priority 'lens', strategic planning supports improved dialogue, decision making, management, and adaptation.

This document stems from a facilitated strategic planning exercise held in July of 2015. The session brought the members of Council and our management team together to discuss and set priorities for the future, using tools and processes developed by the Executive Decision Making Centre of the Queen's School of Business.

PAST PLANNING

Rideau Lakes undertook a significant strategic planning exercise in 2000 following amalgamation. This strategic plan largely identified the need to come together and charted a way forward as 'one community'. During this period, many of the ideas and priorities in this document have been achieved. At the same time additional needs and opportunities were identified and acted upon.

EXISTING DOCUMENTS AND RESOURCES

A number of documents and past exercises assist in informing this strategic plan. They include:

- The Township of Rideau Lakes Official Plan (Township - 2005)
- The Township of Rideau Lakes Strategic Plan 2005/2010 (Township - 2000)
- The Township of Rideau Lakes Parks & Recreation Master Plan (Township - 2013)
- Portland and Newboro Harbour Redevelopment Plan (Township - 2009)
- Conceptual Village Servicing Option Study (Township - In Progress)
- The UCLG Regional Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (UCLG - 2012)
- The Leeds Grenville Economic Development Strategic Plan (UCLG - 2002)
- Economic Development in Leeds and Grenville Review (UCLG - 2015)
- The UCLG Economic Development Implementation Plan (UCLG - 2015)
- Rideau Canal Heritage Corridor Visitor Experience Opportunities Concept (Partnership -2013)
- Rideau Canal Management Plan (Parks Canada - 2005)
- Rideau Corridor Landscape Strategy (Parks Canada - 2013)
- Annual Township Budgets and Audited Financial Statements (various)

PROGRESSIVE RURAL GOVERNANCE

FOCUS OF THIS DOCUMENT

This strategic plan seeks to build upon the past strategic work of the Township, while focusing on evolving opportunities and challenges, both local and global. To accomplish this in a manageable way, four key priority areas have been identified.

This does not mean that other matters are not considered important priorities. Nor would we neglect to take advantage of opportunities should they arise. The key priorities offer a frame of reference for future dialogue and decision making.

This document is anticipated to be a living document, which will require monitoring and updating. The document lays out high-level goals and objectives. The annual budget cycle will set out specific work-plan elements based on necessary expenditures and available resources.

Our Vision

INTRODUCTION

Our goal is to foster a prosperous, growing and progressive community that is economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable. The Township's '2025 vision', as developed during the strategic planning session, seeks to capture a desired future state that reflects this goal.

VISION 2025

By 2025 the Township will seek to have in place:

- **Well-developed infrastructure** that we are able to maintain and improve. This includes a sustainable asset management plan with an associated fully funded financial plan.
- **Viable villages and hamlets** with an appropriate mix of core services (residents) and tourism services (visitors). Focus will be given to rehabilitation and public and private investments that support a strong future, building on the unique opportunities that each village and hamlet has to offer.
- An **expanded business base**, including tourism and farming, while retaining rural character, culture, and lifestyle. Job growth and local opportunities are a key focus.
- **A thriving retirement community** with services closer to home and transportation services available as needed.
- **Financial sustainability** including targeted capital financing investments, stable and low tax rates, and prudent debt management. To this end, a ten-year financial plan will be developed to inform the budget process and asset management.
- The development of a **municipal hub** to efficiently and seamlessly deliver the full range of Township services and other integrated community services to residents.
- **Support waterfront development** in a balanced and environmentally sustainable way that enhances water quality while recognizing and supporting the important cultural and economic role of waterfront development. Innovative technologies, development practices, and economic models will be encouraged.

Identified Priorities

INTRODUCTION

The Township's Council, with the support of senior staff, developed a set of key priorities for the strategic plan. The priorities include:

- Infrastructure Planning
- Financial Planning and Sustainability
- Economic Development
- Village and Hamlet Vitality

These priorities represent a focused and manageable mandate for the plan. Other operational and organizational initiatives remain important and will be followed through on. It is also important to recognize that priority setting does not eliminate the possibility of taking advantage of other opportunities as they arise. Instead, priority setting seeks to provide a frame of reference for policy development and implementation and a benchmark for reflection and evaluation.

DISCUSSION STRUCTURE

The following priority sections are broken down into the sub-headings of goals, challenges, opportunities, and evaluating success. This structure supports the priority being explored from 'vision to action' in a manner that is reflective of local circumstances.

Priority: Infrastructure Planning

GOAL

We will seek to develop, maintain and enhance the core infrastructure required to provide necessary services to residents, businesses, institutional users, and visitors. Infrastructure investment will endeavor to achieve the right balance of providing high quality assets that benefit the wider community, but that remain sustainable within our assessment base.

CHALLENGES

- Despite the wider provincial and national benefits of local infrastructure to the economy and society, stable and long-term funding commitments from other levels of government remain elusive.
- Changing community demands and expectations shape infrastructure needs, quality, and construction and maintenance standards.
- Infrastructure management is increasingly complex as models and options for procurement, financing construction, lifecycle planning, and technologies advance.
- Stochastic and/or uncontrollable risks such as climate, material and fuel inflation, provincial and federal regulatory changes, and legal precedents can make infrastructure planning and maintenance difficult. Infrastructure is a significant fixed asset in a continually changing environment.
- An aging community with higher than average median age versus the region and province.
- In rural municipalities, infrastructure planning, administration, construction and maintenance relies heavily on staff and their local expertise and tacit and historical knowledge. Succession planning and staff retention can be difficult in a rural municipality.

OPPORTUNITIES

- **Asset Management Planning (AMP)** is now required by the Provincial Government and will likely continue to grow in importance. The municipality should seek to annually review and update its asset management plan to ensure it is complete and accurate.
- The Township has a well-established program of **road and bridge enhancement**. The Township's hard-surfacing roads program represents a key opportunity.
- To support **consistent and high quality facilities** across its wide geography, the Township can re-vision underutilized infrastructure, invest in new infrastructure, and increase innovative governance models such as shared services (neighbours), partnerships (3Ps), and co-location of services (hubs) when and where appropriate.
- Invest in infrastructure that supports **aging in place through universal design**.
- Continued investments in waste management and the Portland Transfer Station can **increase efficiency and reduce transportation costs of waste disposal**.

PROGRESSIVE RURAL GOVERNANCE

- The Township can **recognize and leverage the link between high quality staff and high quality infrastructure** through its training, workflow, and human resources policies.

EVALUATING SUCCESS

- The Township AMP contains all classes of assets and is reviewed and updated annually.
- The Township continues to invest in its hard surfacing program and maintains assets and investments already made.
- The Township focuses facility investment in multi-purpose and flexible spaces that drive higher utilization, maintain long-term asset value, and offer opportunities for partnership and revenue generation.
- The Township reduces the overall cost of collecting and disposing of a tonne of waste through infrastructure investment.
- The Township continues to invest in targeted employee training. Departmental planning and operations explicitly acknowledge and seek to address succession planning through acting roles and skill extension opportunities. The Township remains competitive in the local employment market.

Priority: Financial Planning and Sustainability

GOAL

We will seek to maintain a tax rate which is competitive in the local market, but also generates the necessary revenues to sustain and provide targeted enhancement to operations, services, and infrastructure.

CHALLENGES

- The Township has a predominantly residential tax base.
- Provincial and federal transfers remain inconsistent and short-term.
- Year-over-year tax rate stabilization is difficult in the absence of a program of consistent capital investment and/or capital financing.
- Municipal finances and third-party accounting regulations (tangible capital assets) are complex and can generate confusion.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Longer term financial planning and multi-year budgets are becoming normalized in municipal operations. A **10-year financial sustainability plan** can drive this process.
- Accurate **Asset Management Planning (AMP)** will provide the long-term lens required to perform financial planning.
- **Capital financing** allows for tax rate stabilization while still pursuing asset development and enhancement. Loan terms should continue to mirror or be less than asset lifecycle, and leverage historically low interest rates.
- Organizational and public **municipal financial literacy** can be enhanced through dialog, education, and regular, accurate, and complete reporting.
- Exploring, evaluating and considering **shared services** with neighbouring municipalities and appropriate agencies.

EVALUATING SUCCESS

- A 10-year financial sustainability plan is completed by the end of 2017.
- Council members feel comfortable reviewing and interpreting financial statements, budgets, and regular reports. Resources are provided when needed.
- The annual operating budget moves toward accounting for the AMP, tangible capital asset depreciation, and a 10-year financial sustainability plan in a phased, but consistent, approach.

Priority: Economic Development

GOAL

The Township will include a mix of locally appropriate commercial opportunities that leverage and grow our local resources and assets. We will have an economic landscape that supports living and working locally, youth retention, and skills and capital attraction and application.

CHALLENGES

- A lack of water, wastewater, and natural gas services limits the type of institutional, commercial, and industrial development that can take place.
- The local economic development landscape is complex with various actors pursuing complementary goals, but in diverse manners.
- A lack of data on 'hyper-local' economic activity and economic changes over time can limit strategic analysis and opportunity identification.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Economic development opportunities along the **Rideau Canal** and the enhanced economic development mandate of Parks Canada.
- Formalize a tailored mandate and reporting relationship with the **Counties Economic Development Department** to leverage their regional experience and mandate.
- Options for enhanced **local economic development officer services** including in-house, shared services with neighbours, and the Rideau Heritage Route's potential transition to Rideau Tourism.
- **Commercial real estate** listing exposure on the United Counties' database.
- Expansion and extension of **natural gas** services to key nodes and established businesses with provincial and industry support.
- A growing community of semi-retired individuals supports the **transfer of networks and skills** into the area.
- Leveraging lower capital barrier **small businesses opportunities** (home-based businesses, lower cost commercial space, seasonal tourism services etc.).
- Policy implementation that encourages and supports **value-added agricultural** operations.

EVALUATING SUCCESS

- Investments and programs reflect a well-defined, focused, and realistic economic development mandate that leverages local resources and tourism.
- Increased Township-to-business formal and informal relationships and connections.
- Enhanced economic development partner relationships, reporting and collaboration.

Priority: Village and Hamlet Vitality

GOAL

Villages and hamlets will remain the hub of rural life by offering services and housing that reflect local needs and priorities. We will identify and build on each centre's unique opportunities and revitalize our villages and hamlets through resident engagement, targeted programs, investments, and policy.

CHALLENGES

- No water and sewer services. These services generally support greater density, diversity and flexibility of commercial, institutional, and residential uses, which are the backbone of village life.
- Generally villages and hamlets contain an older housing stock which can making 'aging-in-place' more difficult (larger, less efficient, high maintenance, and/or multi-story homes).

OPPORTUNITIES

- The Township's villages and hamlet offer **unique opportunities and strengths**. They are variable and based on location, history, local features, and urban travel distances. Pathways to prosperity can build on these attributes.
- The **Harbour Plans** for Newboro and Portland can be used to leverage the maximum social and economic gain from proximity to the Rideau Canal.
- The outcomes of the Conceptual Servicing Options Study (underway) may provide insight into economically **sustainable and innovative servicing models**.
- Villages function as **recreation and leisure nodes** in the Township. They can best leverage programming and infrastructure consistent with the Township's Parks and Recreation Master Plan.
- **Community Improvement Plans** (CIPs) can leverage private investment, engage the community in rehabilitation, and support community accessibility.
- A program of sidewalk maintenance and capital improvement can be an opportunity to also drive **community branding and streetscape enhancement**.
- Foster engaged and locally attuned **volunteers and Beautification Committees**.

EVALUATING SUCCESS

- As private redevelopment and investment occurs, the full scope of servicing options are considered to enhance targeted mixed-use opportunities and address specific environmental, economic, and social challenges.
- An annual program of sidewalk capital investment is in place.
- The Township continues to invest in enhancements that connect the villages and hamlets to the Rideau Canal and inland lakes where applicable.

PROGRESSIVE RURAL GOVERNANCE

- CIPs are developed that are consistent with unique community needs and opportunities, focus on leveraging private investment, and provide programs to enhance business attraction.

Summary

The Township's Strategic Plan, as outlined in this document, sets four key priorities *Infrastructure Planning, Financial Planning and Sustainability, Economic Development, and Village and Hamlet Vitality*. These priorities are expected to enhance both the governance of the municipality as well as our overall quality of community life.

The Township's Council and staff will reflect on this document and its priorities when recommending and setting policy. At the same time the Township will be prepared to take advantage of other opportunities as they arise, should it reflect a wider public interest.