

**To:** Warden and Members of County Council

**From:** Director of Corporate Services

## Economic Development Group Recommendations

### RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. That Report No. CS 2023-29 entitled “Economic Development Group Recommendations” be received;
2. And further, that staff be directed to facilitate annual Economic Development forums to advance collaboration and seek enhanced service delivery as it relates to local economic development that will encourage participation from the following:
  - Local Economic Development Offices
  - The Small Business Centre
  - Community Futures Oxford
  - SCOR EDC
  - Community Employment Services/Multi-Service Centre
  - Tourism Oxford
  - Director or designate from Oxford County, including
    - CAO
    - Human Services
    - Community Planning
    - Public Works
    - Corporate Services.

### REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

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- This report responds to Council direction for staff to report on the implications of the recommendations presented to Council on June 14, 2023 by the Economic Development Group.

#### Implementation Points

Staff will arrange and facilitate an annual Economic Development Forum with a vision for collaboration as described herein, and report outcomes to Council.

At the discretion of the CAO, additional meetings will be facilitated by County staff with the appropriate local economic development agencies to more fully understand and address

references in the Economic Development Group’s Recommendations and any others that may arise during an annual forum.

**Financial Impact**







The recommendations contained in this report will have no financial impact beyond what has been approved in the current year’s operating budget.

Any financial implications that may arise from the annual forum or supplementary discussions will be brought forward as part of the annual Business Plan and Budget process. More urgent matters will be raised by reporting to Council as required.

**Communications**

Information will be presented to County Council from the Economic Development Forum following the annual sessions.

**Strategic Plan (2020-2022)**

					
<i>WORKS WELL TOGETHER</i>	<i>WELL CONNECTED</i>	<i>SHAPES THE FUTURE</i>	<i>INFORMS &amp; ENGAGES</i>	<i>PERFORMS &amp; DELIVERS</i>	<i>POSITIVE IMPACT</i>
1.i. 1.ii.	2.i. 2.ii. 2.iii.	3.i. 3.ii. 3.iii.			

**DISCUSSION**

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**Background**

As part of the County’s 2023 Business Plan and Budget, at their meeting held January 11, 2023, Council adopted the following resolution:

“Whereas for the past decade, the local economy has enjoyed a period of stable growth with ultra low interest rates and inflation;

And whereas the past few months has seen a significant change in the local economic environment with higher interest rates and inflation which could potentially lead to a more unstable local economic situation;

And whereas Oxford County provides funding through their business plan and budget process to support Economic Development in Oxford County to several partners to promote healthy and sustainable economic development;

And whereas the uncertainty of the current local economic climate may require some new initiatives and adjustment as to how Oxford County and our partners address Economic Development in the future;

Therefore be it resolved that as a condition of providing grants for SCOR, Oxford Connections, The Small Business Development Centre and Community Futures Oxford as outlined in the 2023 Business Plan and Budget, that the following groups be asked to create a committee to collaborate on an overall economic development strategy to help guide our economic initiatives;

And further, that the committee be comprised of one representative from each of, the City of Woodstock Economic Development Department, the Town of Tillsonburg Economic Development Department, the Town of Ingersoll Economic Development Department, the Rural Oxford Economic Development group, SCOR, The Small Business Centre, Community Futures Oxford, and to include the Oxford County Warden and Councillors Schaefer and Wheaton;

And further, this committee is asked to bring forward a report to County Council to provide both a vision or strategy for a sustainable and robust local economy and how all partners can work collaboratively for all areas of Oxford County. This report will be due no later than June 28, 2023.”

In response, County staff arranged three meetings in between March and May, 2023 for the Economic Development Group to inform a report to be delivered to Council.

## Comments

At County Council’s June 14, 2023 meeting, the Economic Development Group presented a report entitled “[Economic Development Focus Group Economic Summary and Vision for Collaboration](#)”.

The presentation addressed the following:

- **Mandate** – being the resolution of County Council passed on January 11, 2023.
- **Oxford overview** – identifying the diverse and unique opportunities which make Oxford a great place to live, work and visit.
- **Economic analysis** – looks at the business environment of Ontario and locally in Oxford; and how it is supported by the various collaboration agencies in Oxford County.
- **Oxford County SWOT** – suggests what factors contribute to a positive outlook for Oxford County; opposing weaknesses; strong opportunities for growth and development; and threats to our economy.
- **Innovation and Technology** – refers to how Oxford demonstrates a role in innovation and technology.

- **Recommendations** – six recommendations were identified that are further explained in more detail below.

In response to the Economic Development Group presentation, County Council passed the following resolution containing staff direction:

“Resolved that the information provided in the delegation by the Oxford County Economic Development Partnerships be received;

And further, that staff consider the recommendations presented in the report and report back to council on implications of implementing the recommendations as presented.”

### Economic Development Group Recommendations

The following staff responses to each of the recommendations contained in the report are based on staff’s interpretation of the issues and discussions raised during the meetings leading up to and including the Group’s presentation to Council.

**Recommendation 1** – make supporting local level Economic Development a priority at the County level.

**Staff comment** – this recommendation infers that County inter-departmental responsiveness and service standards within all departments needs to recognize that economic development investors require a short turn around when seeking confirmation on property attributes and servicing availability/capacity required to make investment decisions and they are not willing to wait before moving to other investment options. More specifically, they suggested Planning and Public Works should consider more resources to ensure the Economic Development Offices are able to address those investment inquiries in a timely manner. They also referenced the County’s Planning Model as an efficient and effective service delivery model.

Furthermore, the Economic Development Offices informed that investors are seeking serviced lands to condense the timeline to complete construction and start earning revenue from their investment. Historically, the County has not typically invested in pre-servicing industrial lands.

At County Council’s August 9, 2023 meeting, Council approved staff Report No. CP 2023-250, directing Planning to bring forward, as part of the draft 2024 Business Plan and Budget, a staffing plan to address a broad range of planning related legislation, regulations, policies, programs and other implementation measures arising from the Provincial’s “Housing Supply Action Plans”. This staffing plan could also be used to include measures to ensure that the appropriate capacity and expertise is included to address additional supports if further explored with the Economic Development Group. Similarly, further discussion would be required with the Economic Development Group to better inform the service areas where response times and service standards are not meeting their needs.

**Recommendation 2** – Host an exploratory discussion to see how internal County departments and local level economic development offices can work more efficiently and collaboratively to support development in the region.

**Staff comment** – staff are prepared to engage in further discussion with the Economic Development Group to better inform how internal County departments and local level Economic Development Offices can work more efficiently and collaboratively to support development in the region.

**Recommendation 3** – Develop a Housing Strategy to include attainable housing for entry level wage earners.

**Staff comment** – staff have engaged a consultant to review and update the “10 Year Shelter Plan – Housing for All” to reflect the revised population growth figures, consider new initiatives in alignment with changing market conditions and current financial challenges, among other items. As part of that process, the 100% Housed Plan will be incorporated into the 10 Year Shelter Plan to align that vision with the housing development strategy. Supporting the development of affordable housing units in the County continues to be a priority.

In addition, the County has been undertaking measures to increase residential density within the Official Plan policies to assist in increasing attainable housing.

Staff are prepared to have further dialogue with the Economic Development Group related to these initiatives to ensure all areas of the housing continuum are considered in the County’s housing strategies.

**Recommendation 4** – Continue to fund the Economic Development Partners currently funded by Oxford County.

**Staff comment** – funding for the Economic Development Partners totalled \$301,000 in 2023, which has increased by \$9,000 over the past five years. The funding is in the form of grants to Oxford Connection \$50,000; Oxford Physician Recruitment Group \$30,000; The Small Business Centre \$50,000; Community Futures Oxford – Future Oxford Legacy Fund \$146,000; and South Central Ontario Region (SCOR) in the form of a membership fee of \$25,000.

Grant allocations in Oxford are subject to Council approval as part of the annual Business Plan and Budget process. In the fall of each year, community grant recipients are invited to register as a delegation and present to Council the current year’s progress and year end projections regarding project(s) and/or programs funded or partially funded by a County grant, supported by outcomes/impacts and key performance indicators. In addition, if they are seeking full or partial grant funding for a project(s) or programs in the next year they would present their request, supported by the organization’s budget with expected outcomes/impacts and key performance indicators that will be achieved with the assistance of County grant funding.

Further collaboration with the Economic Development Group would be of assistance to ensure these grant allocations continue to have a positive impact and remain relevant in light of local economic, social and/or environmental factors changing over time.

**Recommendation 5** – Encourage County departments to consult with local level Economic Development Offices on strategies and master plans prior to public consultation.

**Staff comment** – staff are prepared to collaborate with the Economic Development Group to determine a more effective approach to consultation on master plans and studies of interest to the Economic Development Group.

**Recommendation 6** – Create an annual Economic Development forum with the following to meet at their discretion:

- Local Economic Development Offices
- The Small Business Centre
- Community Futures Oxford
- SCOR EDC
- Community Employment Services/Multi-Service Centre
- Tourism Oxford
- Director or Designate from Oxford County
  - County CAO
  - Human Services
  - Corporate Services.

**Staff comment** – staff fully support this recommendation as reflected in the recommendations contained in this report.

## **Conclusions**

Staff are of the opinion that the recommendations contained in this report will improve collaboration among the key economic development agencies focused on local economic development and will assist in achieving a sustainable and robust local economy.

## **SIGNATURES**

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### **Departmental Approval:**

Original signed by

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Lynn S. Buchner, CGA, CPA  
Director of Corporate Services

### **Approved for submission:**

Original signed by

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Benjamin R. Addley  
Chief Administrative Officer