

REPORT TO COUNTY COUNCIL

Phase 1 Comprehensive Review – Updates to County and Area Municipal Growth Forecasts

To: Warden and Members of County Council

From: Director of Community Planning

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Oxford County Council receive Report CP 2024-323 and the proposed population, household and employment forecasts and municipal growth allocations, prepared by Watson & Associates Economists Ltd., dated October 22, 2024, for information purposes;
2. And further, that Oxford County Council authorize Planning staff to circulate the planning report and draft findings to the Area Municipalities for their information and proceed with the next steps in the study process, including external consultation, on the basis of the proposed forecasts and municipal allocations outlined in Report CP 2024-323.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- In January 2024, County Council authorized staff to retain Watson & Associates Economists Ltd., in partnership with Dillon Consulting, to undertake updates to the current **County and Area Municipal growth forecasts** and land supply information to inform growth management policies and various other County and Area Municipal projects and initiatives (see Report CP 2024-31).
- The initial findings indicate that the County will continue to experience substantial population, household and employment growth over the 40 year forecast period (2021-2061). All eight Area Municipalities in the County are forecasted to experience residential and employment growth over the current planning period.
- The draft findings were developed in close consultation with a Technical Advisory Committee consisting of County and Area Municipal staff, who provided input and feedback on local concerns, trends, initiatives and other considerations.

- The proposed forecasts and allocations will be circulated to the Area Municipal Councils for their information and made available for public information. At such time as the remaining steps in the study process have been completed a draft final report, including the land needs assessment, will be prepared for further consultation with the Area Municipalities, prior to bringing a 'final' draft of the study to County Council for approval.

IMPLEMENTATION POINTS

This report is intended to provide Council with an overview of the proposed updates to the County and Area Municipal growth forecasts and allocations and obtain Council direction to proceed with the next steps of the Phase 1 Comprehensive Review study process (i.e. external consultation, land needs analysis, review of intensification potential and other findings and recommendations) on the basis of these proposed forecasts.

Once the final study has been approved by Council, the updated population, household and employment forecasts will be incorporated into the County Official Plan to provide the updated information necessary to inform growth management and other policies. The updated forecasts will also serve to inform a range of other County and Area Municipal initiatives and projects, including servicing studies and master plans, secondary plans, area studies, housing studies etc.

Financial Impact

This report will have no direct financial impacts beyond those approved in the current year's budget. However, the findings and recommendations of the final report are expected to have potential financial implications related to planning for growth (e.g. secondary planning studies) and related infrastructure which will need to be further considered as part of future budgets and implementation processes.

Communications

A Speak Up Oxford page has been created and will continue to be updated as the project progresses. Once County Council has received this report and the associated presentation from the consultant, they will be posted on Speak Up Oxford and distributed to the Area Municipalities for their information.

An initial stakeholder questionnaire was sent out to development industry stakeholders in September (via Survey Monkey) to obtain their feedback and insights on residential and employment development trends, opportunities and challenges. Responses were compiled and shared with the consultant team to help further inform various aspects of the study. A stakeholder information session is also proposed as part of the next phase of the study process to present the initial findings and obtain further feedback. This is intended to be open to a broad range of stakeholders, including development industry representatives, agricultural organizations, and the general public.

2023-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

Oxford County Council approved the [2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#) on September 13, 2023. The Plan outlines 39 goals across three strategic pillars that advance Council’s vision of “Working together for a healthy, vibrant, and sustainable future.” These pillars are: (1) *Promoting community vitality*, (2) *Enhancing environmental sustainability*, and (3) *Fostering progressive government*.

The recommendations in this report support the following strategic goals.

Strategic Plan Pillars and Goals

PILLAR 1	PILLAR 2	PILLAR 3
		
Promoting community vitality	Enhancing environmental sustainability	Fostering progressive government
<p>Goal 1.1 – 100% Housed</p> <p>Goal 1.2 – Sustainable infrastructure and development</p>	<p>Goal 2.2 – Preserve and enhance our natural environment</p>	<p>Goal 3.1 – Continuous improvement and results-driven solutions</p> <p>Goal 3.4 – Financial sustainability</p>

See: [Oxford County 2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#)

DISCUSSION

Background

The new 2024 Provincial Planning Statement (PPS), enacted on October 20, 2024, indicates that planning authorities/municipalities shall ensure sufficient land is made available to accommodate an appropriate range and mix of employment, housing and other land uses to meet projected needs for a minimum of 20 years and not more than 30 years. Further, the PPS requires that the upper-tier municipality, in consultation with the lower-tier municipalities, shall identify, coordinate and allocate population, housing and employment projections for lower-tier municipalities.

To assist in addressing this PPS requirement and various other considerations, the County has retained Watson & Associates Economists Ltd. (Watson) to undertake a Phase 1 Comprehensive Review to update the population, household and employment forecasts and land supply analysis for the County and eight Area Municipalities. The findings from this study will serve to inform the County’s growth management policies and various other County and Area Municipal projects and initiatives. The forecasts in this study will update the [current County and Area Municipal growth forecasts](#) which were adopted in 2020.

Watson has developed the updated draft population, household, and employment forecasts and municipal allocations in close consultation with a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), comprised of select County staff and staff representatives from each of the eight Area Municipalities. This process provided numerous opportunities for County and Area Municipal review and input on local concerns, trends, initiatives and other considerations relating to growth being considered as part of the study. The TAC has reviewed and accepted the proposed forecasts and municipal allocations attached to this report.

The attached package (Attachment 1) and presentation by Watson (Attachment 2) provide an overview of the findings to date, which are also summarized below.

The next phases of the study will assess the adequacy of the residential and employment land supply in the County and each of the eight Area Municipalities, including the potential need to designate additional land for residential and/or employment purposes to accommodate the forecasted demand for the 30-year planning period (2024-2054). These next phases will also consider residential intensification opportunities and potential land needs for 'dry' rural employment uses as components of the overall land needs analysis.

Comments

The growth forecast component of the draft Phase 1 Comprehensive Review study addresses the amount, type and location of population, housing and employment growth for the County and eight Area Municipalities for a 40-year period (2021 to 2061). A 40-year forecast period was selected to ensure the County and Area Municipalities have the necessary forecast information available to be able to assess potential growth needs for a period somewhat beyond the current 30 year planning horizon, where deemed necessary or advisable (e.g. planning for infrastructure and public service facilities, protection of employment areas etc.), and maintain growth land need information for a continuous 30 year planning horizon over the next 5 plus years (i.e. until the next growth forecast update is completed).

The 2024 Provincial Planning Statement directs that planning authorities shall base population and employment forecasts on the Ontario Population Projections published by the Ministry of Finance (MOF) and may modify, as appropriate. It is generally understood that reasonable modifications to the MOF forecasts can be made based on other information sources. Accordingly, the development of the proposed forecasts attached to this report involved assessment of the MOF Fall 2024 Population Projections for Oxford County (released October 1, 2024), in addition to examination of macro-economic influences and broader regional growth drivers, recent development and demographic trends, and other long range planning assumptions for the County and the Area Municipalities. The most recent Fall 2024 MOF forecast to 2051 appear to be a reasonable reflection of expected growth in Oxford and generally correspond with the medium (most likely) scenario that Watson would have recommended for Oxford in the absence of such Provincial direction. For these reasons, the proposed population forecast to 2051, with modification to the timing of the growth in the first few years, is consistent with the Fall 2024 MOF population projections.

The following sections provide an overview of the key initial findings.

(a) Background Review

Extensive background review was undertaken to develop an understanding of the overall demographic and socio-economic context for the County and Area Municipalities to inform the updates to the population, housing and employment forecasts. From that review, several factors were identified as having a significant impact on population and employment growth in the County and Area Municipalities over the 40 year forecast period (2021-2061), including:

- **Age Structure** - Age structure is a key influence on the forecast. The population in the County is aging, with the 75+ age group representing the fastest growing population cohort to 2051 due to the aging 'baby boomer generation' currently living in the County. This is anticipated to place increasing demand on the need for housing for seniors and affordable housing, as well as community and social services. However, significant intra-provincial migration of younger adults with or without children, will provide population growth in younger age cohorts that will contribute to the labour force and need for a range of housing options.
- **Net Migration** – The recent high levels of growth in Oxford County have largely been driven by out-migration from the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH). A review of growth and development trends over the last decade indicates a changing role for the County within Southwestern Ontario. The County's adjacency to the rapidly growing GGH where housing prices are generally higher and/or the availability of ground-related housing is low, coupled with the trend towards working from home, proximity to major highways, employment opportunities, and lifestyle amenities make the County attractive to potential residents. The outlook for Oxford is for higher growth than in recent decades and prior forecasts, with a continuation of high levels of net in-migration of people in younger age groups from other areas of Ontario.
- **Employment Growth and Economic Shifts** - The County has a notable number of in-bound commuters from Waterloo Region, the City of London, and Middlesex and Elgin Counties, particularly related to the broad range of industrial activities throughout the County. Much of the rapidly growing industrial base is also oriented to relationships with the GGH employment market. The County's proximity to Highways 401 and 403 also represent a key driver of the County's economic competitive position.

Industrial growth in the County is expected to remain strong, along with continued growth in population related employment (e.g. commercial and institutional type uses that primarily provide goods and services to the resident population). Work at home and off-site (i.e. contractors and construction sector) employment is also anticipated to comprise a notable amount of future employment growth. Collectively, strong residential growth, a competitive local and regional economy, and increased remote work opportunities, are expected to drive significant employment growth opportunities across the County.

- **Growth Distribution** - The distribution of growth within Oxford continues to be largely in keeping with historic patterns. Much of the residential growth since 2016 has been in Woodstock, Tillsonburg and Ingersoll, with considerable residential growth also occurring in several of the Townships. The distribution of employment growth over the 2016-2024 period varied, but all municipalities experienced growth to varying degrees. All Area Municipalities are forecast to experience higher population, housing and employment growth relative to historical growth levels over the forecast horizon.

The long-term pattern of growth and the existing concentrations of households and employment in the County are generally expected to continue and all Area Municipalities are expected to experience growth in population, households and employment over the forecast horizon.

b) Population and Housing Forecast 2021-2061

The County is forecast to experience substantial population growth over the 2021-2061 period, driven primarily by relatively strong levels of net migration.

Oxford County has a historical average growth rate of 1.1% and experienced robust population growth from 2016-2021. Based on housing construction and permits since 2021, the forecasted growth rate for the County is 1.4% which is expected to be largely sustained through the forecast period.

By 2061, the County’s population is forecast to grow by approximately 96,900 people from the 2021 population of 126,700 to a total population 223,600 and the number of households is forecast to grow by approximately 42,000, based on an average yearly increase of 1,050 new housing units. The proportion of housing unit types over the 40-year period is expected to be 52% low density (i.e. single detached dwellings and semi-detached dwellings), 22% medium density (i.e. townhouses and apartments in duplexes), and 26% high density (i.e. studio, 1-bedroom, 2-bedroom, and larger apartments and secondary suites/additional residential units).

All the Area Municipalities are forecast to experience substantial housing growth during the forecast period, with such growth concentrated primarily in Woodstock, Tillsonburg and Ingersoll and, to a lesser extent, the five Townships. The number of persons per unit (PPU) is forecast to decline from 2.65 in 2021 to 2.49 in 2061. The decrease in PPU is largely due to an aging population; however, the downward trend is not as steep as in previous forecasts due to expected in-migration of younger adults and children and the growing prevalence of multi-generational households.

The following Figures 1-3 illustrate the draft population and household forecasts for the County over the forecast period, the detailed tables are attached as Attachment 1 to this Report.

Figure 1: Draft Forecast – Oxford County Population (2021-2061)

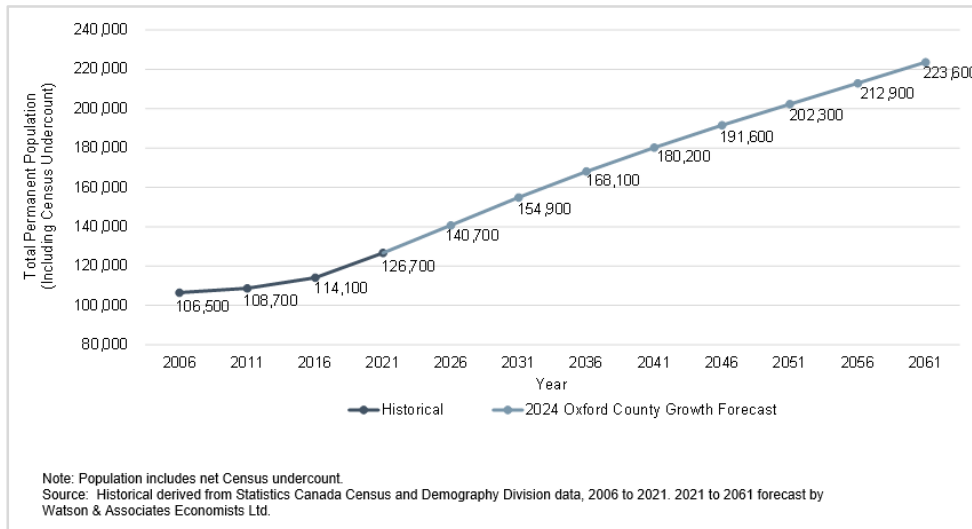


Figure 2: Draft Forecast - Persons per Unit (PPU) (2021-2061)

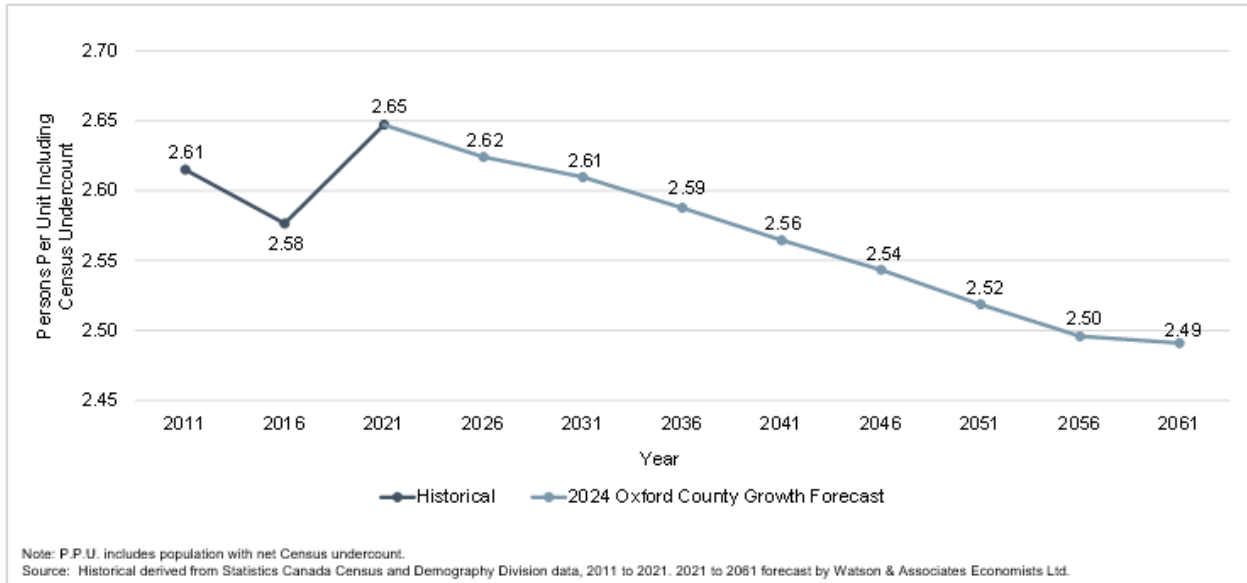
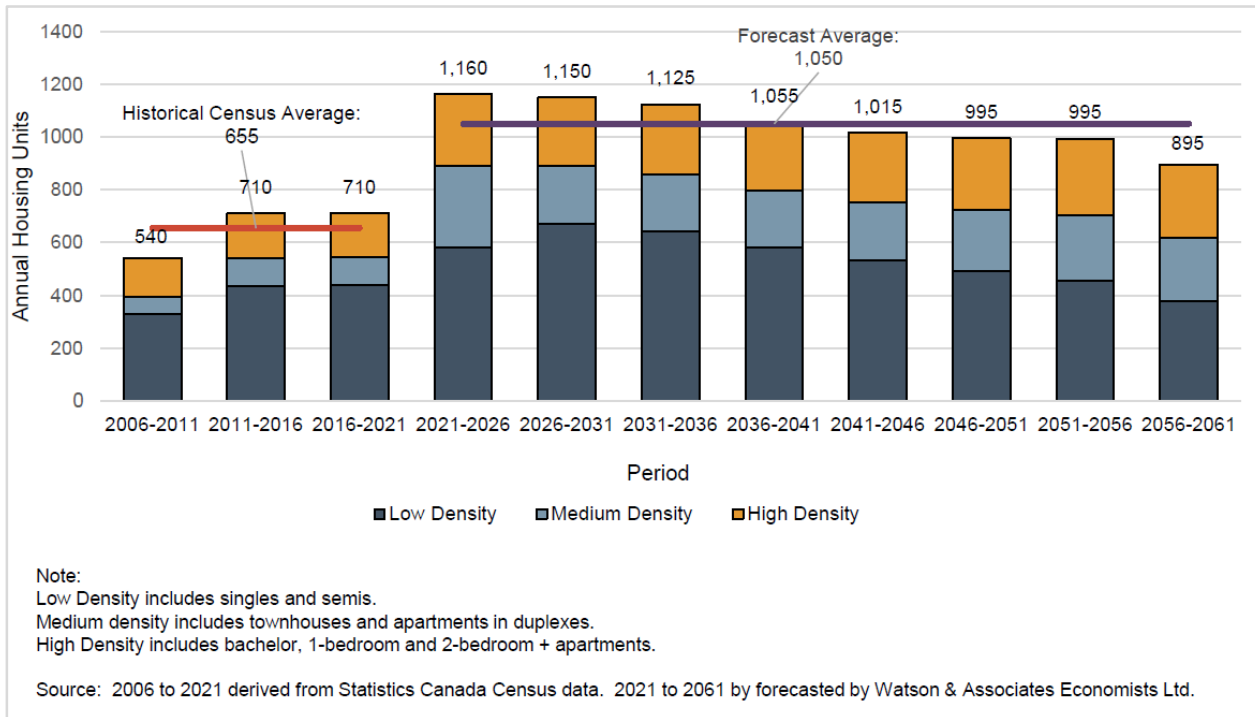


Figure 3: Draft Forecasted County-wide Incremental Housing Growth in New Units (2021-2061)



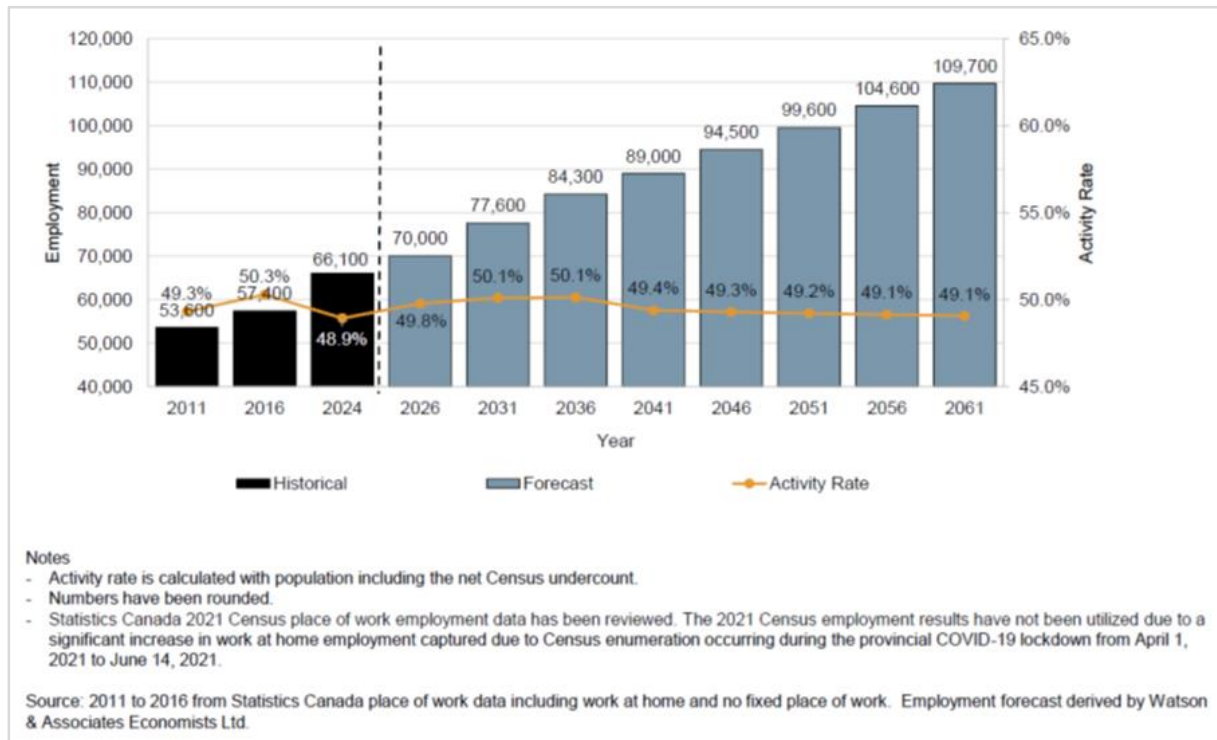
c) Employment Forecast 2024-2061

The forecasted employment growth for the County is based on a comprehensive review of employment growth potential within the County’s commuter-shed and an assessment of other key growth drivers. Based on this analysis, total employment in the County is forecast to grow by 1.4% annually resulting in approximately 43,600 new jobs by 2061 for a total of approximately 109,700 jobs. All Area Municipalities in the County are expected to experience some employment growth over the forecast period.

While it is anticipated that the County will see substantial industrial employment, population related employment (e.g. commercial and institutional) remains a large component of forecasted employment growth for most of the Area Municipalities.

The following Figure 4 illustrates the draft employment forecasts for the County.

Figure 4: Oxford County Employment Forecast (2024-2061)



d) Area Municipal Growth Shares 2021-2061

The forecasted population growth is proposed to be allocated as follows: 43% in the City of Woodstock; 21% in the Town of Tillsonburg; 8% in the Town of Ingersoll; with the remaining 28% distributed across the rural Townships. The allocation of population growth is based on historical trends and other factors such as demographics, anticipated employment growth opportunities within the surrounding market area, local employment opportunities, and the appeal of areas to a range of demographic groups. Figures 5 and 6 provide the anticipated population and household growth by area municipality.

Figure 5: Oxford County Population Growth by Area Municipality (2021-2061)

Area Municipality	Historical Population		2061	Total Annual Population Growth	
	2011	2021		2011-2021	2021-2061
Woodstock	38,800	48,700	90,300	990	1,040
Tillsonburg	15,700	18,800	39,300	310	510
Ingersoll	12,500	14,300	22,600	180	210
Blandford Blenheim	7,600	7,900	11,400	30	90
East Zorra-Tavistock	7,000	8,200	14,400	120	160
Norwich	11,000	11,900	18,500	90	170
South-West Oxford	7,800	8,000	11,600	20	90
Zorra	8,300	9,000	15,500	70	160
Oxford County	108,700	126,800	223,600	1,810	2,420

Note: Figures may not add precisely due to rounding. Population includes net Census undercount.
Source: Historical population derived from Statistics Canada Census data, 2011 to 2021, and 2061 forecast by Watson & Associates Economists Ltd.

Figure 6: Oxford County Housing Growth by Area Municipality (2021-2061)

Area Municipality	Historical Housing		2061	Total Annual Housing Growth	
	2011	2021		2011-2021	2021-2061
Woodstock	15,700	18,900	37,200	320	460
Tillsonburg	6,800	8,000	17,300	120	230
Ingersoll	4,800	5,500	9,100	70	90
Blandford Blenheim	2,600	2,800	4,300	20	40
East Zorra-Tavistock	2,500	3,000	5,500	50	60
Norwich	3,600	3,800	6,500	20	70
South-West Oxford	2,600	2,600	3,900	0	30
Zorra	2,900	3,200	5,900	30	70
Oxford County	41,600	47,800	89,800	620	1,050

Note: Figures may not add precisely due to rounding.
Source: Historical housing derived from Statistics Canada Census data, 2011 to 2021, and 2051 forecast by Watson & Associates Economists Ltd.

The forecasted employment growth is proposed to be allocated as follows: 52% in the City of Woodstock; 18% in the Town of Tillsonburg; 14% in the Town of Ingersoll; with the remaining 16% distributed across the rural Townships. A substantial proportion of the overall employment growth (i.e. population related employment) is determined by the anticipated population growth, with the remainder (employment land related employment) based on other factors, such as the consideration of existing major employers and industries and the potential for new growth. Figure 7 provide the anticipated employment growth by area municipality.

Figure 7: Oxford County Total Employment Forecast by Area Municipality (2024-2061)

Area Municipality	2024	2061	2024-2061		
			Total Growth	Annual Growth Rate	Annual Growth Rate
Woodstock	29,300	51,900	22,600	610	1.6%
Tillsonburg	10,400	18,300	7,900	220	1.6%
Ingersoll	9,900	16,200	6,300	170	1.3%
Blandford-Blenheim	1,900	2,900	1,000	30	1.2%
East Zorra-Tavistock	3,200	4,800	1,600	40	1.1%
Norwich	5,100	7,000	1,900	50	0.9%
South-West Oxford	3,400	4,400	1,000	30	0.7%
Zorra	3,000	4,400	1,400	40	1.0%
Oxford County	66,100	109,800	43,600	1,200	1.4%

Note: Total employment includes usual place of work and no fixed place of work employment. Figures may not add precisely due to rounding.
Source: Watson & Associates Economists Ltd.

Next Steps

This report, including the attached growth projections and consultant presentation, will be circulated to the Area Municipalities for their information. Further, Planning staff will work with communications staff to undertake a campaign to inform various stakeholders and the broader public of the project and opportunities for questions and feedback. Once this consultation process has been completed, a staff report including a 'final' draft of the document will be presented to County Council for their consideration. It is currently anticipated that a final draft document will be brought before County Council in early 2025.

CONCLUSIONS

The draft findings of the study indicate that the County is expected to continue to experience substantial population, housing and employment growth over the next 40 years. The next phases of the study will assess the land supply and determine if any additional land will be required to accommodate forecasted growth for a 30 year planning period (2024-2054). Several of the draft findings in the study may have implications for the programs and services provided by the County and Area Municipalities and, in some cases (i.e. where the need for additional designated growth land is identified), will also require the County and/or Area Municipalities to undertake additional studies and investigations. Consideration of how to appropriately direct and phase growth will include balancing multiple interests, such as servicing capacity and efficiency, efficient densities and use of land, conservation of agricultural land and natural features, creation of complete communities, and addressing a variety of housing needs.

The PPS includes the requirement for municipalities to be able to accommodate their forecasted growth. The PPS sets out a 30-year growth planning horizon and requires planning authorities to ensure a minimum 20-year supply of land is available to accommodate forecasted residential growth at all times, including a minimum 3 year supply of lands with suitable zoning and servicing

capacity (e.g. water, wastewater, roads, etc.) for development. Although some of this growth can be accommodated through further 'growing in', some 'growing out' is also likely to be required to accommodate the forecasted demand.

With the support of Council, the County and Area Municipalities have recently been making considerable strides in terms of increasing average net residential densities and the range of housing options in new development. However, planning staff are continuing to investigate and implement a range of policy approaches to further support increased density within existing settlement areas, where appropriate, to reduce the amount of land required to accommodate the County's forecasted growth and support other community planning objectives. These approaches range from permitting more housing options within existing neighbourhoods, such as permitting additional residential units (ARUs), increasing opportunities for intensification in strategic areas and considering how minimum density and mix of unit types can be increased for new development.

The draft initial findings will be circulated to the Area Municipalities for review and comment, as outlined in this report, to ensure there has been an opportunity to consider the findings and discuss any concerns and implications with Planning staff, prior to determining the land need of the County.

SIGNATURES

Report author:

Original signed by _____

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Departmental approval:

Original signed by _____

Paul Michiels
Director Community Planning

Approved for submission:

Original signed by _____

Benjamin R. Addley
Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Draft Population, Employment and Housing Projections to 2061 (Oct 22, 2024)

Attachment 2 – Growth Forecast & Area Municipal Allocations, Council Presentation
(Nov 13, 2024)