

ELGIN COUNTY

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM STRATEGY

2022-
2025



County of Elgin

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Introduction

Strategic Planning Approach

At the County of Elgin, we are working to re-evaluate how we spend our time and resources so that we can better support our local entrepreneurs and foster an environment of opportunity for the County, its residents and businesses. We will do this by re-engaging our local business community to learn about their needs, let them know about the services we offer, and connect them to other relevant resources. We will champion the creation of a network of entrepreneurs that can work together to grow their businesses and attract new investment to Elgin County. Based on what we learn, we will re-imagine our services, and working in collaboration with our Local Municipal Partners, we will re-build how we do economic development in Elgin County.

The 2022–2025 Economic Development and Tourism Strategy will direct the efforts of the department over the next four years. As we engage with our community, we are committed to reviewing what we hear and improving our strategy to ensure that we provide the best support that we can to our Local Municipal Partners and business community.



Economic Development Strategy

2022-2025

Re/Engage, Re/Imagine, and Re/Build




Re/Engage

Engage local businesses, support services, and municipalities by listening and learning about their needs and working with them to become the place where people want to live, work and play.

Re/Imagine

Reimagine how we spend our time and resources to better support local entrepreneurs and to foster an environment of prosperity and opportunity for the County of Elgin, its residents and businesses.

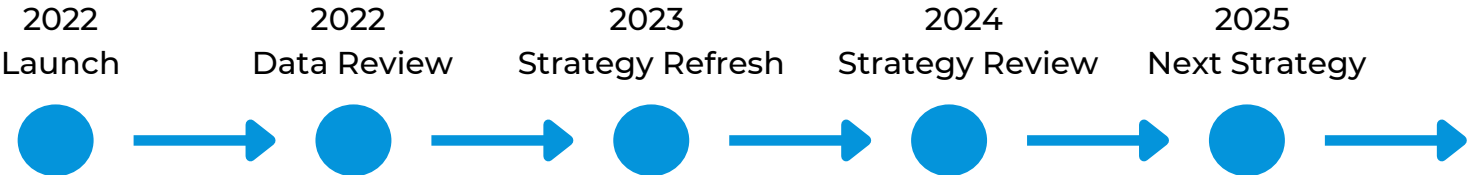




Re/Build

Create a new vision and experience for economic development and investment in Elgin.

Continuous Review and Evaluation



Re/Engage

Goal 1: Engage local businesses, support services, and municipalities by listening and learning about their needs and working with them to become the place where people want to live, work and play.

Priority 1.1: Meet with local entrepreneurs, listen to their needs, and develop a good understanding of the local community's market, assets, and needs.

Actions:

- Recruit and onboard a full-time Business Enterprise Facilitator to listen to the needs of the entrepreneur and connect them with appropriate resources.
- Implement a Business Retention and Expansion program to support local businesses so they can grow, create jobs and stay in our community.
 - Meet with local entrepreneurs to collect business and market data to support economic development planning.
 - After extensive consultation with the local business community, write and implement an action plan to foster business development, investment and job creation.

Priority 1.2: Develop a communications strategy to regularly update economic development stakeholders, and local municipalities on relevant news, opportunities, events and initiatives.

Actions:

- Create a business investment guide for each local municipality to promote our community and to help attract investment to Elgin County.
- Update and enhance business directory.
 - Leverage business directory to restart and promote an economic development newsletter.
 - Start a "What's New in Elgin County"/ "Welcome to Elgin County" feature in the economic development newsletter to highlight new businesses in Elgin as part of a "welcome to doing business in Elgin County" package.
- Review website content and research economic development website best practices to prepare for a website redevelopment.
- Identify and attend relevant tradeshow and events to promote Elgin County.
- Create and implement marketing campaigns to promote existing programs and new opportunities.

Re/Engage

Goal 1: Engage local businesses, support services, and municipalities by listening and learning about their needs and working with them to become the place where people want to live, work and play.

Priority 1.3: Leverage current partnerships and build new partnerships to promote sustainable economic growth in Elgin County.

Actions:

- Continue partnership with the Small Business Enterprise Centre and the Elgin Business Resource Centre and connect entrepreneurs to their resources.
- Leverage partnerships with WOWC, Elgin Workforce Development Network, and London and Area Works in an effort to retain, attract and build the workforce needed to support economic prosperity across Elgin County.
- Continue support of Local Municipal Partners and their Economic Development Committees.
- Strengthen partnership with the City of St. Thomas.
- Partner with local real estate agencies and feature available commercial and industrial real estate in online inventory. Work with local agencies to promote Elgin County for investment and to streamline the site location process.
- Work with local BIAs to promote the revitalization of downtown areas.

Partner considerations:

City of St. Thomas, Small Business Enterprise Centre, Elgin Business Resource Centre, St. Thomas Chamber of Commerce, Aylmer Chamber of Commerce, Western Ontario Warden's Caucus, Elgin Federation of Agriculture, Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, Elgin Workforce Development Network, Local Municipal Partners, local Business Improvement Associations, local Economic Development Committees, South Central Ontario Region Economic Development Corporation, St. Thomas–Elgin Home Builders Association, Provincial and Federal Ministry partners, Community Safety and Well-Being Integration Table, Ontario Southwest Tourism, St. Thomas–Elgin Local Immigration Partnership and more

Re/Imagine

Goal 2: Reimagine how we spend our time and resources to better support local entrepreneurs and to foster an environment of prosperity and opportunity for the County of Elgin, its residents and businesses.

Priority 2.1: Champion an innovative and entrepreneurial ecosystem

Actions:

- Develop regular networking opportunities to connect local entrepreneurs, investors, and business supports.
- Reimagine the Elgincentives program to support the revitalization of local communities.
- Reimagine the Conference Series and host workshops for the local business community on relevant topics and using case studies from the community.

Priority 2.2: Develop a vacant land strategy to encourage the use of vacant sites and to create jobs, increase tax revenue, and attract residents.

Actions:

- Maintain vacant land inventory.
- Overlay existing servicing gaps and future servicing needs onto land inventory map.
- Feature inventory on the economic development website.
- Review status of available industrial lands and market accordingly.
- Dialogue with industrial land owners in strategic employment areas.
- Promote Site Readiness Program to industrial property owners. The Site Readiness Program provides financial support to property owners to complete site preparatory work for eligible industrial properties.

Re/Build

Goal 3: Create a new vision and experience for economic development and investment in Elgin.

Priority 3.1: Develop a community approach to economic development that energizes and empowers our local municipal partners to embrace and promote the Elgin experience.

Actions:

- Meet regularly with representatives from each municipality to discuss local priorities and local trends and opportunities.
- Start an ongoing discussion and partnership around revitalizing downtown areas.
- Stay informed about what is happening in each community and promote local events.

Priority 3.2: Ensure that we have the infrastructure required to attract new business and support workforce demands

Actions:

- Advocate on behalf of our local business community on emerging/current issues affecting the economic vitality of Elgin, including:
 - Servicing,
 - Transportation,
 - Housing,
 - Broadband,
 - Childcare, and
 - Other issues as they arise.

Priority 3.3: Promote investment opportunities as they relate to the Elgin experience

Actions:

- Promote and support unique investment opportunities, including:
 - Filming in Elgin
 - Agricultural and related local food initiatives
- Extend the Elgin experience, including:
 - Facilitate the growth of the tourism sector's shoulder season programming
 - Review accommodation assets and develop a strategy to increase options of places for visitors to stay by reconsidering the Alternative Accommodation Handbook.
 - In partnership with Community and Cultural Services, support creative industries and cultural programming to generate economic growth and enhance the tourism experience.

Tourism Strategy

2022-2025

Re/Engage, Re/Imagine, and Re/Build





Re/Engage

Engage local businesses, support services, and municipalities by listening and learning about their needs and working with them to become the place where people want to live, work and play.

Re/Imagine

Reimagine and market a destination experience for Elgin County, including what it means to call Elgin County home for business, investment and recreation.

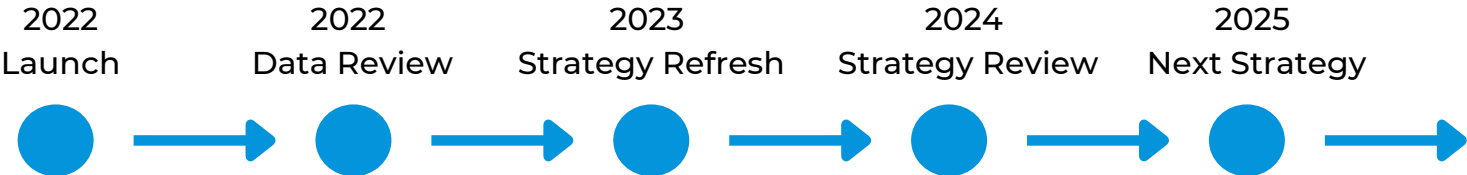




Re/Build

Create memorable and new Elgin experiences and develop the County as a four-season destination.

Continuous Review and Evaluation



Re/Engage

Goal 1: Engage private and public partners by listening and learning about their needs and working with them to become the place where people want to live, work and play.

Priority 1.1: Develop a communications strategy to regularly update tourism stakeholders, municipalities, and visitors on relevant news, opportunities, events and initiatives.

Actions:

- Attract new tourism operators by posting tourism related investment opportunities on the economic development website and promote on social media.
- Continue email newsletter to tourism stakeholders (operators). Explore opportunities to combine the stakeholder newsletter with the Economic Development newsletter.
- Update and grow visitor database. Use visitor database to restart and promote a tourism newsletter.
- Start a “What’s New in Elgin County”/ “Welcome to Elgin County” feature in both the stakeholder and visitor newsletter to highlight new tourism businesses in Elgin.
- Work with realtors to develop and distribute “Welcome to Elgin” packages to new homeowners in Elgin and St. Thomas.
- Restart the events calendar on the tourism website. Engage local tourism operators to add their events to the calendar.
- Review website content and research tourism website best practices to prepare for a website redevelopment.
- Identify and attend relevant tradeshow and events to promote Elgin County.
- Create dynamic social media content.

Priority 1.2: Leverage current partnerships and build new partnerships to promote the growth of tourism in Elgin County.

Actions:

- Identify businesses for Southwest Ontario Tourism Corporation (SWOTC) product and workforce development programs, support applications and participation
- Identify signature experiences and destinations for SWOTC promotion.
- Promote SWOTC and provincial programming to local operators.
- Collaborate with Community and Cultural Services in developing experiential programming.
- Strengthen existing partnerships, and explore new partnerships.

Partner considerations:

SWOTC, Ontario by Bike, Ontario Trails, Elgin Federation of Agriculture, Community and Cultural Services, Local Municipal Partners

Re/Imagine

Goal 2: Create and market a destination experience for Elgin County, including what it means to call Elgin County home for business, investment and recreation.

Priority 2.1: Define the Elgin destination experience.

Actions:

- Research current market trends and issues that affect tourism in Elgin County.
- Develop an updated inventory of tourism assets in Elgin County.
- Identify Elgin's unique products and signature experiences.
- Develop a marketing plan that will define and promote the Elgin experience.

Priority 2.2: Work with local tourism operators and municipalities to strengthen existing tourism experiences and connect them to the Elgin experience.

- Work with Engineering Services to support recommendations from the Cycling Master Plan and promote existing cycling trails (maps, website, murals etc.).
- Identify, enhance, and promote signature Elgin County experiences.
 - Water activities
 - Festivals and events
 - Family destinations
 - Dog friendly activities
 - Farm visits
 - Cycling trips
- Work with the City of St. Thomas and the Heritage Centre to redevelop Elgin's Heritage Guide.

Priority 2.3: Work with local tourism operators and municipalities to promote tourism experiences and events.

- Maintain and enhance annual visitor's guide.
- Develop a seasonal community-based event guide.
- Continue to use tourism kiosks as information centres and promotional hubs.
- Use tourism cruiser as a mobile information centre.
- Continue to manage, promote, and enhance the tourism signage program.
- Continue to identify, invite and host bloggers to tour and promote Elgin County.
- Prepare sample itineraries for bloggers that tell Elgin's story.
- Use different media to promote Elgin's story.
 - Welcome Home video campaign, Elgin Eats social media campaign, Fall for Elgin, Shop Elgin, Maple Syrup Trail, Winter Experiences
- Leverage user generated content. Encourage visitors to attend events and sign up for the tourism newsletter. Encourage visitors to take/post photographs of them engaging in activities in Elgin, using promoted hashtags.

Re/Build

Goal 3: Working with local tourism operators and municipalities, create memorable/new Elgin experiences and develop the County as a four-season destination.

Priority 3.1: Develop a four-season activities and events plan to feature core tourism assets, which will help to build the County's destination experience and encourage year-round attractions to engage visitors and residents.

Actions:

- Host/coordinate workshops on shoulder season programming (SWOTC).
- Work with stakeholders to develop and promote suggested itineraries for shoulder season getaways (promote via videos, website, brochures).
- Develop marketing campaigns for each season.
 - Maple Syrup Trail
 - Fall for Elgin
 - Winter in Elgin
 - Shop Elgin
 - Active Elgin

Priority 3.2: Build culinary tourism experience and enhance Savour Elgin guide/program.

Actions:

- Review membership package and membership criteria. Recruit new members for the program.
- Redevelop Savour Elgin subpage to make it more interactive and visually appealing.
- Develop and promote a video series highlighting Savour Elgin members.
- Refresh the Savour Elgin guide and update photography for guide.

Priority 3.3: Enhance wayfinding and visitor services to improve the tourism experience

Actions:

- Partner with the local municipalities and tourism operators to improve access to businesses and other key destinations.
- Partner with local municipalities and tourism operators to create a consistent look and feel to community assets.



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