



2021
2025



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

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1.0 Executive Summary

In December 2019, the County of Simcoe's Economic Development Office (EDO) began the process to update the County's Economic Development Strategic Plan. The original Plan was approved by County Council in 2009 and resulted in the creation of the Economic Development Office. Since the initial inception of the Plan to present, the EDO has taken a leadership role in facilitating regional economic development, and successfully implemented many key goals and objectives from the original strategy. This document represents the first official update to the EDO's Strategic Plan since the Office's inception. This Strategic Plan update outlines where partners and stakeholders see regional opportunities existing and what actions the EDO can take to support these opportunities.

This Strategy was originally drafted in March 2020, incorporating interviews with 56 key stakeholders, a regional business survey, a review of partner municipalities' economic development strategies, and a literature review of current regional, national and global trends. Since this Strategy was developed in draft form, the global economy experienced one of the most significant shocks in modern history with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has had a significant impact on business operations and confidence. The EDO immediately focused on development and delivery of a COVID-19 Business Support Action Plan, and recently developed a COVID-19 Recovery Plan involving consultation with local businesses through sector focus groups and a review of on-going business trends.

Brief Overview of Simcoe County's Economy

The County of Simcoe is comprised of 16 member municipalities and have the separated Cities of Barrie and Orillia, CFB Borden, and two First Nation communities located within the geographic boundaries of the region. Simcoe County is strategically located just north of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and is serviced by a strong transportation network including 400 series highways, rail and a regional airport. With the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe projecting a population of 336,415 in 2019,¹ the County's growth rate over the last eight years has been 20%, which is significantly higher than the provincial growth rate of 13% over the same period.² The population of the County is on average older than the rest of the province and will likely see a wave of retirement in the coming years. Simcoe County also has higher rates of college and trade certificates and lower levels of university-based education when compared to the provincial average.

¹ Environics Analytics, 2020

² Statistics Canada, 2011 Census of the population, National Housing Survey (NHS)



The County of Simcoe has several critical infrastructure amenities that makes for an attractive place to locate a business including:

- The Lake Simcoe Regional Airport
- Georgian College
- Lakehead University

Overall Simcoe County has a diverse employment base, with employment data showing that there is a high concentration of people employed in the manufacturing and the arts, entertainment and recreation sectors. Sectors that experienced the highest growth of jobs in the period from 2013 to 2018 included, accommodation and food services, health care and social assistance, construction, educational services, and professional, scientific and technical services. These sectors represent population-serving industries and their growth is consistent with the rapid growth in population in the region.

The County EDO, through a review of labour market data and feedback from regional stakeholders, focuses on several key sectors in this Strategy to support the region including, manufacturing, tourism, professional, scientific and technical services, and agriculture. This strategy involved a deeper dive into sector trends, summarized below.

Why Focus on These Sectors:

Manufacturing

One of the largest employers in 2018, with approximately 23,259 employees. The sector has slowed in growth realizing approximately 1% growth in the past 5 years and many stakeholders believe this is related to a shortage of talent, particularly in skilled trades. While the manufacturing sector is a traditional strength, it requires additional focus to ensure it remains competitive in the region and is further diversified. Several sub-sectors of opportunity were identified through this strategy including aerospace, automotive, health and wellness, food and beverage and cleantech.

Tourism

Tourism was frequently noted as a sector of opportunity in the stakeholder interviews and many comments focused on the strength and importance of the tourism sector regionally. Employment in the arts, entertainment and recreation; and accommodation and food services sector totaled 24,981 or 11% of the workforce in 2018, making it a significant regional employer. Of particular interest, the accommodation services sub-sector experienced 49% growth over the past 5 years. Agri-tourism was also frequently noted as an opportunity, aligning the region's rich agricultural tradition, with the growing demand for local food and related experiences.

Professional, scientific and technical services: This sector, and more broadly the business cluster categorized as entrepreneurs, was highlighted by stakeholders a key potential opportunity for diversification. While not a top employer in the region with 10,928 jobs the professional, scientific and technical services has experienced a moderate 11% job growth over the last 5 years.

Agriculture

The agricultural sector has a rich history in Simcoe County however in the past 5 years the farms sub-sector has lost approximately 23% of its workforce and the region now has a lower concentration of employment in the sector compared to the provincial average. Stakeholder interviews indicated the biggest opportunity for the growth of the sector linked to value-added production and agri-tourism. The sector was experiencing challenges related to access to appropriate infrastructure, managing red tape, and public perceptions regarding the sector.

Economic development stakeholder interviews alluded to several critical issues and opportunities facing regional economic development where the County EDO could have an impact.

Prominent Issues and Opportunities

Talent

The majority of stakeholders and almost half of business survey respondents identified access to skilled labour as one of the most significant barriers to economic development in the region. Stakeholders saw a key opportunity for the EDO to be involved in the attraction of new workers to the region, including newcomers, the development of employer resources on hiring a diverse workforce, and promotion of regional career opportunities to youth and residents.

Housing

A lack of attainable and available housing was identified by stakeholders as a critical barrier in attracting necessary talent to the region. Stakeholders noted there were low residential vacancy rates for both rental and purchase, and ultimately there was not a suitable mix of diverse housing options regionally. Stakeholders indicated the EDO could play a greater role in supporting the development of solutions by providing a business lens to housing strategy.

Transportation

Access to transportation was also identified as a barrier to attracting talent. While the County LINX public transportation program has been well received, gaps in transit remain, in particular to get employees from the LINX to their place of employment, known commonly as first/last mile solutions. Recommendations on the role of the EDO centered around applying a business lens to transit decisions where possible.

Investment Attraction

Most stakeholders continue to see a critical role for the EDO to support regional investment attraction initiatives, as the County is ideally positioned to capitalize on investment opportunities given its strategic location and identified employment lands. In order to further facilitate investment attraction, stakeholders recommended addressing red tape/inconsistencies at municipal level planning departments, advocating for new infrastructure and ensuring all partners meet a minimum threshold of readiness to participate in these activities. Infrastructure was noted as especially critical, as a number of stakeholders identified constraints in regards to available serviced employment lands.

Business Development

Stakeholders felt the EDO has a role to play working with other business development partners to support further existing business growth in the region. This involves partnering on business education and connection initiatives, supporting activities that enable further diversification of the economy, and assisting with the promotion of existing services.

Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Several stakeholders identified entrepreneurs as a key target for their investment attraction efforts. Others highlighted the need for businesses to explore automation and innovation to remain competitive, consistent with the secondary research. They saw a role for the EDO to promote existing resources, to include entrepreneurs as a sector of interest, and to help the regional business community understand the value of innovation and automation in remaining competitive.

Regional Economic Development Leadership

The EDO, as noted by stakeholders, is ideally positioned to play a regional leadership role related to economic development. Activities stakeholders indicated would be of interest included continued shared education and benchmarking opportunities, opportunities to be involved in and provide feedback on EDO initiatives, on-going information sharing, and the continuation of the economic development funding program.

Global and National Trends Impacting the Regional Economy

A number of trends are unfolding at the regional, national, and global scale that are impacting the opportunities and challenges facing the regional business community. In particular, workforce, technology, global trade, climate change and COVID-19 have been noted as key factors.

Trends

Workforce

The Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC) identified workforce as one of the biggest barriers to future business growth. As Canada's population ages, the working age population will only grow by 0.2%, which highlights the significant shortfall already being experienced is anticipated to get worse. This shortage is perpetuating some significant business challenges including employees working more hours, limited business growth, inability to fulfill contracts or work orders, decreased competitiveness and deteriorating product quality.

Technology

The BDC also noted technology was one of the biggest barriers to future business growth. Ultimately, many Canadian businesses were not adopting technology into their front or back end processes. This presents a significant challenge, as early adopters of technology have the potential to double their cash flow, where those who are lagging will likely fall behind their technologically advanced counterparts in terms of competitiveness.

Global Trade

Over the past five years Canada has been privy to a number of new/updated trade agreements. These include the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), opening access to the European Union, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), opening access to markets in the Asia-Pacific and South American regions, and the updated Canada-US-Mexico Free Trade Agreement.

Climate Change

Climate change should remain a consideration as it continues to impact weather patterns globally and could have wide ranging impacts from a decrease in tourism, disrupted transportation networks, and challenges related to agriculture production.

COVID-19

The global pandemic has caused the most significant economic shock in modern recorded history, as its onset led to mandated temporary business closures, new health and safety guidelines for operating a business, unprecedented job losses and loss of consumer and business confidence. To date there have been over 90 million cases and over 1.9 million deaths worldwide. Social distancing and other virus control measures are likely to remain in place until a vaccine has been widely distributed, setting the stage for an on-going period of uncertainty for business operations.

This current situation has highlighted the critical need for businesses to rapidly adopt digital technology and be innovative to remain relevant at times of business closure and social distancing. It has also presented a potential investment attraction opportunity, as manufacturers impacted by related supply chain disruptions explore how to make their supply chain more resilient, by creating local clusters of component manufacturers.

As noted, the EDO undertook additional research with business owners to understand the key challenges and opportunities presented by the pandemic and developed a Covid-19 Recovery Plan.



The Strategy

This Economic Development Strategy merges research on trends in the economy to data collected from key economic development stakeholders, and the business community, to set forth a path for economic growth and sustainability within Simcoe County. The overall goals and related objectives are as follows:

1. Simcoe County will be recognized as a premier destination for investment in Ontario.

- a. Build awareness of Simcoe County's value proposition to investment prospects.
- b. Be a leader in coordinating regional investment attraction activities and events.
- c. Work with partners to promote and leverage key regional assets and opportunities.

2. Through an excellent quality of life, education and careers, Simcoe County attracts and retains talent to support the needs of its thriving business community.

- a. Actively work to strengthen linkages between educational providers, industry and students.
- b. Build awareness of the region as a great place to live and build a career to people who are skilled in sectors that are experiencing key shortages.
- c. Support employers to better attract and retain the talent they need to stay in business and grow.
- d. Strive to create a welcoming community that can attract and retain newcomer talent.

3. Businesses stay and grow in this region, supported by a strong and innovative business development environment.

- a. Assist local businesses by providing supports to help businesses remain competitive and grow in today's evolving global marketplace.
- b. Enhance communication regarding the resources, events and education available to support the business community.
- c. Strengthen and support the entrepreneurship ecosystem.
- d. Working in partnership with regional stakeholders, determine the needs of the regional business community and address critical issues and opportunities.
- e. In partnership with Tourism Simcoe County, ensure the spectrum of business support available for tourism sector businesses is understood by Economic Development partners and the business community.
- f. Support the local economy through the COVID-19 pandemic and its post recovery in partnership with Tourism Simcoe County.

4. The County of Simcoe's Economic Development Office is a leader in facilitating and building effective and collaborative relationships that creates a strong ecosystem for regional economic development.

- a. The County's Economic Development Office will facilitate strong communications, connections and relationships with and between economic development stakeholders in the region to support the delivery of economic development goals.
- b. Play a leadership role in facilitating cross-departmental and cross-regional solutions related to policy development where there are direct links to barriers and opportunities in economic development.
- c. Strengthen engagement and collaboration with the regional economic development network to expand economic development knowledge and skills and foster alignment and strategic value.
- d. Assist economic development partners in capacity building through providing funding or other supports to undertake and implement projects that directly align with and benefit the desired outcomes of the County's economic development strategy.

5. Advocate for and support the delivery of infrastructure to meet the needs of a competitive business community.

- a. Expand the capacity and connectivity of the Lake Simcoe Regional Airport.
- b. Increase the supply of shovel-ready employment lands.
- c. Play a significant role working with stakeholders and advocating to other levels of government regarding the need to support and enhance infrastructure and transportation networks to facilitate development.

The Update provides several objectives and action items that the EDO and their partners plan to undertake in the next five years to make Simcoe County a stronger community and premier destination for future economic growth.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 Background

2.1.1 Who is the County of Simcoe Economic Development Office

The County of Simcoe's Economic Development Office (EDO) works to foster and build capacity for a regional approach to economic development activities. The EDO works collaboratively with the County of Simcoe's 16 member municipalities, the Cities of Barrie and Orillia, their First Nation partners and service providers to help businesses in the region thrive and grow.

The EDO was established in 2009 following the County of Simcoe's approval of a 10-year economic development strategic plan. From its introduction in 2009 to present, the Office has grown from a single staff member to a team of 6 staff members. Responsibilities have evolved and changed, as the Office has been able to expand their capacity over 10 years.

County Council established an Economic Development Sub-Committee, which is comprised of the Warden and 4 members of County Council representing the north, south, east and west regions of Simcoe County. The Economic Development Sub-Committee meets on a monthly basis and provides recommendations on strategic direction to Council relating to economic development.

2.1.2 Development of the Strategy

Developing an updated strategic plan allows the EDO to re-evaluate how opportunities and challenges have shifted and identify strategic responses. With this in mind, the EDO engaged the services of the local Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) advisor to support the development of the updated economic development strategic plan. The process involved an extensive economic base analysis a survey with the regional business community and interviews with 56 stakeholders. The stakeholders consulted included municipal staff from member municipalities, members of the economic development sub-committee, key business development organizations, industry associations, post-secondary institutions, commercial and industrial realtors, and representatives of other key assets that support the economic development ecosystem. Initial data collection was completed in February 2020. In mid-March 2020, a state of emergency was declared in Ontario due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The EDO in partnership with local municipalities, Cities of Barrie and Orillia and regional business support agencies conducted three business impact surveys related to COVID-19 to gather information on the impact of the pandemic on the business community and identify the supports needed. In response to the surveys, the EDO, with input from area partners, created an action plan for business support and economic stimulus, and a COVID-19 Recovery Plan. Additionally, the County EDO and Tourism Simcoe County in partnership with regional municipalities hosted a series of 15 focus groups with businesses to understand their immediate and long-term opportunities and challenges in the current climate. The results from the business impact surveys and focus groups are incorporated into the COVID-19 Recovery Plan (Appendix A).

2.2 Current Economic Development Ecosystem

The EDO plays an important role in facilitating economic development at the regional level. Working regionally and collaboratively is vital for supporting the County's economic development efforts in an efficient and effective way. It dramatically enhances all partners' capacity to create awareness about the region and undertake initiatives to help regional businesses start and scale up. For example, a local municipality may currently have a small workforce, no post-secondary institutions, limited transportation assets, and business supports. By being part of the broader region, partners can market themselves as having access to a much larger pool of talent, an airport, strong transportation networks and two post-secondary institutions. Furthermore, businesses can benefit from broader access to business development organizations from around the region. Businesses and talent do not distinctly recognize municipal boundaries, thus taking a regional approach to economic development makes for a stronger economy for all. Today the concept of cooperative competition has risen to prominence, where municipalities collaborate to create awareness about the region and strengthen the economic development ecosystem. In order to sustain a model of cooperative competition it is best to have economic development presence at both local and regional tiers. The regional tier typically takes on higher level, regionally impactful initiatives, where the local municipalities strive to maintain a favourable strong environment for the local business community, as well as assistance for incoming investment.

2.2.1 Member Municipalities

Simcoe County has 16 member municipalities whose populations, as of the 2016 Census, range from 8,962 in the Town of Penetanguishene, to 36,566 in the Town of Innisfil. For the purposes of the Strategic Plan, the County has been divided into four quadrants to more accurately reflect market conditions and trends. Economic development capacity of individual municipalities varies, as some have no dedicated staff and others have small teams.

South Simcoe

Municipalities in South Simcoe include the Towns of Innisfil, Bradford West Gwillimbury and New Tecumseth and Townships of Adjala-Tosorontio and Essa.

Due to its proximity to the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), this region is experiencing the most rapid population growth and interest from an investment perspective. New Tecumseth and Bradford West Gwillimbury currently have strength in manufacturing, while Adjala-Tosorontio and Essa are pursuing agricultural sectors and Innisfil is looking to attract entrepreneurs, particularly from the technology sector. Innisfil and Bradford West Gwillimbury have provincially designated strategic settlement employment areas, along the HWY 400 corridor. The Town of New Tecumseth has a provincially significant employment zone in the vicinity of the Honda of Canada Manufacturing facility. Bradford West Gwillimbury, and the broader region, will be able to benefit from the impending development of the 400-404 Connecting Link highway that will be built in the Town.

West Simcoe

Municipalities in West Simcoe include the Townships of Springwater and Clearview and Towns of Collingwood and Wasaga Beach.

Collingwood is pursuing the development of a technology cluster, Clearview and Springwater are focused on the agricultural sector and downtown revitalization, and Wasaga Beach, while known for tourism, is looking to pursue future diversification in the economy in appropriate sectors of focus.

North Simcoe

Municipalities in North Simcoe County include the Towns of Midland and Penetanguishene and Townships of Tay and Tiny.

The North Simcoe municipalities have partnered together to develop an economic development corporation to manage related activities for the region which is run by a small team. There are four sectors of focus in North Simcoe, manufacturing, agriculture, tourism and healthcare.

East Simcoe

Municipalities of East Simcoe County include the Townships of Oro-Medonte, Ramara and Severn.

The region is focused on manufacturing and tourism sectors. East Simcoe collaborates with Rama First Nation and the City of Orillia to support the tourism sector. East Simcoe has two provincially significant employment areas as identified in the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe along Rama Road in Ramara Township focused on tourism development, while the Township of Oro-Medonte has lands associated with the Lake Simcoe Regional Airport designated as an Economic Employment District.

Cities of Barrie and Orillia

There are two separated cities located within the geographical boundaries of Simcoe County, Barrie and Orillia.

The City of Orillia's economic development team has a strong focus on the manufacturing and tourism sectors and have been focused on a significant waterfront revitalization project. Brownfield remediation in the downtown has been a significant challenge and focus. The City is also home to Lakehead University – Orillia Campus.

The City of Barrie's economic development team also has a strong focus on the manufacturing sector and are currently looking towards how to support more innovation and entrepreneurship, both within manufacturing and across other sectors. Barrie is home to a number of key economic development assets, including the main campus of Georgian College which houses a Research and Innovation department and the Henry Bernick Centre for Entrepreneurship. The City is also home to the Sandbox Centre, a business development support centre focused on driving innovation and entrepreneurship.



2.2.2 Regional Economic Development

In recent years the EDO has focused on investment attraction and foreign direct investment; business supports for the manufacturing and agriculture sectors; supporting talent attraction; advocating on issues relating to business retention/attraction; and supporting local members municipalities with their priorities. Key projects are developed by the EDO in conjunction with member municipalities. Select specific examples are included below:

Made in Simcoe County - many manufacturers in Simcoe County are primed to grow, however, the lack of both skilled and unskilled labour is impeding the sector's ability to expand, an issue that will be exacerbated as the workforce ages. In response, the Made in Simcoe County marketing campaign was launched to promote the world-class products and career opportunities created in the region. The campaign supports labour market needs by shifting existing stigmas of the sector (i.e. dirty, unsafe, underpaid) and modernizes the image as cutting edge, vibrant, and innovative.

Foreign Direct Investment Strategy - forming the basis of the region's investment attraction activities, this strategy advocates for the development of relationships with existing businesses, including those with global headquarters, and strategic partners to help facilitate interest in regional investment.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Value Chain Business Retention & Expansion Study - in 2018, the EDO, with partners, completed an in-depth interview-based study on the needs of the agri-food value chain in the region. The study was used to create a multi-year work plan supporting the sector that focuses on enhancing business supports, improving municipal processes and planning, building agri-tourism assets, advocates for improved infrastructure and strengthens the workforce.

Simcoe Muskoka Skilled Trade Expo - as an additional tactic to address the lack of skilled labour, the EDO has worked with partners to develop an annual event designed to showcase skilled trade professions to regional youth. The event connects youth and employers in a one-day showcase on the types of occupations that exist in the skilled trades within the region.

3.0 Understanding the Simcoe County Economy Today

3.1 Strategic Location

Simcoe County is located north of the Greater Toronto Area (see Figure 1). There are 16 member municipalities in the County, along with the Cities of Barrie and Orillia, Beausoleil of Christian Island First Nation, Chippewas of Rama First Nation, and the Canadian Forces Base Borden (CFB Borden). Simcoe County is the largest County in Ontario by population, and the third largest by area (Statistics Canada 2016 Census). Its location presents a strategic advantage as being connected to provincial highway 400, and arterial highways 11, 12, 26, 27, 88 and 89 facilitates transport across Canada and to the U.S. markets. These highways provide access to a large network of goods, services and potential customers. A main north-south line of Class 1 railway runs through Simcoe County and it is also home to a short line railway, the Barrie Collingwood Railway (BCRY), which directly connects into the national line. The County is home to, and 90% shareholder of, the Lake Simcoe Regional Airport, a 24/7 operation with on-site Canada Border Services Agency services for both passenger and freight.

The geographic breadth of the County is also an asset, as seen in Figure 1. It has significant shorelines on Lake Simcoe and Georgian Bay, connecting the County to the Great Lakes system and creating opportunities for business development in tourism and other recreational industries. The County's size also allows it to encompass both rural and urbanized areas that provide a basis for diverse economic activity, amenities, and lifestyles, ultimately responsible for the region's high quality of life.



Figure 1: Location of Simcoe County in South-Central Ontario
Source: Simcoe County Geographic Information System, 2019

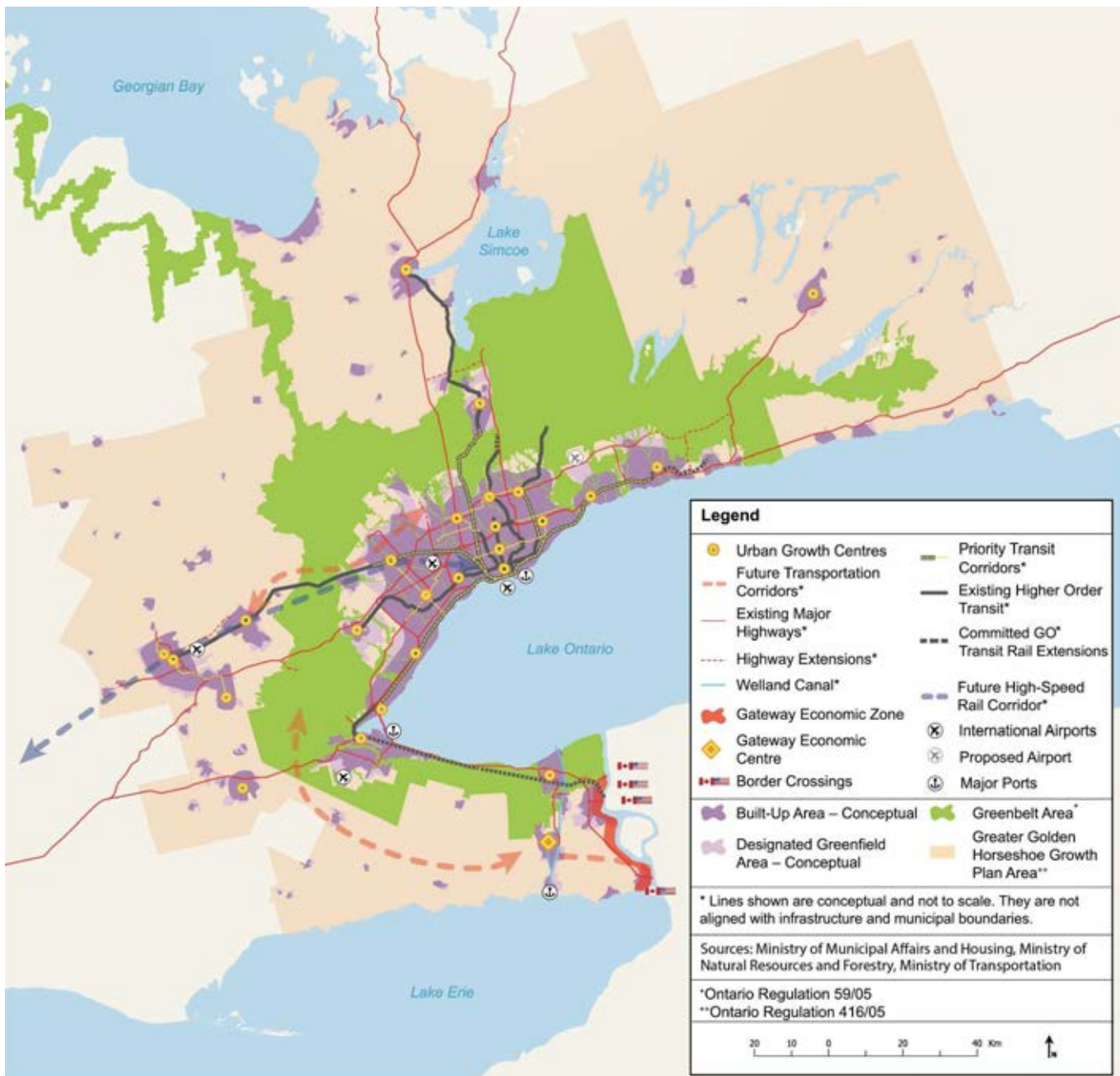


Figure 2: Places to Grow Policy Implications mapped over south-central Ontario.
Source: Schedule 2: <https://www.ontario.ca/document/growth-plan-greater-golden-horseshoe/schedules>

3.2 Provincial Growth Regulations

A Place to Grow - The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe lays out a vision and policies designed to manage growth, plan for complete communities and protect the natural environment, directly impacting Simcoe County. Figure 2 displays the policy area for the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*. The County of Simcoe is subject to provincial-level regulation governing the allocation of population and jobs within the region to ensure sustainable growth. Figure 3 details the population and job projection to 2051 for the County and Cities of Barrie and Orillia. These projections indicate the significant and steady growth that is anticipated in the region that will allow the region's ability to attract investment and talent. These policies and projections are to be incorporated into the Simcoe County Official Plan and the Official Plan of individual municipalities.

The Growth Plan also identifies a number of strategic economic and employment areas: Bradford West Gwillimbury Industrial Strategic Employment Area, Alliston Provincially Significant Employment Zone, Innisfil Heights Strategic Industrial Employment Area, Lake Simcoe Regional Airport Economic Employment District, and Rama Road Economic Employment District.

| Distribution of Population and Employment for the Greater Golden Horseshoe to 2051 (figures in 000s) | | | | | | | | |
|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | Population | | | | Employment | | | |
| | 2031 | 2036 | 2041 | 2051 | 2031 | 2036 | 2041 | 2051 |
| Region of Durham | 970 | 1,080 | 1,190 | 1,300 | 360 | 390 | 430 | 460 |
| Region of York | 1,590 | 1,700 | 1,790 | 2,020 | 790 | 840 | 900 | 990 |
| City of Toronto | 3,190 | 3,300 | 3,400 | 3,650 | 1,660 | 1,680 | 1,720 | 1,980 |
| Region of Peel | 1,770 | 1,870 | 1,970 | 2,280 | 880 | 920 | 970 | 1,070 |
| Region of Halton | 820 | 730 | 1,000 | 1,100 | 390 | 430 | 470 | 500 |
| City of Hamilton | 680 | 730 | 780 | 820 | 310 | 330 | 350 | 360 |
| GTHA Total | 9,020 | 9,410 | 10,130 | 11,170 | 4,390 | 4,590 | 4,840 | 5,360 |
| County of Northumberland | 100 | 105 | 110 | 122 | 36 | 37 | 39 | 44 |
| County of Peterborough | 70 | 73 | 76 | 82 | 20 | 21 | 24 | 26 |
| City of Peterborough | 103 | 109 | 115 | 125 | 52 | 54 | 58 | 63 |
| City of Kawartha Lakes | 100 | 101 | 107 | 117 | 29 | 30 | 32 | 39 |
| County of Simcoe | 416 | 456 | 497 | 555 | 132 | 141 | 152 | 198 |
| City of Barrie | 210 | 231 | 253 | 298 | 101 | 114 | 129 | 150 |
| City of Orillia | 41 | 44 | 46 | 49 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 26 |
| County of Dufferin | 80 | 81 | 85 | 95 | 29 | 31 | 32 | 39 |
| County of Wellington | 122 | 132 | 140 | 160 | 54 | 57 | 61 | 70 |
| City of Guelph | 177 | 184 | 191 | 203 | 94 | 97 | 101 | 116 |
| Region of Waterloo | 742 | 789 | 835 | 923 | 366 | 383 | 404 | 470 |
| County of Brant | 49 | 53 | 57 | 59 | 22 | 24 | 26 | 26 |
| City of Brantford | 139 | 152 | 163 | 165 | 67 | 72 | 79 | 80 |
| County of Haldimand | 57 | 60 | 64 | 75 | 22 | 24 | 25 | 29 |
| Region of Niagara | 543 | 577 | 610 | 674 | 235 | 248 | 265 | 272 |
| Outer Ring Total | 2,949 | 3,147 | 3,349 | 3,702 | 1,280 | 1,355 | 1,450 | 1,648 |
| Total GGH | 11,969 | 12,557 | 13,479 | 14,872 | 5,670 | 5,945 | 6,290 | 7,008 |

Note: Numbers rounded off to nearest 10,000 for GTHA municipalities, GTHA Total and Outer Ring total, and to nearest 1,000 for outer ring municipalities. Reference Forecast used.

| Distribution of Population and Employment for the City of Barrie, City of Orillia and County of Simcoe to 2031 (Figures in 000s) | | |
|--|------------|------------|
| | Population | Employment |
| City of Barrie | 210 | 101 |
| City of Orillia | 41 | 21 |
| Township of Adjala-Tosorontio | 13 | 2 |
| Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury | 51 | 18 |
| Township of Clearview | 20 | 5 |
| Town of Collingwood | 33 | 14 |
| Township of Essa | 22 | 9 |
| Town of Innisfil | 56 | 13 |
| Town of Midland | 23 | 14 |
| Town of New Tecumseth | 56 | 27 |
| Township of Oro-Medonte | 27 | 6 |
| Town of Penetanguishene | 11 | 6 |
| Township of Ramara | 13 | 2 |
| Township of Severn | 17 | 4 |
| Township of Springwater | 24 | 6 |
| Township of Tay | 11 | 2 |
| Township of Tiny | 13 | 2 |
| Town of Wasaga Beach | 28 | 4 |
| Outer Ring Total | 667 | 254 |

Note: Numbers rounded off to nearest 1,000.

Figure 3 (top): Population and job allocation for upper and single tier municipalities in the Greater Golden Source: <https://www.ontario.ca/document/growth-plan-greater-golden-horseshoe/schedules>

Figure 4 (left): Population and job allocation for the Simcoe Sub-Area Source: Schedule 7 <https://www.ontario.ca/document/growth-plan-greater-golden-horseshoe/schedules>

3.3 Demographic Attributes

Simcoe County's member municipalities have experienced pronounced population growth over the last eight years. As shown in Figure 5, they added an estimated 56,991 people between 2011³ and 2019,⁴ for a 20% growth rate. This is projected to have outpaced the provincial growth rate of 13% over the same time period. This rapid growth represents opportunities for new investment, business and talent development.

Within the County, population is most heavily concentrated in South Simcoe, followed by the West, North, and East regions of the County. Between 2011 and 2019, population growth has been most heavily concentrated in the South (29%), with slowest growth in the North (6%). The largest (and fastest growing) portions of the County continue to lie in areas to the South and West, which will have implications for the allocation of services and investment across the County.

Growth in the County can also be compared to the two separated cities within the County region, Barrie and Orillia. The City of Barrie grew at a rate of 11% between 2011 and 2019. South, West and East Simcoe experienced a higher growth rate than the City of Barrie between 2011 and 2019. Conversely the City of Orillia, has grown more slowly than anywhere else in the County over both time periods.

While population growth is a meaningful driver of economic growth and development, like the rest of the province, the County is faced with an aging population. The proportion of its population over the age of 45 increased from 49% (32% for those aged 45-64 and 17% for those aged 65+) in 2011⁵ to 50% (31% for those aged 45-64 and 19% for those aged 65+) in 2016.⁶ For the Province, the 2011 share of the population 45 and older was 44% (29% for 45-64 and 16% for 65+) and the 2016 share of the population was 45% (28% for 45-64 and 17% for 65+). While both the County and the Province saw growth in the 45+ age cohort by 1%, the proportion of the 45+ population is approximately 5% larger in Simcoe County than the Provincial average.

While Simcoe County had a slightly older population than the province did in 2016, the most notable change is the number of retirement aged⁷ residents projected for Simcoe County, which as of 2018⁸ is projected to represent 18.2% of the population. This number is projected to increase over the next few decades, peaking in 2041 at 27.2%.

| | 2006 | 2011 | 2016 | 2019 | 2031 Forecast | 8 Year Net Growth (2011-2019) | 8 Year Growth (%) (2011-2019) | 3 Year Net Growth (2016-2019) | 3 Year Growth (%) (2016-2019) |
|-------------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Province of Ontario | 12,160,285 | 12,851,821 | 13,448,494 | 14,483,929 | 16,795,039 | 1,632,108 | 13% | 1,035,435 | 8% |
| Simcoe County + Barrie + Orillia | 421,581 | 446,072 | 479,642 | 520,123 | 667,000 | 74,051 | 17% | 40,481 | 8% |
| Barrie | 128,430 | 136,063 | 141,430 | 151,473 | 210,000 | 15,410 | 11% | 10,043 | 7% |
| Orillia | 30,255 | 30,585 | 31,165 | 32,235 | 41,000 | 1,650 | 5% | 1,070 | 3% |
| South Simcoe | 110,510 | 120,156 | 138,188 | 154,798 | 197,000 | 34,642 | 29% | 16,610 | 12% |
| West Simcoe | 63,870 | 68,735 | 75,678 | 82,475 | 104,600 | 13,740 | 20% | 6,797 | 9% |
| North Simcoe | 46,185 | 47,933 | 48,302 | 50,715 | 57,400 | 2,782 | 6% | 2,413 | 5% |
| East Simcoe | 42,331 | 42,600 | 44,879 | 48,427 | 57,000 | 5,827 | 14% | 3,548 | 8% |
| Simcoe County | 262,896 | 279,424 | 307,047 | 336,415 | 416,000 | 56,991 | 20% | 29,368 | 10% |

Figure 5: Population and Growth Rates, 2011-2031 Projections

Source: Ontario Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2017, Statistics Canada (Census of Population, 2011 & 2016) & Environics, 2020

³ Statistics Canada, 2011 Census of the population, National Housing Survey (NHS)

⁴ 2019 figures are adapted from Environics Analytics DemoStats. A product that builds off the most recent census (2016) and uses a combination of econometric, demographic and geographic models to create projections for data in between census collections. Data sources include Census data, current economic indicators, postcensal estimates from the federal and provincial governments, immigration statistics, and economic data such as building permits. Environics uses sources such as Statistics Canada, the Canada Revenue Agency, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Oxford Economics, Bank of Canada and Canada Post in their modelling.

⁵ Statistics Canada, 2011 Census of the population, National Housing Survey (NHS)

⁶ Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of the population

⁷ Retirement age in Ontario is 65 years or older.

⁸ Ontario Ministry of Finance "Ontario Population Projections", 2018-2046



Posing an additional challenge, Canada's 2017 fertility rate was 1.5 births per woman⁹ – well below the 2.1 births per woman replacement rate to sustain current levels of population through natural increase. This highlights the stark nature of the current talent challenge – in the near future we will not be able to fill the gap retirements are expected to create in the marketplace.

The large wave of retirements along with the low fertility rate, means the labour force will likely shrink significantly. As seniors continue to transition out of the labour force it will create a need for skilled and educated workers across a range of occupations and in a variety of industries to both replace their exit and service their needs as they age. Without a focused strategy to develop and attract these replacement workers, parts of the County – particularly to the North and East – are at risk of losing their employment base, and a key element of their ability to attract business investment.

Further, it is important to look at the kinds of jobs that residents will be trained to do. There will be an increased need for certain occupations as the population ages but that need will not be permanent. Professions like personal support workers will see a sharp increase in supply of jobs, followed by a decrease in the supply, as mortality rates increase.

This change will occur beyond the scope and needs of the strategic plan. However, strategic policy and investments must be made with the future in mind. This means that the County should be pursuing the support of the shift already being seen from a model where one studies, works, and then retires, to one which includes the possibility and flexibility of re-training for an alternative career.

While it is still critical to focus on developing and attracting youth, enhanced efforts to attract newcomers to the region is an opportunity. The Conference Board of Canada, in its 2018 report, *Canada 2040: No Immigration vs. More Immigration* indicates that immigration's share of annual population growth is currently at 71%. However, according to Environics Analytics, as of 2019, Simcoe County's immigrant population as a share of total population was only 13% (43,658 residents) – well below the province's immigrant population share of 30%. Within the County, this share was highest in South Simcoe at 17% (25,932 residents), and lowest in East Simcoe at 8% (4,102 residents). Immigration is a significant driver of the labour force – and thus the competitiveness of regions across the province. The economic development strategy of the County should continue to promote the attraction and support of immigrants throughout Simcoe County.

A further challenge is a high rate of commuting within the County. While North Simcoe retains about 77% of their workforce in the region, West Simcoe retains 51% of their workforce, South Simcoe retains 39% of their workforce and East Simcoe retains just 16% of their workforce for jobs within their respective regions.¹⁰ With COVID-19 driving an increase in work-from-home opportunities, it will be interesting to see how commuting patterns may change over time.

⁹ World Bank (2019)

¹⁰ Statistics Canada Commuting Flow Tabulations, 2016



3.3.1. Educational Attainment

As noted in Figure 6, compared to the province, Simcoe County has higher rates of college and trade certificates and lower levels of university-based education. According to the 2016 Census the working age population has achieved a lower proportion of university certificate, diploma or degree education at 16.6% versus the Provincial average of 28.2%. However, a higher proportion of the working age population have obtained a college/non-university diploma at 24.5% versus the Provincial average of 20.8%. 19.4% of the population has no certificate, diploma or degree, and 30.9% has achieved a secondary school diploma or equivalency certificate, indicating the majority of the population, and a higher proportion than the province, has not obtained any education beyond secondary school. This signals the need to evaluate efforts to increase transitions from high school to post-secondary education and training within the County.

Finally, of those in Simcoe County that have attained some post-secondary education there is a higher level of expertise than the province in industries such as:

- Architecture, engineering and related technologies (11.7% or 29,380 workers)
- Health, and related fields (8.4% or 21,265 workers)
- Personal, protective and transportation services (4.1% or 10,380 workers)

Conversely, the County lags the province in skilled areas such as business and management, social sciences and law, and computer and information sciences. Despite having a high concentration of architecture, engineering and related technology expertise in the region,¹¹ employers and key economic development stakeholders still noted a significant shortage of skilled labour regionally.

| | No certificate; diploma or degree | Secondary (high) school diploma or equivalency certificate | Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma | College; CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma | University certificate or diploma below bachelor level | University certificate; diploma or degree at bachelor level or above |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|---|---|--|--|
| Province of Ontario | 17.5% | 27.4% | 6.0% | 20.8% | 2.2% | 26.0% |
| Simcoe County | 19.4% | 30.9% | 8.7% | 24.5% | 1.8% | 14.8% |
| City of Barrie | 17.6% | 31.0% | 6.4% | 26.3% | 1.5% | 17.2% |
| City of Orillia | 22.3% | 30.8% | 7.1% | 23.3% | 1.4% | 15.0% |
| South Simcoe | 20.0% | 32.1% | 8.6% | 23.8% | 1.7% | 13.8% |
| West Simcoe | 17.9% | 30.6% | 8.1% | 24.3% | 2.0% | 17.1% |
| North Simcoe | 21.0% | 30.6% | 8.8% | 25.2% | 1.4% | 12.9% |
| East Simcoe | 18.1% | 28.2% | 9.7% | 25.8% | 2.1% | 16.1% |
| Simcoe County + Barrie+ Orillia | 19.0% | 30.9% | 7.9% | 24.9% | 1.7% | 15.5% |

Figure 6: POPULATION BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, 2016
Source: Statistics Canada Census of Population, 2016

¹¹ Statistics Canada 2016 Census

3.4 Economic Sectors

In order to better understand in which sectors Simcoe County may have an advantage, this strategy examines the location quotient and growth rates of regional industry sectors. A location quotient greater than 1.0 indicates that the region has a higher than average concentration of employment in that sector than the national average. Conversely, a location quotient of less than 1.0 indicates a lower concentration of employment in a particular sector than the national average. Due to accuracy issues with employment data, we consider a region to have a “high” location quotient if it is over 1.25. A location quotient between 0.75 and 1.25 is considered “average”, as it is considered close to 1.0, and a location quotient below 0.75 is considered to be “low.”

Based on Figure 7, the sectors in Simcoe County showing the highest labour force concentrations relative to Canada in 2016 are:

- Arts, entertainment and recreation (1.34)
- Manufacturing (1.27)

The ranking of the top two location quotients has remained steady over the past six years, and given their strong local concentrations, both manufacturing and tourism warrant important consideration in terms of how to maintain and grow these sectors.

Though the two sectors discussed above have the highest location quotients, the County has a number of sectors that perform near or above the national average in terms of local labour force concentration. Of the 21 major sector groups, 13 show average labour force concentrations, spread across both goods and services-producing sectors. Location quotients in these sectors remained rather static between 2014 and 2019, though the real estate, rental and leasing sectors saw a notable decrease in its location quotient beginning in 2015.¹²

Six sectors had low location quotients in the County. Except for mining and oil and gas extraction – for which there is little to no resource base to support employment in the region – those sectors were:

- Professional, scientific and technical service
- Information and cultural industries
- Transportation and warehousing
- Finance and insurance
- Management of companies and enterprises

| Location Quotient | Industry | 2018 Location Quotient |
|----------------------------|---|------------------------|
| High (≥1.25) | Arts, entertainment and recreation | 1.34 |
| | Manufacturing | 1.27 |
| Average (0.76-1.24) | Retail trade | 1.20 |
| | Accommodation and food services | 1.18 |
| | Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services | 1.18 |
| | Construction | 1.14 |
| | Public administration | 1.10 |
| | Health care and social assistance | 1.10 |
| | Unclassified | 1.00 |
| | Utilities | 0.95 |
| | Other services (except public administration) | 0.95 |
| | Wholesale trade | 0.92 |
| | Educational services | 0.87 |
| | Real estate and rental and leasing | 0.83 |
| | Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting | 0.80 |
| Low (≤ 0.75) | Professional, scientific and technical services | 0.70 |
| | Information and cultural industries | 0.64 |
| | Transportation and warehousing | 0.62 |
| | Finance and insurance | 0.51 |
| | Management of companies and enterprises | 0.28 |
| | Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction | 0.19 |

Figure 7: LOCATION QUOTIENTS, SIMCOE COUNTY,* 2019

Source: EMSI Analyst, 2019.1 Note: Includes Barrie, Orillia, Mnjikaning First Nation 32, Christian Island 30, and Christian Island 30A*Includes Barrie and Orillia

¹² Analyst Dataset 2019.1

| Industry | 2013 Jobs | 2018 Jobs | 2013 - 2018 Change | 2013 - 2018 % Change |
|--|-----------|-----------|--------------------|----------------------|
| 11 Agriculture; forestry; fishing and hunting | 4,318 | 3,423 | -895 | -21% |
| 21 Mining; quarrying; and oil and gas extraction | 430 | 482 | 52 | 12% |
| 22 Utilities | 1,409 | 1,326 | -82 | -6% |
| 23 Construction | 15,589 | 18,078 | 2,488 | 16% |
| 31-33 Manufacturing | 22,967 | 23,259 | 293 | 1% |
| 41 Wholesale trade | 8,635 | 9,103 | 468 | 5% |
| 44-45 Retail trade | 26,380 | 29,176 | 2,796 | 11% |
| 48-49 Transportation and warehousing | 7,406 | 6,667 | -739 | -10% |
| 51 Information and cultural industries | 2,355 | 2,548 | 192 | 8% |
| 52 Finance and insurance | 4,399 | 4,625 | 225 | 5% |
| 53 Real estate and rental and leasing | 4,072 | 3,996 | -76 | -2% |
| 54 Professional; scientific and technical services | 9,854 | 10,928 | 1,073 | 11% |
| 55 Management of companies and enterprises | 434 | 327 | -108 | -25% |
| 56 Administrative and support; waste management and remediation services | 13,505 | 13,298 | -207 | -2% |
| 61 Educational services | 12,049 | 13,665 | 1,617 | 13% |
| 62 Health care and social assistance | 23,820 | 28,097 | 4,277 | 18% |
| 71 Arts; entertainment and recreation | 6,163 | 6,165 | 2 | 0% |
| 72 Accommodation and food services | 14,980 | 18,815 | 3,835 | 26% |
| 81 Other services (except public administration) | 9,726 | 9,346 | -380 | -4% |
| 91 Public administration | 13,808 | 14,932 | 1,124 | 8% |

Figure 8: Simcoe County Jobs by Industry and Change between 2013 and 2018
Source: EMSI Analyst 2019,¹⁵

Taking into account sector growth and decline is also important. Figure 8 shows the growth in jobs from 2013 compared to 2018, by industry. The sectors which experienced the highest growth of jobs in the County are:

- Accommodation and Food Services (Increase of 3,835 workers or 26%)
- Health care and social assistance (Increase of 4,277 workers or 18%)
- Construction (Increase of 2,488 workers or 16%)
- Educational Services (Increase of 1,617 workers or 13%)
- Professional; scientific and technical services (Increase of 1,073 workers or 11%)

Figure 8 also shows that the sectors with the largest negative growth are:

- Management of Companies and Enterprises (Decrease of 108 workers or 25%)
- Agriculture; Forestry; Fishing and Hunting (Decrease of 895 workers or 21%)
- Transportation and Warehousing (Decrease of 739 workers or 10%)

There is a predictable proportion of service-based jobs that are associated with population growth.¹⁴

Through both the location quotient and growth analysis, as well as considering feedback from key stakeholder interviews, the EDO has identified several sectors of interest to help sustain, grow, or explore. These sectors include the manufacturing, tourism (arts, entertainment and recreation; and accommodation and food service), professional, scientific and technical services, and the agricultural sector.

¹⁵ Emsi Analyst's Canadian dataset incorporates and harmonizes labour market data from SEPH, LFS, CBP, Census, and PSIS, providing it in a format that is easy to understand, access, and use. By combining these disparate datasets into one master set, the strengths of each can compensate for the weaknesses of the others. The data reaches back to 2001 and is projected forward to 2026. The Canada Analyst tool is updated twice a year with new data from various sources, providing access to the most current information. Figures pulled from EMSI Analyst is considered a projection.

¹⁴ Hemson Consulting study "York Region Future Employment Trends Study Report" (2019)

3.4.1 Manufacturing

Manufacturing was one of the region's largest employers in 2018, with approximately 23,259 employees. While a major employer, the sector only realized about 1% growth over the past 5 years. Based on the data collected, the sector is experiencing a significant shortage in talent, particularly in skilled trades. There is also a need to support the sector in planning for future competitiveness, which includes becoming more equipped to implement innovative processes and technologies and succession planning. The EDO's foreign direct investment (FDI) strategy recognizes the manufacturing sector as a traditional strength, one that needs to be retained and further diversified. While key stakeholders felt there was a strong need to continue to support and grow the manufacturing sector, there was also an acknowledgement that the region may have a strong reliance on it in terms of economic development and exploring opportunities to diversify the economy is important. Several areas of interest within the manufacturing sector were identified by Simcoe County stakeholders. These included aerospace, automotive, health and wellness, food and beverage and cleantech.

Taking a closer look at recent opportunities and challenges in the sector, Figure 9 highlights sub-sectors of the manufacturing NAICS and their related change in employment in Simcoe County between 2013 and 2018. These sub-sectors are worth further investigation to determine what the EDO can do to better assist those sub-sectors with growth or help them address challenges. Of particular note, jobs in the paper manufacturing sub-sector grew by 73% between 2013 and 2018, albeit, its location quotient is still only 0.80. As well, jobs in the miscellaneous manufacturing sub-sector increased 68% and it has a strong location quotient of 1.83. In both cases there may be a possibility to expand on the competitiveness of those sub-sectors, given their considerable growth in the past two years. Alternatively, plastics and rubber products manufacturing, fabricated metal product manufacturing and machinery manufacturing have all hosted an 11-22% decrease in the size of their workforce. This warrants further investigation as they have a moderately sized workforce and both plastics and rubber product manufacturing and machinery manufacturing have location quotients above 1.25.

| NAICS | Description | 2013 Jobs | 2018 Jobs | 2013 - 2018 Change | 2013 - 2018 % Change | 2018 Location Quotient |
|-------|---|-----------|-----------|--------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| 311 | Food manufacturing | 1,152 | 1,184 | 32 | 3% | 0.43 |
| 312 | Beverage and tobacco product manufacturing | 474 | 599 | 125 | 26% | 1.20 |
| 313 | Textile mills | 120 | 114 | (6) | (5%) | 1.33 |
| 314 | Textile product mills | 145 | 124 | (21) | (14%) | 0.95 |
| 315 | Clothing manufacturing | 57 | 16 | (41) | (72%) | 0.07 |
| 316 | Leather and allied product manufacturing | 25 | 0 | (25) | (100%) | 0.00 |
| 321 | Wood product manufacturing | 467 | 612 | 145 | 31% | 0.55 |
| 322 | Paper manufacturing | 284 | 490 | 206 | 73% | 0.80 |
| 323 | Printing and related support activities | 569 | 635 | 66 | 12% | 0.96 |
| 324 | Petroleum and coal product manufacturing | <10 | 15 | Insf. Data | Insf. Data | 0.07 |
| 325 | Chemical manufacturing | 849 | 714 | (135) | (16%) | 0.68 |
| 326 | Plastics and rubber products manufacturing | 2,008 | 1,627 | (381) | (19%) | 1.42 |
| 327 | Non-metallic mineral product manufacturing | 1,183 | 1,413 | 230 | 19% | 2.27 |
| 331 | Primary metal manufacturing | 325 | 447 | 122 | 38% | 0.68 |
| 332 | Fabricated metal product manufacturing | 2,752 | 2,134 | (618) | (22%) | 1.15 |
| 333 | Machinery manufacturing | 3,239 | 2,870 | (369) | (11%) | 1.83 |
| 334 | Computer and electronic product manufacturing | 301 | 336 | 35 | 12% | 0.50 |
| 335 | Electrical equipment, appliance and component manufacturing | 290 | 330 | 40 | 14% | 0.83 |
| 336 | Transportation equipment manufacturing | 7,278 | 7,517 | 239 | 3% | 3.22 |
| 337 | Furniture and related product manufacturing | 586 | 645 | 59 | 10% | 0.74 |
| 339 | Miscellaneous manufacturing | 857 | 1,438 | 581 | 68% | 1.83 |

Figure 9: Sub-sectors of interest under the manufacturing NAICS, change in jobs over time and 2018 location quotient.

Source: EMSI Analyst 2019.



3.4.2 Tourism

Employment in the arts, entertainment & recreation; and accommodation & food services sectors totaled 24,980 or 11% of the workforce employed in a classified industry sector in 2018, making it a significant regional employer, although not all of these jobs may have a direct link to tourism. Figure 10 provides detail on sub-sectors of interest such as amusement, gambling and recreation with its high location quotient, and accommodation services, which experienced 49% job growth in the last five years.

| NAICS | Description | 2013 Jobs | 2018 Jobs | 2013 - 2018 Change | 2013 - 2018 % Change | 2018 Location Quotient |
|-------|--|-----------|-----------|--------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| 711 | Performing arts, spectator sports and related industries | 1,128 | 951 | (177) | (16%) | 0.57 |
| 712 | Heritage institutions | 180 | 202 | 22 | 12% | 0.67 |
| 713 | Amusement, gambling and recreation industries | 4,854 | 5,012 | 158 | 3% | 1.90 |
| 721 | Accommodation services | 1,846 | 2,751 | 905 | 49% | 1.13 |
| 722 | Food services and drinking places | 13,135 | 16,064 | 2,929 | 22% | 1.19 |

Figure 10: Sub-sectors of interest under the arts, entertainment and recreation, and accommodation and food services NAICS, change in jobs over time and 2018 location quotient.

Source: EMSI Analyst 2019.1

3.4.3 Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services

While not a top employer in the region with 10,928 jobs and a location quotient of 0.70, the professional, scientific and technical services has experienced a moderate 11% job growth over the last 5 years. Several stakeholders have highlighted this as a potential area of diversification, particularly when it comes to attracting entrepreneurs to the region. Figure 11 details some trends in the sub-sector to give insight on shifts that have been experienced between 2013 and 2018 in Simcoe County. Of particular interest is the specialized design services sub-sector which experienced employment growth of 125% between 2013 and 2018. Also, of interest, employment in engineering services, a specific labour need that came through the business survey, shrunk, in conjunction with architectural services, by 8% over the same period.

| NAICS | Description | 2013 Jobs | 2018 Jobs | 2013 - 2018 Change | 2013 - 2018 % Change | 2018 Location Quotient |
|-------|---|-----------|-----------|--------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| 541 | Professional, scientific and technical services | 9,854 | 10,928 | 1,074 | 11% | 0.70 |
| 5411 | Legal services | 1,099 | 1,321 | 222 | 20% | 0.85 |
| 5412 | Accounting, tax preparation, bookkeeping and payroll services | 1,670 | 1,763 | 93 | 6% | 0.89 |
| 5413 | Architectural, engineering and related services | 2,013 | 1,843 | (170) | (8%) | 0.66 |
| 5414 | Specialized design services | 327 | 737 | 410 | 125% | 1.14 |
| 5415 | Computer systems design and related services | 1,291 | 1,613 | 322 | 25% | 0.42 |
| 5416 | Management, scientific and technical consulting services | 1,558 | 1,752 | 194 | 12% | 0.85 |
| 5417 | Scientific research and development services | 64 | 61 | (3) | (5%) | 0.10 |
| 5418 | Advertising, public relations, and related services | 641 | 614 | (27) | (4%) | 0.64 |
| 5419 | Other professional, scientific and technical services | 1,190 | 1,224 | 34 | 3% | 1.01 |
| 5511 | Management of companies and enterprises | 434 | 327 | (107) | (25%) | 0.28 |
| 5611 | Office administrative services | 828 | 635 | (193) | (23%) | 0.92 |

Figure 11: Sub-sectors of interest under the manufacturing NAICS, change in jobs over time and 2018 location quotient.

Source: EMSI Analyst 2019.1

3.4.4 Agriculture

The agricultural sector has a rich history in Simcoe County and remains a sector of focus for a number of the County's smaller, more rural municipalities. That being said, in the past 5 years the farms sub-sector has lost approximately 23% of its workforce and has a 0.93 location quotient. Stakeholder interviews indicated the biggest opportunity for the growth of the sector linked to value-added production and agri-tourism.

Feedback from the sector indicated that they face challenges in relation to access to infrastructure, such as three phase power and dealing with red tape at the municipal level when there is interest in expanding. Key stakeholders also identified access to internet, agricultural processing and storage facilities as areas hindering growth in the County. Additional concerns included a need for more advocacy and public education regarding conventional agriculture, as well as local food.

| NAICS | Description | 2013 Jobs | 2018 Jobs | 2013 - 2018 Change | 2013 - 2018 % Change | 2018 Location Quotient |
|---------|-------------|-----------|-----------|--------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| 111-112 | Farms | 4,147 | 3,194 | (953) | (23%) | 0.93 |

Figure 12: Sub-sector - Farms NAICS, change in jobs over time and 2018 location quotient.

Source: EMSI Analyst 2019.1





3.5 Key Regional Assets

3.5.1 Lake Simcoe Regional Airport

The Lake Simcoe Regional Airport (LSRA) is a regional strategic economic development asset. It is centrally located in the Township of Oro-Medonte, with easy access to provincial highways. The LSRA has a total land area of approximately 245 hectares (605 acres). This includes 58 hectares (142 acres) of serviced and un-serviced land available for airside commercial development opportunities and a further 24 hectares (60 acres) available for non-aviation development. The airport has a 6,001ft runway and is able to accommodate a wide range of aircraft including large corporate jets, turboprops, and narrow-body aircraft such as the B737-800. The LSRA is serviced by Canada Border Services Agency and maintains Commercial Port-of-Entry status for both people and goods. Recognizing the LSRA as a key regional infrastructure asset, the County of Simcoe increased its ownership share to 90% effective January 1, 2020, highlighting the County's commitment to the airport's success. The County should continue to maintain and invest in the airport strategically to ensure it is leveraged fully.

Several key stakeholders identified the LSRA as a regional opportunity, and one that can drive the attraction of new investment, facilitate on-going business development, and potentially bring in tourism opportunities. As Toronto's Pearson International Airport runs out of land to develop on, future investment opportunities will arise through the Southern Ontario Airport Network (SOAN) as airlines and service providers, such as maintenance, repair and overhaul operations, look to relocate or expand into new spaces. In particular, the County EDO could support the LSRA in making the business case to attract new investment. While there are many potential investment opportunities, the LSRA also flagged a need to help businesses and community partners understand how to better utilize the regional airport for their benefit.



3.5.2 Georgian College

Georgian College has four locations within the geographic region of Simcoe County including campuses in Barrie, Orillia, Collingwood and Midland. The largest Georgian Campus is located in the City of Barrie. The College offers over 130-degree, diploma, or certificate programs, including four degree-diploma programs in partnership with Lakehead University and a continuing education program equipped to develop custom training. Georgian's seven campuses play host to over 13,000 full-time students, including more than 3,600 international students from 85 countries.

Georgian College is home to several programs that support research, innovation and entrepreneurship. Specifically, the College hosts a research and innovation department which is dedicated to bringing those supports to regional businesses. There are opportunities for businesses to get involved with student/faculty-based product research, product design, prototyping, market research, analysis, testing and e-business solution development.

The Peter B. Moore Advanced Technology Centre is a \$30-million investment into a 56,000-square-foot facility at the Barrie Campus that opened in November 2018. This Centre:

- Hosts the first engineering degrees in Central Ontario
- Equipped with research and collaboration spaces, complete with emerging technologies in robotics, mechatronics, manufacturing and assembly
- Has a living lab, with sustainable building construction and energy efficiency principles incorporated throughout the building for environmental students to study
- Has the only anechoic chamber in the region to measure sounds or electromagnetic waves emitted by devices

The Henry Bernick Entrepreneurship Centre helps entrepreneurs navigate the startup and growth process by providing training, connections, funding and mentorship opportunities. Through the interviews, Centre stakeholders indicated an interest in expanding some of their programming more broadly across the region, however at this time most of the Centre's activities are focused in Barrie.

Georgian is the first college in Canada designated as a “changemaker college” by Ashoka U for its role as a leader in social innovation and changemaking in higher education. Ashoka Canada is a not-for-profit that “supports the world's leading social entrepreneurs, learns from the patterns in their innovations and mobilizes a global community that embraces these new frameworks to build a changemaker world.”¹⁵ Ashoka U is one of Ashoka Canada's programs that works directly with educational institutions to develop social innovation training and changemaking culture on campus. The designation is from the Changemaker Campus program, which recognizes more than 40 colleges and universities globally that encourage social innovation and changemaking in their culture, programming and operations. This impressive designation recognizes the unique programming and work done through Georgian's Centre for Changemaking and Social Innovation which has strived to develop and empower students and community to engage in social entrepreneurship.

From information gathered through the stakeholder interviews, Georgian was positively regarded as a strong education partner and source for workforce, cooperative learning placements, and apprenticeships. While Georgian

¹⁵ Ashoka, <https://www.ashoka.org/en-ca/about-ashoka>

students were considered a potential pipeline for talent, the College has experienced a significant decline in terms of domestic enrollment. Mature students, returning to school after time in the workforce, are an increasing market, but the College anticipates its future growth, at least for the next decade, will be in international students. Georgian noted that 70% of international students that come to Canada intend to immigrate. While a great opportunity to align with a need to attract new talent to the area, it was noted that students face racism and related barriers to employment while trying to begin their career or co-operative learning placements. Furthermore, international students struggled to find employment that enabled them to apply for their permanent resident status, which would secure their position in the regional labour market.

Affordable housing for students has also been identified as a challenge, along with access to robust transportation systems. It was noted that all campuses are quite separate from downtowns and in many cases commercial centres, making basic living tasks a challenge and preventing students from feeling rooted in the local community. Georgian College presents opportunities to work with the EDO on many different fronts. The EDO should continue to play a role in connecting businesses to the range of services offered to support them, in particular in regards to the adoption of automation and technology. The College presents a pipeline of incoming and existing talent that the EDO could work to integrate into the community to support local businesses or become business owners themselves. The College has seen a significant increase in international student enrollment, and there could be the opportunity to retain them in the community if they feel welcome and can navigate the immigration process. Finally, the College's activities also facilitate regular work in national and international markets to attract students and new partnerships. There is the opportunity for the EDO to partner with the College through that work to promote talent, quality of life and investment opportunities in the region.

3.5.3 Lakehead University

Lakehead University is based in Thunder Bay, Ontario, however the University host a satellite campus in Orillia. This campus is home to over 1,450 students, split between 4 academic areas of focus: business, arts and science, education and social work.

In addition to these areas of focus, Lakehead is scheduled to launch four new degree diploma programs in partnership with Georgian College in Fall, 2020. These include:

- Bachelor of Engineering (Electrical) Degree with Electrical Engineering Technology Advanced Diploma
- Honours Bachelor of Arts and Science – Environmental Sustainability (Specialization in Ecosystem Management) Degree with Environmental Technician Diploma
- Honours Bachelor of Science – Applied Life Sciences (Specialization in Biomedical Techniques) Degree with Biotechnology-Health Diploma
- Honours Bachelor of Science in Computer Science Degree with Computer Programming Diploma.

Lakehead is currently completing an update to their strategic plan and is looking to become more engaged as an economic development university. At this time, they provide assistance with private sector and community-based research and innovation through their faculty and student research capabilities, not limited to their Orillia campus. They rely heavily on their economic development counterparts to create awareness about their services and source new clients. As part of those services, Lakehead is home to the Centre for Analytical Services (LUCAS) and while based at their Thunder Bay campus, the Orillia campus has full access to those services. LUCAS embodies an amalgamation of semi-autonomous laboratories, laboratories, each headed by an Academic Director but coordinated through a common LUCAS secretariat. LUCAS combines experienced technical staff, internationally recognized researchers and the unique technology of the University, offering a wide range of testing, training and consulting services.

The LUCAS provides access to several specific services through their labs that include:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural research • Aquatic toxicology, acute testing with rainbow trout and water fleas • Bacteria/fungi isolation and identification, microbial engineering • Biomass testing • Environmental testing • Fire testing services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapping and 3D imaging • Materials and deposit analysis using FTIR, XRD, SEM EDX, ICP, GC EDX, GC-MS, LCMS, PSA • Mercury, methylmercury testing • Mineral deposit analysis • Paternity testing, mitochondrial and nuclear DNA, ancient DNA • Primer development, animal, plant and fish DNA coding. |
|--|---|

3.6 Regional Issues to Consider

Interviews with key stakeholders and surveys with the business community highlighted some specific regional opportunities and challenges that are currently being faced, including access to talent, investment attraction, business development, entrepreneurship and innovation, and regional economic development leadership. The sections below detail the issue and suggested opportunities for the EDO to provide assistance.

3.6.1 Talent

The need for talent emerged as a key issue in the research. Approximately 70% of stakeholder interviews specifically mentioned labour as a significant consideration for economic development in Simcoe County. 42% of business surveyed indicated that labour was one of the resources they most need to grow their business and 40% cited labour as the biggest barrier facing their business. While skilled talent was cited more often, a lack of general labour also came up frequently. The sector that was cited as most often impacted by a lack of talent was manufacturing, however construction and tourism were also mentioned, as well as healthcare for an aging population. The issue is significantly punctuated by a deficit in attainable and available housing for purchase or rent, and a significantly improved but still limited rural transportation challenge. Most interviewees noted that the challenges facing the regional workforce are complex and multi-faceted, although not unique in Ontario, and the EDO should consider playing a leadership role in coordinating a strategy and bring together the partners to implement solutions.

In line with demographic shifts highlighted earlier, the on-going workforce challenge is related to a decreasing working aged population. As a result, EDO stakeholders and the business community saw a key role for the County EDO in labour attraction and retention. In particular, undertaking campaigns to promote the region as a place to live, work and play, highlighting the County's quality of life, was often mentioned.

Stakeholders suggested that newcomers are a potentially under-tapped talent marketplace, however issues of racism, welcoming communities and a lack of employee accommodation remain prevalent in the region. The EDO could play a larger role working with the community and employers to become more welcoming to newcomers. It is important that if the EDO spends the time and resources to attract new immigrants to the community, the right services and supports are in place to retain them. Beyond just newcomers, employers could also use support in terms of understanding how to work with a multi-generational workforce, as well as support and best practices on how to better attract and retain talent. Those resources could include but are not limited to activities like the Orillia & Area Community Development Corporation's youth employment program; a toolkit on how to welcome newcomers; trailing spouse programs; and custom training.

Another challenge that became apparent from stakeholder interviews was the lack of awareness about the types of jobs available in the region and how to access them. From the education perspective, it was noted that a stronger link to the school boards was needed to promote and connect students to both the skilled trades and a broader range of regional professions. The EDO is in the process of launching a comprehensive employment website and this has the potential to serve as an anchor for finding talent and opportunities regionally if designed and marketed strategically.





3.6.1.1 Housing

A lack of attainable and available housing was often directly linked to the region's ability to attract and retain talent. 33% of interviewees noted housing as a significant issue facing regional economic development. 6% of business survey respondents noted it as a top 3 resource for, as well as barrier to growth. The lack of attainable housing references the high cost of rentals (some of the highest rental rates in the country),¹⁶ and also, the high cost to purchase a home, which although more affordable in comparison to renting and home prices in the GTA, was still quite high. Comments around available housing referred to there being very low residential vacancy rates, both for rental and purchase. Where there was housing available, there was not a suitable mix for a diverse range of incomes, lifestyles and ages – such as senior's housing, multi-unit/rental apartment/condominium, and townhomes.

Specifically, there were calls for the EDO to do a better job of understanding the scope of the problem, identifying best practices to address the challenge, and supporting development and implementation of a strategy to address this challenge. Through the stakeholder interviews, it was expressed that the County's attainable housing strategy was not geared towards addressing housing needs for the entire labour market and the EDO should ensure attainable housing is also part of the conversation going forward. There were also suggestions that the EDO advocate for and facilitate the development of policy that would support the development of more attainable housing across the region.

3.6.1.2 Transportation

Simcoe County has a complex geography and a population that is dispersed. As a result, transportation links were seen as a significant issue facing Simcoe County's economic development by 30% of interviewees. 6% of businesses noted it as a top 3 disadvantage to operating in the County, and 6% also noted it as a top 3 resource required for business growth.

Currently the County's transit infrastructure is serviced by:

- Recently launched County-wide transportation service, LINX transit
- Local level transit systems in Collingwood, Wasaga Beach, Bradford West Gwillimbury, Midland, and Penetanguishene, as well as the Cities of Barrie and Orillia
- Ride sharing services in some areas, particularly, Innisfil who has partnered with Uber to offer transit service to residents
- The GO Transit (train and bus) which runs alongside the 400 corridor to Barrie and is expected to increase its service levels to the region
- Regional bus transportation services from Greyhound and Ontario Northland.

The County has taken positive steps with the introduction of its LINX, a County run bus service providing inter-community connections. However, it was noted in the interviews that residents still experience challenges moving

¹⁶ <https://barrie.ctvnews.ca/barrie-rental-rates-ranked-sixth-highest-in-the-country-1.4732429>



around within municipalities that did not have formal public transit and where rural residents are required to get to transit hubs to be able to access transportation services.

It was suggested the EDO should continue to support the expansion of transit across the region, and in particular for the EDO to work with various departments to ensure there is a business lens consideration for putting stops near business hubs, applied to facilitating the movement of labour. There were also suggestions to consider applying a student lens to ensure students can access and experience our regional municipalities to connect them into our communities. This would also include further exploration of first/last mile solutions.

3.6.2 Investment Attraction Activities

Investment attraction was the most mentioned issue facing Simcoe County's economic development. 77% of stakeholder interviews identified investment attraction opportunities and challenges. Most of the stakeholders interviewed considered the EDO as a regional lead for marketing and investment promotion. In terms of investment attraction targets, the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) was noted as the top market of interest, with Ontario and more broadly Canada also being identified. Still others appreciated the international presence the EDO was able to provide in some cases. However, there were also several suggestions that the EDO should focus on attracting small and medium size enterprises across all sectors and to not be so focused on the manufacturing sector.

Branding was often brought up in interviews with considerations such as what is Simcoe County known for and how does the brand best align with multiple partners. Many advantages related to Simcoe County were cited, such as:

- Quality of life, lower cost of land and development
- Its strategic location on the Highway 400 corridor with generally good road networks
- Strong business support assets such as Georgian College and Lakehead University for research supports.

These can be attractive qualities, but it was noted that further consideration must be given on how to best package and present these with and amongst multiple partners who want to use it for their own efforts. Many partners were finding there is a lingering perception that Simcoe County is far from Toronto, very disconnected and very rural. This is not in line with the reality and direction the County and EDO is working towards. The County EDO needs to revisit its branding to ensure it resonates with potential investors. Several strategic partners said there are opportunities for them to share County investment materials with their respective audiences and even the potential to partner of the development of specific pieces.

Specific challenges that were mentioned related to attracting and retaining investment included a lack of infrastructure and challenges with planning red tape. Challenges such as basic land servicing, access to high speed and affordable internet were brought up as the most often-cited missing pieces. 19% of business indicated they needed internet and general infrastructure as resources to help them grow, 11% cited internet and infrastructure as a top three

barrier to growth, and 16% as a top 3 disadvantage to doing business in the region. The challenges relating to planning were numerous including:

- General red tape comments
- Inconsistency between zoning by-laws
- Outdated zoning by-laws
- Decision making that is not consistent with community goals
- Long process that is impacted by nimbyism/disconnection
- Disconnection between planning and economic development
- Lengthy municipal processes to get new or expansion development approved.

12% of businesses cited red tape as something they needed resources around to help them grow, 15% cited red tape as a top three barriers to growth, 9% as a top three disadvantage to doing business in the region. Provincial and conservation authority regulations were also often cited as challenges.

Advocacy for more support from the Province was most frequently mentioned as the role the EDO could play in supporting the infrastructure challenge. Some interviewees also suggested there was an opportunity for the County to explore taking on the servicing of the land themselves, or to work with their municipal partners to develop innovative servicing models.

In terms of planning, many stakeholders suggested the County could play a role in working with planning to harmonize and modernize the zoning by-laws to facilitate development and align with community goals. It was hoped that the EDO could generally advocate for a more harmonious relationship between economic development and planning stakeholders. Several municipalities noted that they had an on-going Community Improvement Program (CIP) to facilitate investment in key areas and they would like to see the County match Development Charge Abatement on commercial properties or explore how to complement existing CIPs. Interviewees also noted they would like some support in creating/undertaking CIPs in their municipalities.

Several small municipalities indicated the EDO could play a bigger role in helping them get investment-ready and to undertake research and data collection related to specific investment areas of focus or challenges they were facing. At this time, those partners did not have investment related materials and information. In those cases, if there are related investment opportunities to promote, the EDO should ensure they have the appropriate information to promote the site.

3.6.2.1 Available Employment Land

Further compounding the investment attraction challenges is a general lack of available employment land, as the County has very low industrial and commercial vacancy rates and little greenfield, serviced and available land for sale. 25% of interviewees specifically mentioned this as a significant economic development issue for the region. Land that was zoned industrial but had high servicing costs was noted as one of the key bottlenecks to selling land. Industrial landowners who have no interest in selling the land in the short term was identified as the other major barrier in terms of available employment lands in the region.

Stakeholders identified opportunities for the EDO to advocate for more zoning allocation of industrial land, working with property owners to support them in selling their industrially zoned lands, and potentially playing a role in servicing some of the land.

3.6.3 Business Development

The critical importance of supporting the existing business community was brought up as a significant factor for regional economic development in 53% of stakeholder interviews. Businesses also mentioned supports like grants and capital, marketing and awareness (about their business), networking, business supports, and exporting as some of the top resources they need to grow. Access to capital was also cited by 21% as a top barrier to doing business in the region. There was a perception that the EDO and many stakeholders are currently somewhat disconnected from regional small and mid-sized enterprises (SMEs).¹⁷ With a better understanding of our SME needs, the EDO would be in the best position to respond strategically to support regional business development.

There are several stakeholders regionally who provide general supports such as coaching and financing to support business development in the regional business community, such as Community Futures Development Corporations and Small Business Enterprise Centres. There is also the Henry Bernick Entrepreneurship Centre, mentioned above, from Georgian College, and the unique research and innovation capacity of Georgian College and Lakehead University.

¹⁷ According to SME Canada, a Small and Mid-size business includes small businesses with 1-99 employees and a medium business, with 100-499 employees.



Despite struggling with capacity, all these stakeholders indicated they would be willing partners in starting and growing business development related initiatives. In terms of providing more resources, the following were noted as being potential opportunities to better support businesses within the region:

- Better connectivity between businesses, the value chain, the sector, and between sectors facilitated by networking and other tools
- A central database of information and resources around funding programs, and best practices on starting and growing a business
- Support for succession planning, from start to finish on both buyer and seller ends
- Access to capital, especially to support scale-ups from \$250,000 to \$1.5 million
- Support navigating planning and building approvals
- Information for businesses on how to export
- Exploration of mentorship programming
- Information on understanding the nature of challenges attracting and retaining talent (i.e. statistics)
- Tools and best practices to accelerate technological growth and innovation in your business
- Forums to bring sectors together for knowledge sharing, business-to-business connections, conversation and collaboration such as the Manufacturers Forum.

In terms of delivering programming, many indicated that they felt the County In-Market Funding Program had been beneficial. However, they noted that the funding was restrictive in that it did not generally allow for multi-year projects, thus new initiatives struggled to continue beyond the funding period, and stakeholders lacked the capacity to administer new projects. Given their limited capacity interviewees also felt they would benefit from working with the County to raise awareness about the supports that they can provide to regional businesses. In many cases, business development partners are relying on their economic development counterparts to help make connections between industry and their organizations.

While it was noted manufacturing is an important sector and should continue to be supported, there is a heavy reliance on the sector in terms of existing industry and workforce. In many cases there are opportunities and a desire to further diversify Simcoe County's economy. Some of the most frequently suggested sectors included: agri-food, logistics and warehousing, tourism, cannabis, creative economy, technology (including cleantech, health tech, and data), smart manufacturing, construction, and social enterprise.

3.6.4 Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Entrepreneurship and innovation were mentioned as a significant opportunity for the County's regional economic development by 33% of stakeholders interviewed. While much of the support and resources mentioned for entrepreneurs overlaps the previous business development section, several partners specifically highlighted their primary investment attraction focus was entrepreneurs, particularly from the GTA, and at least three local municipalities are exploring or in the process of developing an accelerator or innovation centre. Beyond that, the same support organizations face the same challenges related to capacity and funding.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, an entrepreneur is “a person who organizes and operates a business or businesses, taking on greater than normal financial risks to do so.” A business owner is defined as “an individual or entity who owns a business entity in an attempt to profit from the successful operation of the company.” Thus, entrepreneurs are more likely to assume big risks, and business owners are primarily focused on business profitability.^{17F}

Stakeholders noted that although there is existing support and various circles meeting to support the entrepreneurial ecosystem, there is an opportunity for the EDO to play a larger role in strategically coordinating the provision of entrepreneur supports regionally. There may be a need to facilitate ecosystem discussions on more of a County specific basis to ensure the full scope of the ecosystem, its gaps and opportunities are considered, in particular the challenge of providing service to a considerable geography.

It was suggested that the EDO could also consider working with partners to develop programming designed to help businesses embrace innovation. This could include:

- Showcasing innovation in the community
- Educating about opportunities to be innovative and related benefits
- Educating about the benefits of utilizing artificial intelligence and automation
- Promoting grants or funding that supports innovation
- Expanding access to mentors
- Educating on the process of innovation
- Providing assistance in understanding intellectual property.

Georgian College and Lakehead University both expressed an interest in partnering on related programming and events. When programming for innovation and entrepreneurship is taking place in the region, the EDO could also play a role in communicating about the opportunities available to the business community.

3.6.5 Regional Economic Development Leadership

Maintaining a key role in coordinating regional economic development activities and supports was also considered important to regional economic development from the perspective of 25% of the interviewees. Given the limited economic development capacity of some of the municipalities and other partners, the EDO was seen as critical in realizing the success of economic development projects that municipalities would have not had the capacity to take on with their own resources.

One of the capacities interviewees valued most about the County EDO was its ability to be informed and communicate across regional economic development stakeholders. The EDO was seen as having access to more data, including best practice research. The EDO was also seen as a conduit for economic development programs and partners, ensuring that municipal economic development partners were informed about the resources available to support their business community, and connected to regional best practice examples. Stakeholders generally placed a high value on attending bi-monthly regional economic development meetings. Interviewees also saw the EDO as a key conduit for educating stakeholders about the value of economic development and recognized the importance of working together. However, the interviewees suggested the EDO could do more to communicate about and engage partners in the development and outcomes of projects. It was suggested that there was an opportunity to communicate, and specifically regional project outcomes, to a broader audience like local municipal councils and the public. Finally, several stakeholders noted they would welcome individual meetings with EDO staff from time-to-time to make sure that both parties are informed of their activities.

Municipalities and other partners strongly felt that they benefitted from the funding programs offered through the EDO; the economic development funding program and in-market funding program. Several municipalities noted that they would not have an economic development budget if not for those funds. In the case of both funding programs, stakeholders recommended that while the County should continue to offer both programs, they should ensure projects funded are strategic towards accomplishing regional economic development goals.

¹⁸ <https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/8327-business-owner-versus-entrepreneur.html>



4.0 Global and National Trends Impacting the Regional Economy

The success of regional economic development efforts cannot solely be attributed to the EDO, as Simcoe County's economy is subject to impacts from provincial, national and international economic trends and shocks. It is critical as the EDO moves this strategy forward, that what is going on beyond Simcoe County borders is taken into account.

In early March 2020, the EDO was in the process of finalizing this document for approval by County Council when COVID-19 hit Canada. Within weeks, non-essential businesses were closed, international travel stopped, social distancing was in place and over 1-million Ontarians were out of work.¹⁹ COVID-19 is a global pandemic that has disrupted the global economy and caused a dramatic change in the local business environment. Many local businesses have had to change how their employees work, how they sell their products/services and overall, how they navigate the economy as a whole. This has necessitated the EDO to act by consulting the business community to develop a COVID-19 Business Support Action Plan and a Recovery Plan.

Nationally, the Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC) identified workforce and technology as the biggest barriers to future business growth in 2019. Approximately 39% of Canadian SMEs are challenged to find the talent required for growth and only 19% of Canadian SMEs are considered digitally advanced, remaining competitive from a technology perspective.²⁰ These are major roadblocks to the development of new employment opportunities and the sustainability of your existing business base businesses.

Globally, we have seen significant shifts in trade policy and partnerships, with Canada participating in several new trade agreements. Most notably, in the past 5 years Canada has entered into both the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA),²¹ opening access to the European Union, and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP),²² opening access to markets in the Asia-Pacific and South American regions. Canada has also been involved in the successful renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), now known as the Canada, United States, Mexico Agreement (CUSMA).

Climate is another global factor one must consider, with a lack of collective action to address what some are calling a 'climate emergency,' it is predicted that extreme climate such as flooding, wildfires and drought will continue to be felt around the world. These could have wide ranging impacts from a decrease in tourism, disrupted transportation networks, and challenges related to agriculture production.²³

The implications of these factors will play a role in shaping the Simcoe County economy for years to come and require further consideration in terms of how the EDO should respond.

¹⁹ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-covid19-april-jobs-1.5562034>

²⁰ <https://www.bdc.ca/en/articles-tools/blog/2019-economic-outlook-canada-in-good-place>

²¹ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/ceta-europe-free-trade-1.4300071>

²² <https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/agr-acc/cptpp-ptpgrp/index.aspx?lang=eng>

²³ <https://www.brookings.edu/research/ten-facts-about-the-economics-of-climate-change-and-climate-policy/>

4.1 Workforce

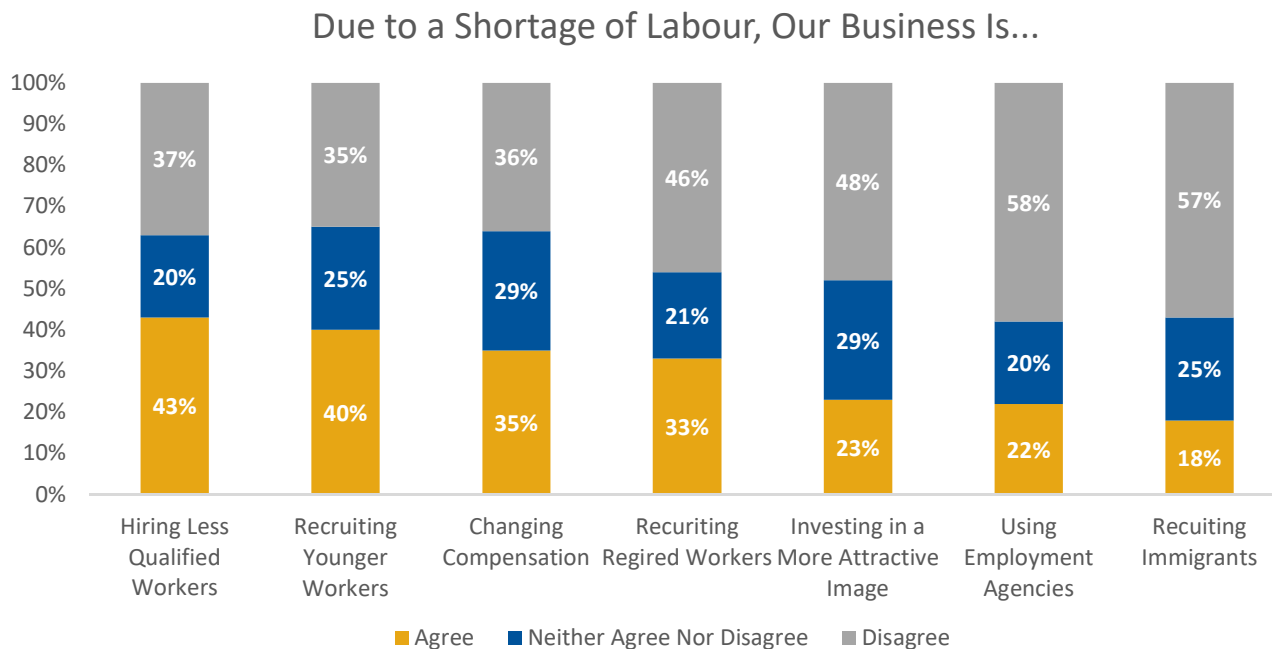
The workforce picture remains a significant challenge when examined on a national level, echoing what is taking place on a regional level. Businesses are not able to find the talent they require, an issue that will grow as the population ages. This is limiting their competitiveness and growth potential, which is a significant barrier to a prosperous economy. As a result, a prominent focus needs to be talent attraction.

The population of Canada is aging and growth in the working age population will remain below 0.2% for the decade to come, not growing at a fast-enough rate to replace the baby boomer generations that are heading towards retirement. This creates a complex challenge for the Canadian labour market, as there is an increasing demand for goods and services to support the exiting workforce and minimal incoming workforce to supply it. In Ontario, approximately 40% of SMEs are experiencing workforce shortages, which is on par with the Canadian average.²⁴

Some of the consequences that SMEs were experiencing as an outcome of the shortage included employees working more hours, limited business growth, inability to fulfill contracts or work orders, decreased competitiveness and deteriorating product quality.²⁵ The BDC workforce study found that 65% of businesses experiencing workforce shortages are low-growth companies, highlighting that the lack of talent is constricting overall economic growth. Those sectors experiencing the most pronounced shortages were manufacturing, retail and construction and the difficulty faced in hiring tends to be focused around firms with 5 or more employees.²⁶

To address this challenge, as noted in Figure 13, businesses tended to look towards hiring more underqualified and youth workers, rather than looking at underutilized markets, such as newcomers to Canada, where we will likely see the biggest growth in workforce in coming years.²⁷

Recognizing the significant impact that the labour shortage will have both regionally and nationally necessitates that the EDO take significant action to help employers increase productivity and attract and retain the talent needed to remain sustainable and grow.



Source: Maru/Matchbox survey on Canada's Labour shortage, 2018. Results excludes respondents who said, "I don't know" or "I prefer not to answer". Results are weighted by region and company size to reflect Canada's economy more accurately. n=1,123 to 1,156

Figure 13: Business Strategies to Address Shortage of Labour.²⁸

²⁴⁻²⁸ https://www.bdc.ca/en/documents/analysis_research/labour-shortage.pdf?utm_campaign=Labour-Shortage-Study-2018--download--EN&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Eloqua



4.2 Technology

Technology is rapidly reshaping the global economy from exacerbating regional advantages (or disadvantages) to the industry sectors experiencing the highest growth. Economists point to digital technologies as becoming increasingly critical in production processes²⁹ as the rate of development and adoption of new technologies is taking place at a significantly faster pace than ever before.³⁰ Thus, expanding on the innovation discussion in the regional economy section, it is essential to make sure our businesses consider implementing strategic technologies.

Globally, trends point to higher rates of competitiveness for countries that promote the use of digital technologies. This promotion results in increased competitiveness, with the opposite effect if not achieved. The effect on competitiveness is especially pronounced in countries that have an aging society, making it a special consideration for Canada.³¹ Particularly crucial in this picture is how quickly that technology can be adopted, and, as a developed economy, Canadian businesses are in a better position to finance more rapid adoption.³² Organizations that are late adopters of automation can find it difficult to benefit from the impact because they will lag in the development of related capabilities and attracting talent. Early adopters, on the other hand, have the potential to double their cash flow over the next decade while non-adopters could experience a 20% decline from current cash flow levels.³³ This is a critically important trend to consider because if the regional business community is not adopting technology, any competitive advantage they once had could be forever lost as productivity declines in the face of global technology adoption. Technology like artificial intelligence, is expected to widen the economic gap between countries who can facilitate faster adoption, versus those who cannot.³⁴ Additionally, with aging populations and higher wage rates, in order to remain competitive, businesses will have to examine how and where artificial intelligence can increase their competitiveness and sustainability.

²⁹ <https://ged-project.de/blogpostsen/digital-economy-how-is-digitalization-changing-global-competitiveness-and-economic-prosperity/>

³⁰ <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/the-8-major-forces-shaping-the-future-of-the-global-economy>

³¹ <https://ged-project.de/blogpostsen/digital-economy-how-is-digitalization-changing-global-competitiveness-and-economic-prosperity/>

³² <https://ged-project.de/blogpostsen/digital-economy-how-is-digitalization-changing-global-competitiveness-and-economic-prosperity/>

³³⁻³⁴ <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/artificial-intelligence/notes-from-the-AI-frontier-modeling-the-impact-of-ai-on-the-world-economy>

Ultimately, product and process development and adoption are taking place at a rapid pace and those who are unable to remain competitive with respect to this will be left behind in this economic shift. For business, that technology adoption should consider how to leverage connectivity, network effects, artificial intelligence, and the opportunity to create global platforms that are almost impossible to compete with (for example Ali Baba and Amazon in the retail space, Uber and Lyft in the transportation space).³⁵ Today new digital products are attracting millions of users in much shorter timeframes than ever before. Take the game, Pokémon Go, for example, which had 50 million users in 19 days, versus the telephone, which took 50 years to gain that level sort of traction.³⁶ Businesses, on a regional basis, would benefit from understanding the opportunity to have access to and create global networks and platforms, which will enhance the adoption rates of their new products or services.

Nationally, a BDC survey found that only 19% of Canada's SMEs are considered digitally advanced, and in Ontario, 57% of businesses were digitally conservative (those that were not investing in and adopting technology).^{36F} Digitally advanced companies are those that have a high use of digital technology (consumer-facing and back-end) and a high ability to manage change. They are considered more likely to export and more likely to have introduced one innovation in the past three years.³⁸ Businesses with less than 20 employees had the highest levels of digital conservatism (60%), while businesses with 20 or more employees ranked as digitally advanced (34%), highlighting that larger firms tend to be more digitally advanced. In Canada, firms that have higher use of digital technology are considered significantly more likely to experience annual revenue growth of 10% or more. Similarly, firms that have a high capacity to manage change are significantly more likely to have annual profit growth of 10% or more.³⁹ With these high levels of impact, it is essential that the EDO examine how to better support digital adoption and innovation for regional businesses to ensure they remain competitive.

Finally, while the introduction of technology into the global economy has a significant impact on firm competitiveness, the nature of industrial labour is also impacted. Trends point to jobs shifting away from repetitive tasks to require higher degrees of digital, social and cognitive skills. Low digital skill jobs are predicted to decline by about 40% over the next decade, to make up 30% of the workforce, and on the converse, digitally skilled jobs will increase by approximately 40% to over 50% of required talent.⁴⁰ This is particularly critical for the County's strong manufacturing sector. The World Manufacturing Forum indicates the top two skills that will be in demand in the future are digital literacy and artificial intelligence and data analytics, respectively.⁴¹ It will also be critical for the EDO to take this into consideration as it works with the region's educational providers and stakeholders to plan and prepare for the workforce of tomorrow.

4.3 Global Trade

Today, Canada's economy is intimately linked with that of its global trading partners, the largest one by a significant volume being the United States. Despite this, recent years have seen that landscape shifting due to political and economic agendas, and trade agreements and tariffs have appeared and disappeared in response to global events. In recent years, Canada has signed onto two new trade agreements, the Canadian-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). Canada has also just completed the renegotiation of NAFTA, now CUSMA. These new agreements have the ability to positively or negatively impact different sectors or marketplaces.

The signing of the CETA represents a significant opening of the European Union (EU) marketplace, as over 98 per cent of Canadian goods are now able to enter the EU without tariffs, compared to only 25 per cent before. The federal government believes this will improve export opportunities for a range of Canadian producers, processors and manufacturers.⁴² The agreement provides Canadian companies with access to a \$20-trillion market, and also allows Canadian companies to bid on all levels of EU government procurement activity, an additional \$3.3-trillion dollar annual marketplace.⁴³ While this represents an attractive deal to Canadian exporters, the on-going impact of the agreement remains to be seen, as developments in the global political climates evolve, for example, the exit of the United Kingdom from the EU.

³⁵⁻³⁶ <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/the-8-major-forces-shaping-the-future-of-the-global-economy/>

³⁷⁻³⁹ https://www.bdc.ca/EN/Documents/analysis_research/how-to-make-the-digital-shift-in-your-business-study.pdf?utm_campaign=Digitize-now-Study-2018--EN&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Eloqua

⁴⁰ <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/artificial-intelligence/notes-from-the-ai-frontier-modeling-the-impact-of-ai-on-the-world-economy#0>

⁴¹ http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Jobs_of_Tomorrow_2020.pdf 9356e02fbfb5.filesusr.com/ugd/c56fe3_d617f7333fd347b0b2b-b4a739ba72993.pdf

⁴²⁻⁴³ <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/the-8-major-forces-shaping-the-future-of-the-global-economy/>

The CPTPP is a free trade agreement between Canada and 10 countries in the Asia-Pacific region: Australia, Brunei, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam. Currently, 7 of the 11 countries above (including Canada) have implemented the agreement. Once fully implemented, this agreement will create a trading block representing 495 million consumers and 13.5% of the global GDP. Ultimately, this will provide Canada with preferential access to key markets in Asia and Latin America.⁴⁴ This trading block will allow for 94% of Canadian agriculture and agri-food products, 99% of industrial products, 100% of fish and seafood, and 100% of forest products to be exported duty-free.⁴⁵ With this agreement, Canada becomes the only G7 country to have free trade agreements with all other G7 members and free trade access across the Americas, Europe and Asia-Pacific regions.

Canada and its closest neighbor, the United States, have a long and amicable trading history. While both countries are the other's top trading partner, Canada relies on the United States to a much greater degree as illustrated in Figure 14. Established in 1994, the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has provided Canada with preferential trade access to the USA and Mexico. While merchandise-based trade has increased nine-fold and service-based trade has increased six-fold with Mexico, as noted in Figure 14, Mexico only accounts for about 1% of Canadian exports. However, 400,000 people and over \$2.4 billion worth of goods cross the Canada-United States border daily.⁴⁶ It is estimated 1.9 million Canadian and 9 million jobs in the United States are dependent on this trade relationship, making it a critical one for both parties. While NAFTA has been beneficial to all parties involved, the three countries have come back to the negotiating table and recently ratified the updated CUSMA. While the agreement looks similar to its predecessor there have been changes in regards to auto manufacturing, labour and environmental standards, intellectual property protections and digital trade protections. These changes will likely be beneficial for Canadian trade and will support increased production opportunities for the North American auto sector and a chance to improve innovation capacity in Canada.⁴⁷

With the implementation of the new trade agreements, access to new marketplaces for trade have been expanded significantly. This presents a meaningful opportunity for Canadian, and Simcoe County businesses to export their products and services in markets they previously did not have access to. At the same time, as these trade relationships go two ways, this also opens new markets for imported goods to come into Canada. Of note is that each of these agreements included concessions of market share from the highly protected dairy sector. Given increased competition and opportunity, there is a critical need for Simcoe County businesses to remain competitive, both from a technology and labour perspective, to be able to not only compete in the domestic marketplace but thrive with access to these new markets.

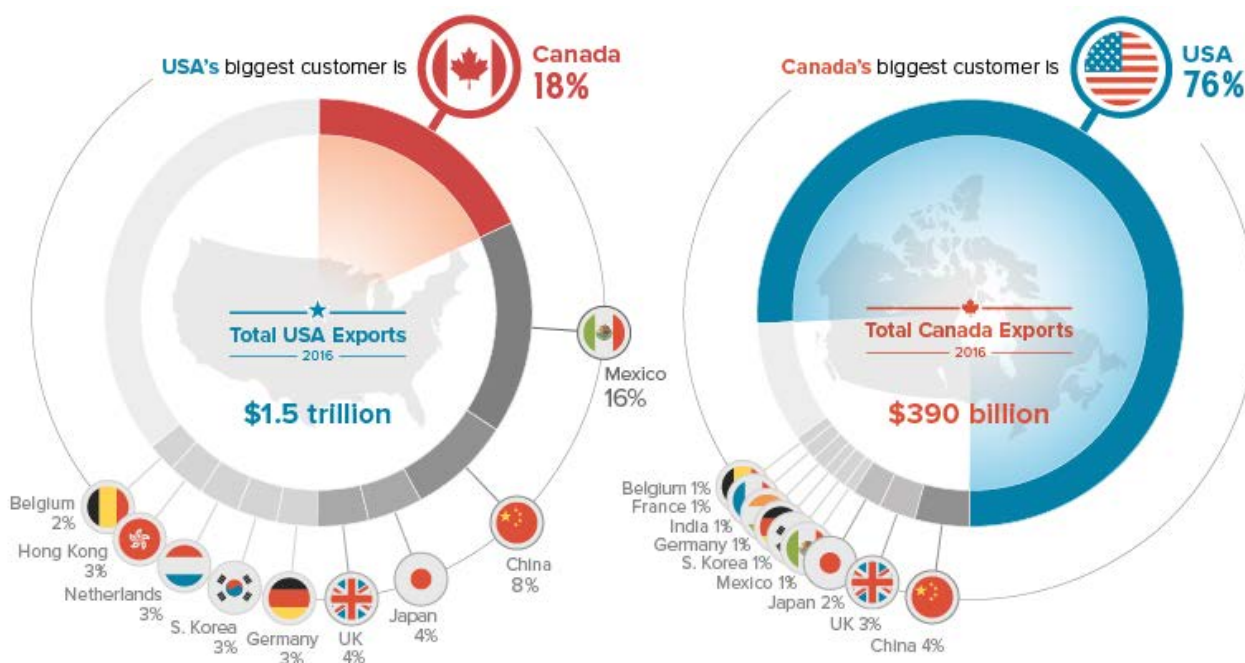


Figure 14: Business Canada and US trade relationship highlighted, amongst other trade partners.⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁻⁴⁵ <https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/agr-acc/cptpp-ptpgp/index.aspx?lang=eng>

⁴⁶ <https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/consultations/nafta-alena/toolkit-outils.aspx?lang=eng>

⁴⁷ <https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/agr-acc/cusma-aceum/index.aspx?lang=eng>

⁴⁸ <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/the-8-major-forces-shaping-the-future-of-the-global-economy/>

4.4 Climate Change

The state of the global climate has been a frequently discussed topic over the past decade. There is strong agreement amongst scientists that the climate is changing at an increasingly rapid rate, and fundamentally these changes will have an impact on our economy. In 2018, it is estimated that economic stress and damage from global natural disasters was equal to \$165 billion and 50% of that was uninsured.⁴⁹ A changing climate will have impact on trade, as arctic passes open for shipment, new shipping routes and relationships may be generated. Conversely, more severe weather affects the ability of agricultural producers to produce reliable crops. It can also cause widespread disruptions to ecosystems, causing flooding, drought, wildfire and extinctions, highlighting a need for additional consideration, especially in regard to the tourism sector.⁵⁰

With the rhetoric about climate change and its increasing importance, it is highly likely we will see a shrinking Canadian resource sector, within oil and gas, as investment in energy transitions towards more sustainable sources.⁵¹ Since a student call for fossil fuel divestment in 2011, nearly 1,000 institutional investors with \$6.24 trillion in assets have committed to divest from fossil fuels globally, which is up from \$52 billion just four years ago, highlighting the rapid adoption of divestment currently taking place. It is unclear what the impacts will be on a County level, as at least some businesses retain contracts in the oil sands for service and manufacturing.⁵²

Given the environmental and economic volatility that is expected to emerge from climate change, the EDO should consider how best to prepare businesses for more severe weather, but also look for sector opportunities to capitalize on economic shifts. Several stakeholders mentioned they saw an opportunity to pursue the cleantech sector, which will likely be a growing sector of the economy as globally we look to create and maintain a more sustainable world.

4.5 COVID-19

In December 2019, the globe saw the emergence of a new coronavirus, known as COVID-19. This new coronavirus strand was different from past coronaviruses like Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), as this strand travels faster and had more severe symptoms. In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared an international pandemic with numerous countries including Canada stopping all non-essential travel into the country. While the health challenges posed by COVID-19 are immense, the economic challenges posed are unprecedented. In March 2020, the Provincial Government announced the immediate closure of non-essential businesses and work from home measures to slow the spread of the virus. In addition, physical distancing measures requiring workforce and customers to be at least 6 feet (2 metres) apart, and temporary elimination of group gatherings were implemented. In the summer of 2020, the Province of Ontario started a phased approach to re-opening of the economy to limit human interactions. Until a vaccine is available widely COVID-19 will continue to play a role in how human interaction takes place.

Physical distancing has changed how local employers operate their business from manufacturing to office space. Many businesses are being required to innovate and change operations dramatically or alternatively face failure. The effect will be felt across almost all industries, in particular those most impacted by physical distancing such as food services, accommodations, air transportation, retail and culture.⁵³

The pandemic has had a significant impact on Canada, which is experiencing the worst economic downturn in decades, with second quarter GDP forecasted to contract 25%.⁵⁴ Since February 2020 Canada lost over 3 million jobs, including the largest monthly decline ever in April, and with many more working reduced hours⁵⁵⁻⁶⁰. In Ontario, manufacturers that did not define themselves as essential or could not pivot to help with healthcare innovation needed to close their doors temporarily. Since the initial downturn, the Canadian economy and outlook has improved and by September 2020, had recovered about 2.3 million jobs.⁶¹

In April, the Index of Consumer Confidence decreased by 41.0 points, a record decline and low, as Canadians' concern for their finances grows and Canadians shied away from making big purchases in this highly uncertain

⁴⁹⁻⁵⁰ http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GlobalRisk_Report_2020.pdf

⁵¹⁻⁵² <https://www.arabellaadvisors.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Global-Divestment-Report-2018.pdf>

⁵³⁻⁵⁵ http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GlobalRisk_Report_2020.pdf

⁵⁶ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/canada-jobs-april-1.5561001>

⁵⁷ <https://www.conferenceboard.ca/insights/blogs/job-losses-top-1-million-with-more-to-come>

⁵⁸ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/canada-jobs-april-1.5561001>

⁵⁹ <https://www.conferenceboard.ca/insights/blogs/job-losses-top-1-million-with-more-to-come>

⁶⁰ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/sunday-tfw-fruit-veg-1.5571508>

⁶¹ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/jobs-august-1.5756642>



time.⁶² A recent survey by McKinsey and company indicated approximately 80% of Canadians felt unsure or pessimistic about the economy, expecting recovery to take 6 months or more.⁶³ These statistics are cause for significant concern about the health of the economy and its ability to rebound. High numbers of jobs lost, decreased consumer confidence and pessimism about the economy will likely mean that consumers will not return to their previous level of spending for some time, which will have long standing implications across all sectors. While on the surface it may appear that retail and service sectors are the most impacted, reduced and shifting consumer buying habits will have an effect down the value chains that produce our consumer goods, and in turn support the manufacturers producing those goods. In the recent Manufacturing Business Outlook survey of manufacturers across Canada, 65% of respondents expected their sales and output over to remain below normal for at least the next 3 to 6 months.⁶⁴

The Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO) and the local Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs) have conducted 7 tourism specific surveys (as of July 2020) in Ontario to look at how the pandemic has affected the sector. The surveys indicate that tourism businesses throughout Ontario were very concerned about the uncertainty of re-opening timelines, missing the key summer season, lack of provincial government funding, and increased business debt.

Simcoe County may face additional barriers, as the Conference Board of Canada notes that urban centres like Toronto and Ottawa have a high number of professional and business service sector jobs that enable their population to work from home.⁶⁵ These dense populations also better enables delivery services, meaning consumer spending will ultimately remain stronger in those regions.⁶⁶ Simcoe County has a lower number of individuals that work in the business service sector and may not have the opportunity to work from home to stay employed during the pandemic.

In the Spring of 2020 the Simcoe County EDO, Tourism Simcoe County (TSC), and area partners conducted two (2) COVID-19 Business Impact Surveys in the region to identify key areas of support needed by the local business

⁶² <https://www.conferenceboard.ca/insights/covid-19>

⁶³ <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/survey-canadian-consumer-sentiment-during-the-coronavirus-crisis>

⁶⁴ <https://cme-mec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Manufacturing-Our-Future-Print-Ready-.pdf>

⁶⁵⁻⁶⁶ <https://www.conferenceboard.ca/e-library/abstract.aspx?did=10588>

community. Survey results identified the top supports needed by Simcoe County businesses as:

- Financial support/relief (tax relief/deferrals, finance assistance, grants, rent relief)
- Access to information and resources (personal protective equipment supplies, health and safety guidance)
- Marketing and promotional support
- Access to broadband infrastructure

The Business Impact Surveys data was used in the development of the Business Support and Economic Stimulus Action Plan. The Action Plan was approved by the Economic Development Sub-Committee of County Council on April 23, 2020, and updates were later approved on June 9 and October 13, 2020. The Action Plan includes numerous initiatives under six categories, of financial support; business outreach, support and resources; workforce alignment; economic development network collaboration and research, business promotion, and potential broader economic stimulus. As the pandemic evolves the actions are reviewed to ensure the County was responsive in supporting the needs of the business community.

4.5.1 COVID-19 Looking Forward

As the first wave of this pandemic appears to have reached its peak in May 2020, the future is unfortunately marred with uncertainty. Additional waves of the virus are anticipated to emerge in the future, and the Ontario government has referenced projections in the timeframe of 18 to 24 months.⁶⁷ The World Trade Organization has forecasted double digit reductions in trade, almost across the globe, with North American and Asian exporters being the hardest hit.⁶⁸ The pandemic has put global trade and supply chains in crisis.⁶⁹⁻⁷⁰ Business confidence has dropped to its lowest level on record, indicating businesses will be unlikely to make significant investments soon.⁷¹ With high levels of job losses, increasing government debt levels which will lead to tax implications, it is likely that consumers will remain cautious about spending for some time, which will limit the ability for the economy to bounce back to pre-COVID-19 consumer spending.⁷²⁻⁷⁴ Deloitte currently predicts that Canada's economy will begin to rebound by mid-Q3 2020.⁷⁵⁻⁷⁷ With the unprecedented nature of this economic shock, there is no magic formula to follow in terms of recovery, however on-going data collection should be at the forefront of identifying challenges and opportunities that need to be solved in the short and long term. It is important to note, that despite extensive and on-going research March-May 2020 for this strategy, there has been a very limited amount of credible prediction in terms of what the new normal economy will look like.

Businesses that are best able to adapt and pivot to the requirements, particularly those who can go digital, will have the best chance of succeeding and even leveraging the situation.⁷⁸ Given the nature of a pandemic, which encourages isolation and limited contact with others, consumers are adopting new digital and low touch activities, and 40-60% intend to continue using those post pandemic.⁷⁹ In October 2018, Ontario's Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs in partnership with the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association launched Digital Main Street. Digital Main Street was to help small main street businesses from across Ontario improve their adoption of technologies to better promote themselves online by providing businesses with the resources and technology support to compete. The program was scheduled to end in the spring of 2020, but the provincial government has extended the program to continue to help local businesses. As Digital Main Street only focused on businesses within main commercial districts, the County of Simcoe has provided funding to local Digital Main Street providers to expand their services into the rural and smaller communities within Simcoe County, known as Digital Main Street and Beyond.

⁶⁷ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/pandemic-covid-coronavirus-ontario-doug-ford-1.5521639>

⁶⁸ <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/coronavirus-how-are-countries-responding-economic-crisis>

⁶⁹ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/covid-19-pandemic-disrupts-global-value-chains/>

⁷⁰ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/13/coronavirus-will-undo-globalization-make-supply-chains-regional-eiu.html>

⁷¹ <https://www.conferenceboard.ca/insights/covid-19>

⁷² <https://knowledge.insead.edu/blog/insead-blog/the-shape-of-the-covid-19-economic-recovery-13841>

⁷³ <http://www.qub.ac.uk/coronavirus/analysis-commentary/dont-bank-on-a-rapid-economy-recovery/>

⁷⁴ <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/a-global-view-of-how-consumer-behavior-is-changing-amid-covid-19>

⁷⁵ <https://knowledge.insead.edu/blog/insead-blog/the-shape-of-the-covid-19-economic-recovery-13841>

⁷⁶ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/05/04/the-abcs-of-the-post-covid-economic-recovery/>

⁷⁷ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/economic-recovery-letters-analysis-1.5574372>

⁷⁸ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/post-pandemic-economy-favour-fastest-movers/>

⁷⁹ <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/a-global-view-of-how-consumer-behavior-is-changing-amid-covid-19>



There is also anticipated to be an increase in opportunities to work from home, as businesses evolve to operate in the current situation and assess the feasibility of it. This can again lead to a shift in purchasing habits, away from job-specific requirements such as business clothing and vehicle related costs towards home office related purchases and more casual clothing.⁸⁰ Simcoe County has already seen this trend occurring. In February 2020, Nordia, a customer service call centre, announced that they planned to close and lay-off their 300 staff located in their Orillia facility by the end of 2020. In March 2020, with the closure of non-essential workplaces, Nordia moved all Orillia staff to a work from home environment. The work from home pilot was so successful that Nordia decided to continue the remote work program and retain all 300 of their employees based out of Orillia.⁸¹ The Global Workplace Analytics consulting firm has shown that a typical employer can save an average of \$11,000 per half-time telecommuter per year, in terms of increased productivity, lower real estate costs, reduced absenteeism, and turnover.⁸²

While retail and population-based services may not be a focus for this strategy the reality is that this is an area of the economy that will likely require a significant amount of pivoting.⁸³ There are opportunities to both support that pivot directly with the businesses, but also to provide opportunities for other sectors to assist in the development of solutions to the challenges facing the retail and service sector. Data, forecasts and predictions are rapidly changing as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolds globally. Businesses will need to remain informed to remain competitive.

COVID-19 has prompted some local manufacturers to transform their business offerings to support the healthcare sector. No fewer than 20 local manufacturers have pivoted away from what they normally produce to focus on essential goods such as PPE, medical supplies, and sanitizer. For example, Molded Precision Components (MPC) is a precision injection moulding facility located in Oro-Medonte, offering industry a full-service engineering, product development and volume manufacturing capability. With a flexible manufacturing approach, they continue to serve their existing automotive partners, while having also redeployed key resources to focus on medical-driven needs, including a collaboration for supply of 25 million personal protective face shields. In response to this, they have hired

⁸⁰ <https://www2.deloitte.com/ca/en/pages/finance/articles/covid-19-voice-of-canadians-and-impact-to-retailers.html>

⁸¹ <https://www.simcoe.com/news-story/9952802-nordia-jobs-staying-in-orillia-as-company-embraces-virtual-operation/>

⁸² <https://hub.jhu.edu/2020/07/27/digital-technology-in-business-joel-le-bon/>

⁸³ <https://www.scotiabank.com/ca/en/about/perspectives.articles.economy.market-insights.html>

60 new employees and are working collaboratively with a number of local businesses and organizations throughout the region and Province.

The significance of the shock and disruption to trade and global markets that have been experienced, may lead to a process of creative destruction, where new models for business and global trade emerge and replace the ones we have become familiar with.⁸⁴ With unprecedented global supply chain disruption, it is anticipated there may be a shift towards regionalizing logistics hubs to support long term resiliency.⁸⁵⁻⁸⁶ There is and has been an increasing desire from large businesses to eliminate single-source dependencies and to establish a flexible and adaptable supply chain.⁸⁷ This means that ultimately product integrators, sub-system suppliers and component suppliers may look to source, assemble and deliver from their own backyards, presenting both business development and attraction opportunities for global businesses based in Simcoe County.⁸⁸

When the pandemic will end, the economy will return to its “new normal,” and social distancing will be a concept of the past is impossible to predict at this point. The economic impact has been deeper and longer than many have anticipated already, and the immediate term outlook continues to look bleak as social distancing measures stay in place.⁸⁹⁻⁹⁰ COVID-19 management and reduction measures will likely be in place for some time and the health component needs to remain a consideration for mid-term economic development. The World Health Organization has identified 6 areas that require consideration before re-opening their economy. These include having virus transmission under control, the health care capacity to handle an outbreak, no outbreaks in special settings like nursing homes, measures in workplaces and schools to prevent the spread, no imported cases from abroad, the community is educated and there is capacity to limit and fight the virus.⁹¹ That being said, in the interim the County EDO can take steps to assist the regional business community to remain resilient in this challenging time, prepare for and leverage recovery, and in some cases, even thrive in this new environment.

Given the jobs recovery that has taken place, the latest McKinsey Global Survey suggest a positive change in outlook, where more than half of all executives surveyed say economic conditions in their own countries will be better six months from now.⁹² However, countering this, at the end of August, despite returning to almost normal business operations in many cases, a CFIB survey indicated that only 25% of Ontario businesses were experiencing sales levels at or above normal sales levels compared to previous years.⁹³ The EDO understands that until a vaccine for the virus is widely available, COVID-19 will continue to affect the local, national and international economy.

4.5.2 The County's Response to COVID-19

In response to the COVID-19 Business Impact Surveys, the County of Simcoe has developed and implemented the Business Support and Economic Stimulus Action Plan. The Action Plan was approved during the April 23, 2020 Economic Development Sub-Committee of County Council Meeting and later updated June 9 and October 13, 2020. COVID-19 is still a part of everyday life, and Ontario is currently experiencing a second wave. Due to international collaboration, vaccines for this deadly virus have been developed and starting to be distributed to the Canadian population. With the regular delivery of the vaccine, the provincial government plans to have all residents vaccinated by December 2021. The EDO approached the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs about facilitating focus groups in key sectors to determine how the County could support COVID-19 recovery. Through this process, the COVID-19 Recovery Plan (Appendix A) was developed. This Recovery Plan is an evergreen document that will provide the EDO, TSC, and area partners with priority objectives and actions to continue to support the business community.

⁸⁴ <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/a-long-time-until-the-economic-new-normal/>

⁸⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/16/upshot/world-economy-restructuring-coronavirus.html>

⁸⁶⁻⁸⁸ <https://www.imd.org/research-knowledge/articles/A-post-COVID-19-outlook-The-future-of-the-supply-chain/>

⁸⁹ <https://www.spglobal.com/ratings/en/research/articles/200416-economic-research-covid-19-deals-a-larger-longer-hit-to-global-gdp-11440500>

⁹⁰ <https://knowledge.insead.edu/blog/insead-blog/the-shape-of-the-covid-19-economic-recovery-13841>

⁹¹ <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/covid-19-the-who-has-issued-guidelines-for-lifting-restrictions-but-is-canada-ready>

⁹² <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/the-coronavirus-effect-on-global-economic-sentiment>

⁹³ <https://www.cfib-fcei.ca/sites/default/files/2020-09/COVID-19-survey-results-September2.pdf>

4.6 Other Considerations

Global geopolitical stability continues to be an issue of concern, exacerbated by environmental and economic stressors above. Not only is inequality growing and more people are becoming displaced, but on a regular basis we see increasing tensions between and within governments. Global instability on a geopolitical level creates an uncertain environment for investment.⁹⁴

Finally, one must recognize that there may be economic shocks one cannot anticipate, and in those cases, one may need to adopt new objectives and actions to ensure the local economy is able to prevail.



5.0 An Economic Development Strategy for Simcoe County

In the face of many regional, national, and global opportunities and challenges the EDO must choose a path forward that provides a sustainable future for its communities. The EDO is focused on creating a competitive business environment, and an attractive place to invest with a strong pool of talent. The following section will lay out a vision for Simcoe County's future and the strategy for success.

5.1 A Vision for Sustainable Growth

The County of Simcoe EDO will be a catalyst for building and maintaining the assets, tools, and partnerships required to recover from the economic shock of COVID-19 and continue to build a strong, diversified economy.

Simcoe County has reached a complex time in their economic development process. While they have an incredibly strategic location for business investment and start-ups, the County has an extremely low vacancy rate for available industrial and commercial land. Furthermore, the County is challenged with the provision of commonly relied upon services such as high-speed internet and natural gas. Businesses are optimistic about growth and opportunities in their sectors, however that growth has been limited by the struggle to find and retain talent. While investment attraction remains a focus for the EDO, with limited access to land and talent the EDO will need to implement new tactics to address those challenges and continue to better position the region for growth.

The County's labour force has become highly concentrated in population-based employment, the manufacturing, and tourism sectors. Partners are seeing more opportunities to diversify their economy, attract innovative entrepreneurs, home-based businesses, and explore linkages to other sectors such as health care and technology. In the face of global trends and challenges, there are potential opportunities for growth across all of these sectors, the EDO will ensure their regional business community is connected to relevant tools and resources to help enable future

⁸⁴ http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GlobalRisk_Report_2020.pdf

growth. Furthermore, in order to help businesses remain globally competitive, it is vital to ensure ongoing promotion and support of technology and innovation. In order to be the catalyst for a strong and diversified regional economy, Simcoe County will be:

Investment Ready

It is easy and attractive for a business to invest in Simcoe County as a result of available serviced land, talent, and effective customer service and processes.

Business Responsive

Starting, scaling, and investing in business in Simcoe County will be seamless and supported by a robust innovation and business development ecosystem. Partners will work harmoniously to facilitate investment in alignment with community development goals.

A Livable Community

Simcoe County becomes a destination for talent as a result of livable communities and competitive wages. Simcoe County has an unmatched quality of life in diverse and welcoming communities serviced by an appropriate mix of housing and business and resident focused transit.

Using the data collected from the economic base analysis, business surveys, stakeholder interviews, and a review of secondary research, five key goals were developed to help the County achieve this vision going forward.

Goals

1. Simcoe County will be recognized as a premier destination for investment in Ontario.
2. Through an excellent quality of life, education and careers, Simcoe County attracts and retains talent to support the needs of its thriving business community.
3. Businesses stay and grow in this region, supported by a strong and innovative business development environment.
4. The County of Simcoe's Economic Development Office is a leader in facilitating and building effective and collaborative relationships that creates a strong ecosystem for regional economic development.
5. Advocate for and support the delivery of infrastructure to meet the needs of a competitive business community.

Appendix B outlines a prioritization framework that will be used to guide the implementation of the actions within this plan, along with potential partners. Priority actions will be further refined in the EDO annual work plans.

5.2 Goal:

Simcoe County will be recognized as a premier destination for investment in Ontario

Simcoe County is in a strategic location with available industrial land, commercial property and a growing population. It is a community positioned for continued economic growth and is looked upon as a premier destination for investment. The County will work to create the tools and brand to ensure investment opportunities across the identified sectors understand the regional value proposition.

Why pursue this goal?

- The County of Simcoe has access to several features that make it attractive for investment including:
 - Proximity to the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).
 - Strong transportation networks.
 - A high quality of life.
 - Supports for innovation and business development through Georgian College and Lakehead University.
 - Known tourism brand.
 - Strong cluster of manufacturing businesses.
- Stakeholders have identified the EDO as the organization best positioned from a capacity and mandate perspective to represent regional investment attraction efforts. There are opportunities to work together with a range of partners to develop materials, share branding, and promote the region nationally and internationally.

- Despite its strategic location, the brand recognition for Simcoe County’s positioning as located in Central Ontario has not been well received, and in particular stakeholders had received feedback that businesses were not interested in locating here because of perceptions of its distance from Toronto, its rurality, and its lack of diversity. The EDO is in a position to help change those perceptions through branding and materials, such as a standalone website, that identify it as connected to Toronto, with a high quality of life and robust business community. The EDO’s current website is buried within a broader Corporate County site, where little else has a focus on business, innovation, talent and investment.
- COVID-19 presents opportunities for regionalization of supply chains, which may present opportunities to attract suppliers related to large manufacturers in the region.

5.2.1 Objective 1

Build awareness of Simcoe County’s value proposition to investment prospects.

The County EDO must develop and maintain a strategic set of investment attraction materials and identify and act on opportunities to create awareness of the regional value proposition to partners and prospects. This will be realized through the following priority actions:

- Implement the Foreign Direct Investment Strategy and Marketing Plan.
- Develop and maintain investment attraction materials.
- Create a standalone website that showcases opportunities and resources available from an investment and talent lens.
- Maintain social media using key messaging.
- Maintain up to date land and building inventory.
- Support Ontario’s Certified Site program in the region.
- Where member municipalities do not have the capacity, support the development of basic investment attraction materials (i.e. community profiles).
- Engage with real estate associations, site selectors, provincial representatives and developers to promote investment opportunities.
- Collaborate with Ontario-based investment attraction groups to promote investment opportunities.

We will measure the outcome of this objective through:

- Investment inquiries received.
- Investment inquiry outcomes.
- Website and social media engagement (using unique links for specific campaigns).
- Collaborations with investment attraction groups.
- Engagements with real estate and development stakeholders, provincial and federal agencies.

5.2.2 Objective 2

Be a leader in coordinating regional investment attraction activities and events.

The EDO is best positioned to bring together the multitude of stakeholders, such as member municipalities, separated cities, and regional assets like Lake Simcoe Regional Airport or local post-secondary institutions, to develop and refine a regional brand that is truly representative of the region. The EDO will participate in investment attraction activities on behalf of and/or in partnership with its partners. This will be accomplished through the following priority actions:

- Refine Simcoe County’s economic development brand to reflect its strategic location in proximity to the GTA, quality of life, strong business development assets and thriving business community.
- Lead Requests for Information (RFIs) process in relation to new investment opportunities and engage partner municipalities.
- Coordinate attendance at events for provincial, national and international investment activities.

We will measure the outcome of this objective through:

- Investment inquiries received.
- Investment inquiry outcomes.
- Participation in investment attraction events.
- Development and implementation of Economic.
- Development branding.

5.2.3 Objective 3

Work with partners to promote and leverage key regional assets and opportunities.

The EDO must work with their strategic regional assets to maximize the economic development impact that these assets have. These assets currently include, the Lake Simcoe Regional Airport and other Simcoe County airports, Barrie-Collingwood Railway (BCRY) and Class 1 Railways (CPR and CNR), and local post-secondary institutions. This will be accomplished through the following priority actions:

- Recognize strategic regional assets in investment materials.
- Help existing businesses and new investors understand the opportunities available to them through key regional assets.
- Leverage opportunities from partners to promote Simcoe County as a place to live, work and invest to their client groups.

We will measure the outcome of this objective through:

- Promotional collaborations with key regional assets.
- Development of sector specific promotional material.

5.3 Goal:

Through an excellent quality of life, education and careers, Simcoe County attracts and retains talent to support the needs of its thriving business community.

Simcoe County is home to an excellent quality of life that is inclusive, accessible and affordable, has educational institutions that are supporting the talent needs of industry, and a business community that supports attractive career opportunities that keep residents and students working in Simcoe County. The County will strive to have a mix of housing and transportation options that more adeptly aligns with the needs of business, residents and students. Furthermore, the County will work towards becoming a more welcoming community, one where newcomers to Canada and youth feel at home and embraced by the community and regional employers. The EDO will ensure employers have access to the knowledge and tools they need to be successful in attracting and retaining the talent they need to grow.

Why pursue this goal?

- Employers in Simcoe County are experiencing a significant shortage in skilled and unskilled workforce. This was noted as the top resource needed to help businesses grow, as well as the top barrier business in Simcoe County is facing by 40% of survey respondents. It was also one of the most significant issues facing local municipalities as identified by stakeholders. We need to ensure Simcoe County businesses are well-equipped to attract and retain talent in the region.
- Simcoe County and Canada's current population is aging, adding additional demand for goods and services, and the working age population is not growing at a rate that will allow for the full replacement of those jobs. Most future workforce growth in the next decade will come from immigration.
- Georgian College and Lakehead University are a great pipeline for talent, but currently there are gaps between educational providers and industry. Information is not moving effectively between the educators and industry.
- In order to retain newcomers to the County, be it immigrants, youth, young families or seniors, the County needs to ensure it has the right mix of housing and transportation options to service them. Even if there are jobs available, without suitable housing options talent will not relocate here for employment purposes.
- While majority of future workforce growth will be through immigration, it was noted in stakeholder interviews that employers and the community are not well equipped to welcome them into the community. Several stakeholders, particularly those connected to international students from Georgian College, spoke about incidents of a non-welcoming environment in the community. Newcomers to the community must feel welcomed if we want them to stay. Talent attraction efforts will only be successful if we are able to anchor talent in the community.

5.3.1 Objective 1

Actively work to strengthen linkages between educational providers, industry and students.

The EDO is in a unique position to connect educational providers, industry and students to create a stronger understanding of what type of employment opportunities exist in Simcoe County, and what it might be like to work in them. Preparing for employment opportunities of the future also needs to be part of the conversation. This will be accomplished through the following priority actions:

- Explore partnership opportunities with educational institutions.
- Work with partners to identify skills gaps between recent graduates and the needs of employers to help educators deliver programming that matches industry needs.
- Promote co-operative learning/apprenticeships to students in interactive ways.
- Promote opportunities for industry academic research and innovation projects with partners.
- Attract and retain post-secondary talent where there is strong alignment with in-demand jobs.

We will measure the outcome of this objective through:

- New partnerships and projects.
- Job search and in-demand job reports.
- Post-secondary survey data and industry academic projects (as available).

5.3.2 Objective 2

Build awareness of the region as a great place to live and build a career to people who are skilled in sectors that are experiencing key shortages.

The EDO needs to build on the position that the region is an attractive place to live and work. This means the County EDO must refine its brand and value proposition and undertake a campaign to create awareness about employment opportunities in the region. Target markets should include youth, newcomers and skilled labour from high unemployment markets. This will be accomplished through the following priority actions:

- Expand Simcoe County economic development brand to include labour attraction.
- Undertake a targeted talent attraction and retention campaign.
- Promote available career opportunities through job-related site/regional programs and service providers.
- Collect ongoing data on in-demand careers to ensure alignment with programming/promotional efforts.

We will measure the outcome of this objective through:

- Labour attraction marketing analytics.
- Collaborations with strategic service providers.
- Job search and in-demand job reports.

5.3.3 Objective 3

Support employers to better attract and retain the talent they need to stay in business and grow.

The EDO will assist regional employers by creating opportunities for learning and collaboration around local and global best practices for talent attraction and retention. The EDO will also work to ensure that once talent locates here, they will have a place to live and a means to get to work, where feasible. This will be accomplished through the following priority actions:

- Educate employers on leading practices related to attraction and retention of employees.
- Facilitate opportunities for industry to collaborate and develop strategic partnerships with businesses and stakeholders.
- Engage employers to be ambassadors in talent attraction and retention efforts.
- Work with County departments and partner municipalities to support the development of attainable housing and a public transit system that facilitate talent attraction and retention in the region.

We will measure the outcome of this objective through:

- Engagement in talent attraction and retention events and projects.
- Growth rate and number of people in the 20 to 44-year-old age group workforce.
- Overall workforce participation across multiple generations.
- Engagement in attainable housing and transit projects.

5.3.4 Objective 4

Strive to create a welcoming community that can attract and retain newcomer talent.

The EDO will work with regional partners to ensure newcomers feel welcome and supported in the community, remaining as part of the regional talent pool for the long-term. This will be accomplished through the following priority actions:

- Work with the Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) and post-secondary institutions to retain international students in the Simcoe County region, including supporting work to address barriers to settlement in the region.
- Create and promote opportunities for newcomers to engage with employers and business organizations.
- Educate employers on cultural awareness and diversity/inclusion in the workplace in partnership with LIP.
- Be a champion for promoting diversity and inclusivity.
- Facilitate training for employers to hire newcomers.

We will measure the outcome of this objective through:

- Data provided by post-secondary institutions on international student retention in community.
- Engagement in events and projects.
- Immigrant workforce in increasing across the region.
- Diversity is reflected in EDO and partner marketing materials.

5.4 Goal:

Businesses stay and grow in this region, supported by a strong and innovative business development environment.

A strong business development and entrepreneurship ecosystem exists in Simcoe County and provides several tools and supports to help businesses in the region remain sustainable and grow. The EDO has a strong understanding of the needs of the business community, and in particular, sectors of priority that have been identified. The EDO will work with ecosystem partners to enhance existing business programming and supports and better enable access on a regional level. In order to fully leverage that, the EDO will need to be a strong conduit for communication about regional opportunities and success on the business development front.

Why pursue this goal?

- Simcoe County has a significant cluster of manufacturing and tourism related businesses accounting for approximately 48,000 jobs in the region. While there is significant interest from partners to continue supporting and growing these clusters, there were also suggestions on the need to explore opportunities to diversify. In particular technology, entrepreneurs, agri-food and health sectors came up as opportunities to support diversification. Given the potential challenges and opportunities facing existing and emerging sectors, the EDO should work with partners to better understand the needs of specific industries and how to best facilitate their growth collectively.
- Through the business survey, key business needs such as access to labour, access to capital, marketing, networking, exporting and general business support were identified.
- There are many potential partners in the region and beyond that work to support business development and innovation activities. Many are interested in actively working with the EDO to promote existing programming and develop new programming. This presents an opportunity to strategically align services and promotion in a way that best meets the needs of business owners in the region.
- Innovation and technology adoption are anticipated to be critical for businesses to remain competitive in the face of a rapidly evolving global economy. Today technology is enabling massive gains in productivity and disruption to traditional economic structures. The EDO must continue to work with stakeholders, in particular, Georgian College and Lakehead University, to enable business to understand and adopt new technologies into their operations. While this may be more common practice in larger business, the EDO should strive to ensure this is on the radar of every business to ensure regional businesses have the best chance at remaining competitive.
- There are many examples where technology is merging with a number of sectors that have been identified as

important to at least two or more partners in the region, such as manufacturing, health care and agriculture. An opportunity to drive growth in these sectors could arise from building stronger connections between sectors, in particular related to product and process innovation.

- COVID-19 presents new market opportunities for innovation and innovative businesses. Pivoting and adapting is key to business survival.
- Further consideration should be given to how businesses in the region can remain sustainable and benefit from new trade agreements, the pressing concern of climate change and other instabilities that can arise in today's global economy.

5.4.1 Objective 1

Assist local businesses by providing supports to help businesses remain competitive and grow in today's evolving global marketplace.

The County will ensure that the regional business community has access to information and supports that they need to remain sustainable and grow. Focus areas such as innovation, artificial intelligence, automation, global trade and export, and succession planning should be considered as potential supports. The EDO should look for opportunities to facilitate stronger connections between businesses and sectors across the region. Finally, in order to get businesses excited about the possible impact of those focus areas, the EDO should support the promotion of success stories. This will be accomplished through the following priority actions:

- Provide education and connect businesses to resources on trends and opportunities in technology, and innovation.
- Provide education and support for succession planning.
- Facilitate connections within the regional business community.
- Include businesses in opportunities to participate in trade missions and investment promotion where opportunities align.
- Promote industry academic projects and innovation opportunities.
- Showcase local business success stories.

We will measure the outcome of this objective through:

- Engagement in events and projects.
- Data provided by post-secondary institutions on industry academic partnerships.
- Industry partner success stories.
- Industry support connections/referrals.

5.4.2 Objective 2

Enhance communication regarding the resources, events and education available to support the business community.

The EDO will ensure that information about resources, events and education is promoted in a format that is reaching its target audience and increasing participation and engagement with these resources. This will be accomplished through the following priority actions:

- Provide easy to navigate information and resources on the EDO Website to support businesses starting up and growing.
- Develop a strategy to collect/disseminate information regarding business resources, events and learning opportunities.
- Maintain social media with key messaging for business resources and training
- Promote success stories of businesses leveraging regional business development resources.

We will measure the outcome of this objective through:

- Engagement in events and projects.
- Data provided by post-secondary institutions on industry academic partnerships.
- Industry partner success stories.
- Industry support connections/referrals.

5.4.3 Objective 3

Strengthen and support the entrepreneurship ecosystem.

The EDO will identify how the Office can best work with the entrepreneurship ecosystem to support new and existing entrepreneurs scale their business in the region. This will be accomplished through the following priority actions:

- Define the role of the EDO in the entrepreneurship ecosystem.
- Work with partners to identify gaps in entrepreneurship services and how to address them.
- Promote and facilitate regional access to entrepreneurship resources.

We will measure the outcome of this objective through:

- EDO's role in the entrepreneurship ecosystem is defined.
- New strategic collaborations and projects with Entrepreneurship Ecosystem.
- Entrepreneurship Ecosystem gaps identified and supported.
- In-Market Special Project Fund metrics.

5.4.4 Objective 4

Working in partnership with regional stakeholders, determine the needs of the regional business community and address critical issues and opportunities.

The County EDO will get a better understanding of specific sector needs and how best to support these sectors. This understanding will better enable the EDO to come up with innovative sector specific solutions or approaches with their partners, and also ensure that they understand broader regional trends taking place across sectors. This will be accomplished through the following priority actions:

- In partnership with member municipalities implement a business visitation program and/or business survey focused on key sectors identified in the Strategy Update and assist with key issues that arise.
- Continue implementation of sector specific work plans including the Agriculture & Agri-Food Business Retention and Expansion work plans.

We will measure the outcome of this objective through:

- Business engagement completed through visitations and/or surveys.
- Implementation of Sector Specific Work Plan objectives and action items.

5.4.5 Objective 5

In partnership with Tourism Simcoe County, ensure the spectrum of business support available for tourism sector businesses is understood by Economic Development partners and the business community.

The EDO and Tourism Simcoe County will provide stakeholders with a better understanding about who and how roles are defined in business development, tourism promotion, and tourism related investment attraction. This will be accomplished through the following priority actions:

- Create a roles and responsibilities chart and share with partners.
- Collaborate to showcase quality of life in the region.
- Continue to participate in investment related tourism activities.

We will measure the outcome of this objective through:

- Roles and responsibilities chart is created and communicated.
- Investment inquiries received.
- Investment inquiries outcomes.

5.4.6 Objective 6

Support the local economy through the COVID-19 pandemic and its post recovery in partnership with Tourism Simcoe County.

The EDO and Tourism Simcoe County will work collectively on the implementation of pandemic supports and recovery effects. This will be accomplished through the following priority actions:

- Implement the COVID-19 Recovery Plan.

We will measure the outcome of this objective through:

- Implementation of Recovery Plan actions and key outcomes.



5.5 Goal:

The County of Simcoe's Economic Development Office is a leader in facilitating and building effective and collaborative relationships that creates a strong ecosystem for regional economic development.

Economic development stakeholders in the County of Simcoe are connected and working collaboratively to facilitate a strong regional economic development ecosystem. The EDO is looked at as a coordinator of regional-level economic development initiatives and priorities, such as ensuring a business lens is applied to decisions of economic development importance and enhancing the resources available to the region through data, funding and partnerships. The EDO is the main conduit of communication and information on a regional basis, facilitating communication amongst stakeholders, supporting educational opportunities and also sharing the regional economic development story, including successes, with external stakeholders.

Why pursue this goal?

- Stakeholders are looking to the County EDO to take the lead on initiatives and priorities that have region wide implications. These are typically more strategic in nature and require more human and financial capacity than the partners typically have. As is consistent with regional economic development theory, collaboration will enable the EDO and its stakeholders to collectively accomplish more.
- Stakeholders frequently noted that the EDO was well positioned to provide a deeper understanding of business needs to external partners. In particular, it was noted that the lack of alignment between member municipalities' by-laws and the outdated nature of different planning definitions proved to be a significant barrier to investment.
- Stakeholders are generally happy working with the EDO to support regional economic development today,

however they suggested the EDO should find new ways to engage with them so they can be better informed about projects of importance. For example, it was suggested that they wanted to be more involved in the development of a project and the implementation of its outcomes, and in particular, how they could support and leverage the outcomes on a local level.

- The regional economic development network has been a valuable tool to connect municipalities and facilitate collaboration. The EDO should continue this activity and ensure its content remains meaningful.
- Even the most well-resourced stakeholders felt their capacity was limited, and many stakeholders depended on County EDO funding to be able to undertake economic development projects.

5.5.1 Objective 1

The County’s Economic Development Office will facilitate strong communications, connections and relationships with and between economic development stakeholders in the region to support the delivery of economic development goals.

The County EDO will be the key conduit for regional economic development communications. This will include regular updates and opportunities to provide input on strategic priorities and projects with stakeholders and championing economic development successes and opportunities to parties external to the regional network. This will be accomplished through the following priority actions:

- Develop an online portal to share information, data, and resources with economic development partners.
- Provide on-going communications and engagement with stakeholders on regional projects and outcomes.
- Facilitate regular data sharing to support economic development planning and investment attraction.
- Consult with economic development partners regarding data needs and potential data sources.
- Formalize and implement an on-going external communications plan to share success stories and opportunities with targeted audiences.

We will measure the outcome of this objective through:

- Development and use of economic development network portal.
- Tracking of data sharing and data requests.
- Development and implementation of communications plan.

5.5.2 Objective 2

Play a leadership role in facilitating cross-departmental and cross-regional solutions related to policy development where there are direct links to barriers and opportunities in economic development.

The EDO will be a key conduit in helping other departments and related regional stakeholders understand their role in economic development and the importance of considering current and future economic needs in planning. The EDO should be a voice of those economic needs during policy and program development. This will be accomplished through the following priority actions:

- Facilitate alignment of planning and economic development policies.
- Apply a business supportive lens in relation to attainable housing, public transit and municipal customer service.

We will measure the outcome of this objective through:

- Key economic development information, data and priorities are shared with internal departments.

5.5.3 Objective 3

Strengthen engagement and collaboration with the regional economic development network to expand economic development knowledge and skills and foster alignment and strategic value.

The EDO is looked at as a key conduit for engagement and collaboration around regional economic development, providing a venue to meet and share information with partners on a bi-monthly basis. Through that network the EDO provides additional value by offering educational opportunities, information and connection to new and existing resources, and unique and engaging formats. The EDO also helps broader economic development partners understand how best to work with economic developers. This will be accomplished through the following priority actions:

- Continue to support economic development learning opportunities.
- Enable stakeholders who impact economic development better understand how to support and work with the sector.
- Lead coordination of regional economic development network and entrepreneurship ecosystem meetings and explore ways to increase value to stakeholders.

We will measure the outcome of this objective through:

- Economic Development Network meetings and Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Meetings held.
- Economic Development Network educational opportunities presented.
- Stakeholder engagement - presentations and events.

5.5.4 Objective 4

Assist economic development partners in capacity building through providing funding or other supports to undertake and implement projects that directly align with and benefit the desired outcomes of the County's economic development strategy.

The EDO will seek to provide funding and support to enhance their partners' capacity to help accomplish the goals of this economic development strategy. This will be accomplished through the following priority actions:

- Continue to support partners through economic development programs.
- Evaluate programs to ensure maximum effectiveness and efficiency.

We will measure the outcome of this objective through:

- Project outcomes.
- Partner feedback on value of programs.
- Funding and in-kind value leveraged from additional partners to execute projects.

5.6 Goal:

Advocate for and support the delivery of infrastructure to meet the needs of a competitive business community.

Simcoe County must, on an on-going basis, strategically advocate for, invest in, and maintain its regional economic development infrastructure assets. These assets, such as roads, airports, rail, electricity, natural gas, and internet, form the basis of the infrastructure needed to operate a business. In particular, the EDO will need to address the servicing challenge for its existing employment lands and fundamentally increase the amount of property for sale if future industrial investment attraction efforts are to be successful. The EDO also needs to ensure high speed internet is highly accessible as this will be critical for business to remain competitive. The EDO will ensure that its existing business community and prospects understand how to best leverage Simcoe County's infrastructure assets.

Why pursue this goal?

- Lack of available serviced land was cited as a significant barrier in 23% of stakeholder interviews, including most municipalities. For Simcoe County to facilitate new investment, either through business expansion or new business attraction, shovel-ready sites are required. Facilities typically need to be serviced, at a minimum, by electricity, water and wastewater, natural gas, and internet.
- County assets that support a competitive business environment will take investment to retain and maximize overall benefits. The County and its partners should work closely to ensure these assets are maintained and expanded where possible.

5.6.1 Objective 1

Strengthen engagement and collaboration with the regional economic development network to expand economic development knowledge and skills and foster alignment and strategic value.

The EDO is looked at as a key conduit for engagement and collaboration around regional economic development, providing a venue to meet and share information with partners on a bi-monthly basis. Through that network the EDO provides additional value by offering educational opportunities, information and connection to new and existing resources, and unique and engaging formats. The EDO also helps broader economic development partners understand how best to work with economic developers. This will be accomplished through the following priority actions:

- Continue to support economic development learning opportunities.
- Enable stakeholders who impact economic development better understand how to support and work with the sector.
- Lead coordination of regional economic development network and entrepreneurship ecosystem meetings and explore ways to increase value to stakeholders.

We will measure the outcome of this objective through:

- Economic Development Network meetings and Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Meetings held.
- Economic Development Network educational opportunities presented.
- Stakeholder engagement - presentations and events.

5.6.2 Objective 2

Increase the supply of shovel-ready employment lands.

The County must address a lack of serviced employment land in order to facilitate its investment attraction and business expansion activities. The County may have to explore new tactics and partnerships to fund the preparation of the land. This will be accomplished through the following priority actions:

- Provide a strategic economic development lens to complete the Municipal Comprehensive Review in support of shovel-ready employment land needs of the business community.
- Work with municipal partners to explore tactics to facilitate the development of employment land to be shovel-ready.
- Protect employment land for future industrial uses.

We will measure the outcome of this objective through:

- Economic Development input into Municipal Comprehensive Review.
- Increase supply of shovel-ready land.

5.6.3 Objective 3

Play a significant role working with stakeholders and advocating to other levels of government regarding the need to support and enhance infrastructure and transportation networks to facilitate development.

The EDO is clearly communicating the need for further financial support to get Simcoe County the infrastructure it requires to support its existing business community and grow. The EDO, where possible, is engaging partners to discuss the enhancement of existing infrastructure assets. This will be accomplished through the following priority actions:

- Work with municipal partners to identify infrastructure gaps hindering business development, engage in and support advocacy opportunities.
- Identify and support relevant funding opportunities.

We will measure the outcome of this objective through:

- County funding and support from other levels of government for infrastructure priorities.



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1-866-893-9300 ext. 1686 | edo@simcoe.ca



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County of Simcoe Economic Development