



DRAFT FOR COUNTY COUNCIL REVIEW

Oxford County Strategic Advocacy Framework

Introduction

Oxford County Council and staff care deeply about the future of our communities and are committed to acting with transparency, accountability, and respect in all matters.

As Oxford County's first Strategic Advocacy Framework, this document is further demonstration of that commitment and the dedication to achieving the goals and objectives within the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan.

Policy and legislation decisions made at the provincial and federal levels can have profound impacts to us locally in our communities within Oxford County. As a result, intergovernmental advocacy is imperative at the municipal level, which is reflective of the recent changes to the Manager of Strategic Initiatives and Intergovernmental Relations role.

Oxford County is an active participant in conversations at the regional, provincial and federal levels. By establishing a framework, we will continue to engage in this type of work but in a more strategic and coordinated manner.

Having an advocacy framework will provide guidance and focus to staff's intergovernmental advocacy efforts, in alignment with County Council's Strategic Plan and reflective of evolving community needs. Further, it is important that we connect with partners and stakeholders to contribute as necessary in the key conversations that directly impact the services that we provide to our residents.

Partnerships

Effective advocacy is best done in collaboration with partners and stakeholders. Oftentimes, when multiple partners come together with a shared voice and a common interest, there is greater likelihood for positive outcomes. Encouraging conversations with the right partners and building strong partnerships with those same partners will help Oxford County in successfully addressing community needs. It is important that we continue to identify meaningful partnerships and make new connections as necessary so that we can deliver on the priorities of our Strategic Plan.

Local

Oxford County has solid relationships with many of its community partners and actively participates in a variety of groups and organizational tables. We continue to strengthen the relationships with our area municipalities and believe in being contributing partners with local service providers. Examples of our local partners include human service providers, youth organizations, schools, hospitals and local businesses.

Regional and Intergovernmental

Engaging with stakeholders more broadly is also important to the success of our advocacy efforts and our overall service delivery. Leveraging similar perspectives and influence of other organizations can significantly enhance the outcomes, as will working together regarding policies and issues that may impact a broader region or more specifically Oxford County.

We will continue to maintain and enhance relationships with provincial and federal ministers, members of parliament and other ministerial staff. Participation in coordinated associations such as the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), the Western Ontario Warden's Caucus (WOWC), Rural Ontario Municipalities Association will also contribute to our overall effectiveness. These associations present opportunities to further leverage collective interests and influence. Oxford County staff are actively engaged with these associations, working to influence decisions that align with our priorities and goals.

Guiding Principles

Oxford County has always been an active advocate for its communities' needs and priorities. This framework will help to make our efforts even more effective and efficient, maximizing the outcomes.

Intergovernmental advocacy is often a lengthy process, sometimes with very incremental progress. Strategic intergovernmental advocacy can also take a few steps forward and very quickly take multiple steps backwards. It is an evolving and constantly changing environment and therefore our approach and strategies need to reflect that. With that in mind, the County's preferred approach to advocacy is based on the following principles.

- Focused on our Strategic Plan or having direct impact on current service delivery levels
- Timely and responsive to changing priorities and community needs as well as priorities and interests of the government of the day
- Collaborative and in consideration of broader advocacy efforts by our partners, such as AMO and WOWC

Strategic Plan Focus

With the launch of the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, Oxford County has a clear direction and vision for both its communities and for service delivery. This Plan streamlines advocacy by prioritizing efforts and providing overarching guidance. The Senior Management Team has reviewed the

objectives within the Plan to specifically identify which goals require advocacy in order to advance and ultimately accomplish.

This review process will be ongoing while continuously monitoring progress, to ensure that the approach is appropriately aligned with the current Strategic Plan. Additionally, it is important to note that there may be occasional situations in which advocacy is required due to a potential impact on our existing service delivery levels. Although that advocacy may not technically fit within the scope of the existing Strategic Plan, it would be important for us to engage in that work to have the best possible outcome for our communities and to maintain our service delivery expectations when possible.

Timely and Responsive

Advocacy efforts can take years to fully achieve outcomes and sometimes fail to reach the intended conclusion. Despite this, it is important to continue to advocate on behalf of our communities and residents' needs. Oxford County is committed to this and will prioritize advocacy that is timely and responsive. Issues or conversations may change and fluctuate depending on a local situation or need.

It is also important that the County monitor the government of the day and adapt strategies depending on their interests and priorities. Cabinet shuffles for example can quickly alter the direction of an advocacy plan. Federal and provincial elections can significantly impact if and how we present our requests. Sometimes it is best to alter priorities and topics if there is no political interest by the government of the day. Other times, we may intentionally pursue something that is critically important to Oxford County, so that it becomes a priority of theirs as well. Overall, our advocacy will be flexible and adaptable to best meet achieve results.

Collaborative

Intergovernmental advocacy can be approached through a variety of lenses. As an active community partner, it is important for Oxford County to approach advocacy in the same way. Depending on the topic or issue, we will determine what, if any collaboration is necessary. This may include being supportive of others in their advocacy through letters of support; making intentional connections and partnerships to advance our priorities; or maximizing the influence that existing groups have.

In other words, certain issues might be better addressed at a more regional level, such as through the Western Ontario Warden's Caucus, while another issue might be best addressed with a smaller, more localized group with direct connection to its impacts. Going forward, Oxford County will look more critically at these opportunities and endeavour to engage with partners as necessary to produce the best outcomes.

Methods and Approaches

There are a variety of ways in which the County could engage in advocacy related work, many of which we already do. In consideration of the above-mentioned principles, the specific approaches we use will change and adapt as necessary. Methods may include:

- delegations at Ministry attended municipal conferences (AMO, ROMA);
- local MP, MPP and Minister meetings;
- issue-specific meetings with stakeholders and invitations to meet with relevant Ministers and their staff;
- parliamentary advocacy days (Queen's Park);
- priority issues position papers and briefing notes;
- legislative consultation responses; and
- general inter-government correspondence.

This is not an inclusive list and there are additional methods or variations of approaches that will be utilized when relevant.

Summary

Adopting a Strategic Advocacy Framework is new for Oxford County but will serve as a valuable resource for our organization and broader communities. It is our hope that this framework will ultimately support County Council, senior leadership and staff in ensuring Oxford County continues to be a welcoming, healthy and thriving community today and for the future.

Based on Oxford County's dedication and commitment to achieving the objectives within the Strategic Plan, this framework will provide direction, collaboration and consistency in how our organization engages with other levels of government when working to get our needs heard.

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