



TOWNSHIP OF  
**Southwold**



# TOWNSHIP OF SOUTHWOLD

## Strategic Plan

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# 1. Introduction

The Township of Southwold's Strategic Plan will guide Council and administration's efforts over the next four years to support a high quality of life and economic opportunity in this growing community.

Southwold is a rural community of 4,990 people (July 2022) in Elgin County located west of the City of St. Thomas, south of the City of London and south of the primarily rural Middlesex County.

The background to the development of the Strategic Plan is detailed in a Key Findings Report issued in May 2023. The Key Findings Report includes the results from detailed economic and demographic analysis and broad-based community engagement.

This report represents Phase 3 of the Strategic Planning Process. The Strategic Plan builds on the Key Findings Report with a review of Strategic Priorities identified by Southwold Council in July 2023. The Strategic Plan includes the Township's vision, mission, goals, objectives and actions.

**Figure 1: Strategic Planning Process**





## 2.Strategic Priorities

Strategic priorities are those issues that must be addressed to ensure a positive future for Southwold.

Southwold Council identified three main strategic priorities based on the research and analysis and community consultation conducted through the strategic planning process.

They are:

**Managing growth/building community:** Thoughtful planning and investment that balances the needs of current residents, newcomers and commercial development while protecting agricultural land.

**Economic development:** Investment readiness and support for new and existing businesses

**Cost management/ accountability:** Prudent financial management to address current needs and prepare for the future.



### 3. Vision and Mission

The vision statement is a short phrase describing the future that the Township of Southwold is ultimately working towards. The mission is a one sentence statement of what the Township of Southwold does and why. Together the vision and mission provide the foundation for a series of goals and objectives.



#### VISION

The Township of Southwold is a vibrant, safe, and growing rural community recognized for its high quality of life and economic opportunity.



#### MISSION

To provide quality municipal services that support growth, prosperity, and exceptional quality of life through prudent management.

### 4. Goals and Objectives

Goals and objectives provide further definition and direction for the strategic plan.

**Goals** are the broad end states that the Township of Southwold wants to achieve.

**Objectives** are the desired outcomes as a result of the goals.

	Goal	Objective
	<b>1. Managed Growth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Policies and programs that manage growth, maintain community character, protect agricultural land, and align with community capacity.</li><li>• Infrastructure to support identified residential and industrial growth areas.</li></ul>
	<b>2. Welcoming and supportive neighbourhoods</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inclusive, resident-focused programs, services, and facilities throughout Southwold.</li></ul>
	<b>3. Economic opportunity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Investment readiness and support for new and existing businesses.</li></ul>
	<b>4. Fiscal responsibility and accountability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prudent financial management to address current needs and prepare for the future.</li><li>• Engaged and informed residents, businesses, and other interested parties.</li></ul>



## 5.Strategic Actions

**Strategic actions** are the specific, measurable steps required to achieve the goals and objectives. The following section provides the rational and specific actions related to the four goal and objectives.

	Goal 1	Managed Growth
	Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Policies and programs that manage growth, maintain community character, protect agricultural land, and align with community capacity.</li><li>• Infrastructure to support identified residential and industrial growth areas.</li></ul>

The Township of Southwold has experienced significant residential development of 9% over the past five years. It is also part of a region experiencing major industrial growth. The increased demand for serviced residential and employment land is creating an unprecedented need for expanded infrastructure. Wastewater infrastructure, in particular, is required to support investment in Southwold.

It will be critically important to focus the Township's resources with an infrastructure plan that will prioritize, stage, and scope its infrastructure investments. The infrastructure plan will allow the Township to determine the required capital and ongoing costs and the Township's capacity to fund these investments.

A wastewater infrastructure plan is one key component of the long-term vision required for the capital investment plan. The infrastructure plan will also help the Township's to advocate and apply for funding from the provincial and federal government.

The community engagement conducted through this strategic planning process highlighted the need for a greater range of housing formats and budgets to best support a growing, diverse population. There is also a strong desire to protect the agricultural land that is so vital to the local economy and community culture.


The Township should review its existing policies and provide additional supports and incentives to encourage a greater range of housing with more affordable and attainable housing options. Strategies to increase residential density will ensure that the residential development supports population growth with while retaining Southwold's finite resource of agricultural land.

High speed, reliable and affordable internet and cellular connectivity are also essential services for households and businesses in Southwold. The Township should continue to support initiatives that will expand services to underserved areas and provide the critical connections needed to support families and economic development.



## GOAL 1 ACTIONS

- 1.1. Establish a wastewater infrastructure plan that includes the location, capacity, staging, and budget required to support projected residential and commercial growth.
- 1.2. Develop long-term plans and budgets for municipal infrastructure investment and operations.
- 1.3. Allocate sufficient resources and seek external sources of funding to address Southwold's hard and soft infrastructure needs.
- 1.4. Establish policies and incentives to support mixed residential development with a focus on affordable and attainable housing within existing residentially zoned areas.
- 1.5. Continue to maintain policies that protect agricultural land and recognize agriculture's contribution to Southwold's economy and community culture.
- 1.6. Support and participate in initiatives to expand and enhance internet access throughout the Township.

	Goal 2	Welcoming and supportive neighbourhoods
	Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inclusive, resident-focused programs, services, and facilities throughout Southwold.</li></ul>

Community parks, programs and facilities are also important forms of infrastructure that contribute to residents' quality of life. The Township has an important role in bringing residents together and creating a place that sustains and supports their social, physical, and emotional wellbeing.

The Township's programs and services need to support demographic shifts and a growing population. The community consultation also revealed a desire for cycling trails and sidewalks to connect Southwold's communities and bring residents to the Township's parks, sports fields, and recreation centres. Childcare and active living activities for seniors were identified as important programs to support the needs of specific segments of the community.

Community festivals and celebrations, beautification efforts, sports programs, volunteering, youth engagement and environmental conservation are some of the ways Southwold can connect community members, celebrate community character, create welcoming and supportive neighbourhoods while building civic pride.

The Township's support of local arts, heritage and cultural can provide economic benefits and add to residents' wellbeing by building community identity and pride,






fostering social inclusion, connecting residents to the past, providing platforms for creative expression and establishing a unique Southwold identity.

## GOLA 2 ACTIONS

- 2.1 Establish long-term plans to maintain and enhance parks, programs and facilities that support social interactions throughout Southwold.
- 2.2 Expand active transportation links between Southwold communities.
- 2.3 Explore opportunities to expand age specific programs and services such as childcare and active living programs for seniors.
- 2.4 Maintain and support events and programs that create civic pride, support community character, and encourage community involvement.
- 2.5 Support and promote local arts, heritage, and culture.

	Goal 3	Economic Opportunity
	Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Investment readiness and support for new and existing businesses.</li></ul>

Southwold's Community Economic Development Plan established in 2020 includes five goals:

1. Community Engagement
2. Investment Readiness
3. Branding/Communication
4. Business Development
5. Enhanced Infrastructure

Since that time some of the specific actions have been addressed and others are no longer priorities. A review of the 2020 strategy will provide an opportunity to update the priority and timing of the strategic actions.

Since the strategy was adopted, Southwold Township has welcomed a new Amazon warehouse facility which is expected to create approximately 1,000 jobs. Other investments in neighbouring communities are expected to create thousands of new jobs in manufacturing and other supporting industries. Workforce development will be a critical consideration for new and existing businesses in Southwold and should be considered in the updated strategy.

There has also been increased interest and demand for large industrial sites since 2020. Southwold needs respond to this demand by compiling information on the



industrially zoned land, determining the owners' interest in selling and considering the costs and timing to provide the required infrastructure for development.

Another critical element in supporting investment inquiries will be compiling and providing local and regional economic development data. The economic and demographic data in the Key Findings Report includes 2021 Census data that was not available when the 2020 Strategy was completed. The Township needs to proactively compile local and regional data to respond to investment opportunities as they emerge.

The Township should also maintain regular contact with Elgin County and the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus (WOWC) economic development committees efforts which could support Southwold Township's economic development goals.

Existing businesses are the foundation of Southwold's economy. Meetings with the business owners and operators can provide insights into how to retain and assist businesses to grow. It can also help determine the opportunities and barriers to attracting additional investment in the community.


Finally, community engagement participants shared their dissatisfaction with the appearance and limited use of Shedden's four corners. There were several suggestions including establishing a small business resource centre, commercial business location or additional community services. Southwold Township should ensure that current zoning provides the maximum flexibility to support a variety of uses to revitalize this important intersection. Community Improvement Plan incentives could also be an important consideration to support the rehabilitation and redevelopment of the area.

### GOAL 3 ACTIONS

- 3.1 Update and implement the 2020 economic development strategy to reflect the emerging challenges and opportunities related to major regional investments.
- 3.2 Engage with industrial landowners to determine their interest in selling and the property specifications required for development.
- 3.3 Compile and share local and regional economic development data to ensure Southwold is investment ready.
- 3.4 Identify opportunities to attract commercial service providers to meet local demand in urban settlement areas.
- 3.5 Establish a business visitation schedule to assess and address local business opportunities and barriers.
- 3.6 Leverage and partner in County and other regional economic development programs and initiatives.



### 3.7 Explore opportunities for additional, alternative uses that will enhance Shedden's four corners.

	Goal 4	Fiscal responsibility and accountability
	Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prudent financial management to address current needs and prepare for the future.</li><li>• Engaged and informed residents, businesses, and other interested parties.</li></ul>

Council and Southwold residents are keenly aware that the infrastructure needed to support growth is both essential and expensive. Supporting economic development efforts will help to expand and diversify Southwold's tax base which will help to support this investment.

Southwold Council has been wise stewards of the Township's financial resources. It has maintained healthy reserves and managed its debt to minimize the risk associated with escalating interest rates. Southwold Township has low tax rates compared to neighbouring jurisdictions and is committed to remaining competitive. It will need to monitor its tax rates in comparison with its peers to balance its competitive tax rates with the investment in infrastructure to support the community's current and future needs.

Southwold Township has a team of loyal, hardworking staff members, many with very long tenures that are key to efficient Township operations. Providing competitive wages, investing in employee training, and maintaining a supportive work environment will be important considerations to continue to attract and retain a high performing staff.

The need for regular communications with Southwold's constituents was a key theme during the community consultations. Residents and businesses want to be informed about the strategic plan and its implementation. Southwold needs to continue to explore and identify the most effective methods and channels for providing regular updates to its constituents including online and more conventional communications tools. A formal communications plan with established goals and outcomes and regular review and refinement will help to identify the most effective methods for connecting and deepening the relationship with residents and businesses.



## GOAL 4 ACTIONS

### **Financial management**

- 4.1 Support economic development efforts to expand and diversify Southwold's tax base.
- 4.2 Support the long-term sustainability of municipal finances through stable, healthy reserves and thoughtful borrowing.
- 4.3 Protect and sustain Southwold's infrastructure while retaining competitive tax rates.
- 4.4 Recruit, develop and retain a high performing workforce with competitive salaries, training programs and a supportive work environment.

### **Engaged and informed stakeholders**

- 4.5 Develop a communications plan to introduce the strategic plan and provide updates on its implementation.
- 4.6 Explore additional channels and strategies to increase and expand communications with residents and businesses.

## 6. Next Steps

This Strategic Plan is intended to guide Southwold Council for the next four years to achieve its vision of a vibrant, safe, and growing rural community that offers a high quality of life and economic opportunity.

The implementation plan is the final element in the strategic planning process. It will be developed following approval of the Strategic Plan vision, mission, goals, objectives, and actions. The implementation plan will identify the priority level, timing, and related performance measures of the strategic actions. Together the strategic plan and the implementation plan will provide the Township of Southwold with the tools to plan and measure its progress towards its goals. Providing regular updates to Southwold's ratepayers will help to continue the positive momentum and encourage greater engagement with the community.