



# Proudly Moving Forward Together

Wellington County

## Strategic Action Plan



2023



McSWEENEY







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Wellington  
County





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## Letter from the CAO and Warden

We are proud to present the 2023-2027 Wellington County Strategic Action Plan outlining the direction that the Corporation will be taking over the remaining Term of Council. This Strategic Action Plan is an update after the completion of the previous 2019-2023 Strategic Action Plan. Similar to 2019, the County is still set in naturally beautiful geography and is a predominantly rural community with a number of uniquely diverse urban centres. Wellington County offers a tremendous small-town feel and is home to many passionate residents.

As with the previous Strategic Plan, this iteration is a product and a true reflection of how the Corporation works – in an environment that promotes openness, trust and collaboration. Once again, each Councillor and members of the County of Wellington senior management team





contributed to the development and crafting of this plan by expressing their priorities in an open forum and working as a cohesive team to help provide clarity on the County's strategic priorities.

As we transition out of the pandemic, optimism abounds within the County, though challenges do also exist. This Strategic Action plan seeks to harness the growth that we are experiencing to help us best serve the County, as we seek to continue building a prosperous future for everyone. As we strive to make the community a better place over the coming term of council, this Strategic Plan makes clear that when we say community we must include all residents. Our community is stronger together, when everyone has a seat at the table and an opportunity to take advantage of the incredible opportunities that exist within Wellington County, and the actions outlined within this Plan make that a clear priority.

The Corporation will use this Strategic Action Plan as an example of how the Corporation and its member municipalities can continue to work together to plan and set the County's corporate priorities and to build a strong foundation for the County to move forward on.



**Andy Lennox**  
Warden



**Scott Wilson**  
Chief Administrative  
Officer





# Introduction

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Wellington County in 2023 remains a predominantly rural County, with smaller settlement areas throughout. As of 2022, the County's population had risen above 100,000 residents, rising by over 10,000 residents since the 2016 Census was taken. The County is home to seven partner municipalities: Township of Centre Wellington; Township of Guelph/Eramosa; Township of Wellington North; Town of Erin; Township of Mapleton; Town of Minto; and Township of Puslinch.

As outlined in the infographics on pages nine through 12, the Corporation of the County of Wellington provides a range of services throughout the community, providing exemplary service to residents and businesses. Carrying over sentiments from 2019, the County is still seen as an “employer of choice” and takes pride in providing an open and collaborative environment for its staff to grow and flourish. Staff and Council also remain respectful of Wellington County residents and take seriously the obligations they have as public servants devoted to providing the best possible service to their community.

**Proudly Moving Forward Together** is an update after the completion of the previous 2019-2023 ‘Future Focused. People Invested.’ Plan. The purpose of this document is not to set the County on a completely new path, reinvent the work the County is doing, make drastic changes to the strategic direction of the County, nor just rubber-stamp the continuation of previous themes and actions. Instead, this Strategic Plan seeks to review what is similar to 2019 in Wellington County, what has changed, and how the Corporation can adapt and improve within the confines of the new reality it finds itself. With new social, cultural, and labour dynamics facing the Corporation, opportunities abound, but challenges also exist. This plan seeks to offer strategic directions aimed at helping Wellington County navigate these new circumstances while ensuring the County continues to thrive through this term of Council.

## Agricultural Roots Run Deep



Wellington County is home to 523,903 acres of Farmland, contributing \$841 million to Ontario's GDP.





## Top Priority Actions

### Continue working to ensure all County residents have a safe place they can call home:

- With the on-going goal of finding immediate and long-term solutions to best support those people who are experiencing homelessness:
  - Continue implementing, updating and communicating the status of the County's Housing and Homelessness Plan.
- To assist in solving the current housing crisis:
  - Mapping out roles of the various stakeholders across the different levels of government, not-for-profit, and private business sectors.
  - Assess the County's role in providing solutions.
- Ensure the Wellington Terrace Recruitment Strategy remains a top priority for the County.
- Make a decision regarding whether or not to proceed with the Continuum of Care project.

### In those communities poised to grow, help manage community expectations by:

- Creating an educational programme aimed at highlighting for new residents the existing culture and lifestyle of the various rural communities within Wellington County as well as the changes that the residents of these growth communities can expect due to the impending population growth.

### Ensure long-term financial sustainability to allow for the continued delivery of the highest quality service:

- Continue to implement the County's Long-Term Financial Sustainability Strategy and update the Annual Budget and 10-Year Plan.
- Accommodating Provincial regulations, continue working with all County's Departments to update the County's Long-Term Asset Management Plan.





## Focus on People as the main driving force behind Wellington County by:

- Ensuring Recruitment and Retention remains a top priority for the County.
- Continue reporting on Human Resources' successes in the County (e.g., Human Resources Annual Report).
- Continuing implementing and growing the County's Wellness Strategy.
- Begin embedding the notions of the Wellness Strategy into the County's Human Resources policies.
- Continue capturing and sharing the County's Corporate culture.
- Building on the Human Resources Annual Report, engage County staff and build out a comprehensive Human Resources Strategy.





## Process Followed

The process followed to develop Wellington County's 2023 Corporate Strategic Plan Update began with a document review, a statistical snapshot of the community and a graphical representation of what the County does. A comprehensive consultation process was then undertaken, with one-on-one interviews taking place alongside a strategic listening workshop. Following the consultation process, priorities were grouped into key themes leading up to the reconfirmation of 2019 values and a strategic planning workshop. Finally, actions were developed and an updated Strategic Plan was crafted.

# WELLINGTON COUNTY'S ROADMAP

## 2023 Strategic Action Plan Update

### STEP 1: DISCOVER

#### Preliminary Work.

- » Document Review.
- » Community Bottom Line.

### STEP 2: DEFINE

#### Reconfirming Commitments.

- » One-on-one Interviews.
- » Priority Opportunities Workbooks.
- » Strategic Listening Workshop.
- » Grouping of Priorities.

### STEP 3: DEVELOP

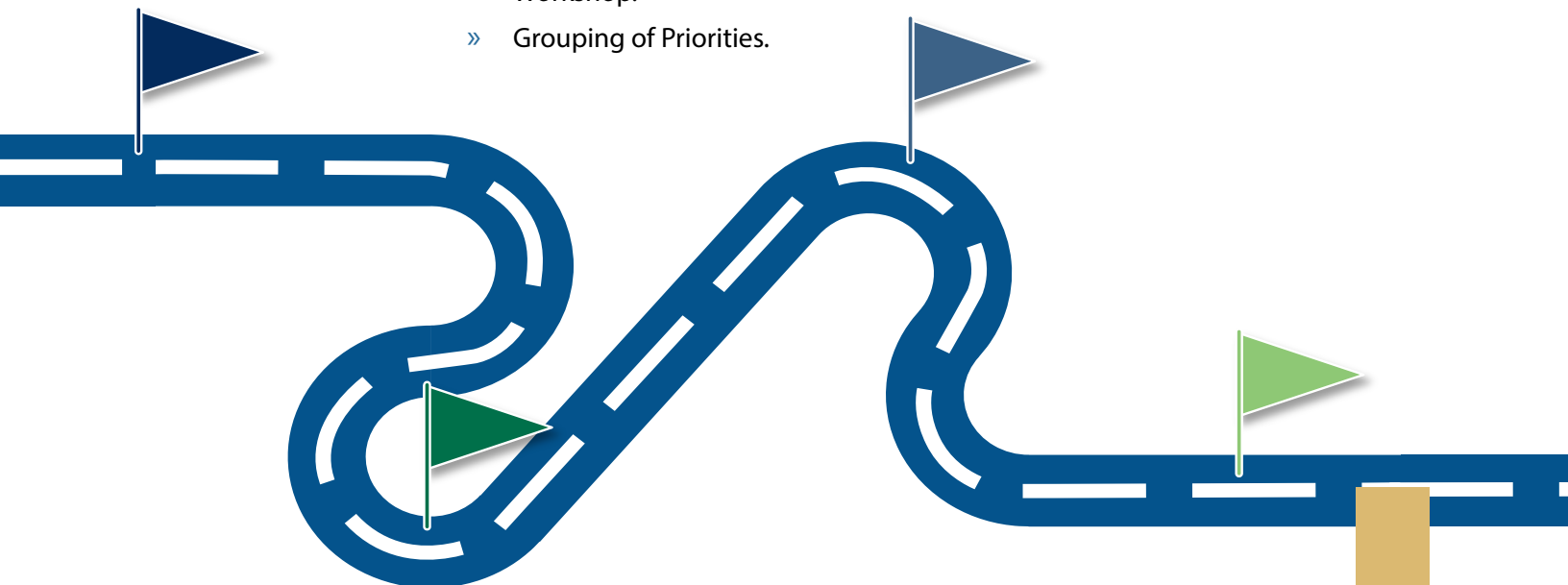
#### Strategic Objectives Setting.

- » Reconfirming Surveys.
- » Strategic Planning Workshop.
- » Develop the Actions.

### STEP 4: DELIVER

#### Present the results.

- » Craft the Updated Strategic Plan.
- » Finalize the Strategic Plan.
- » Presentation to Council.

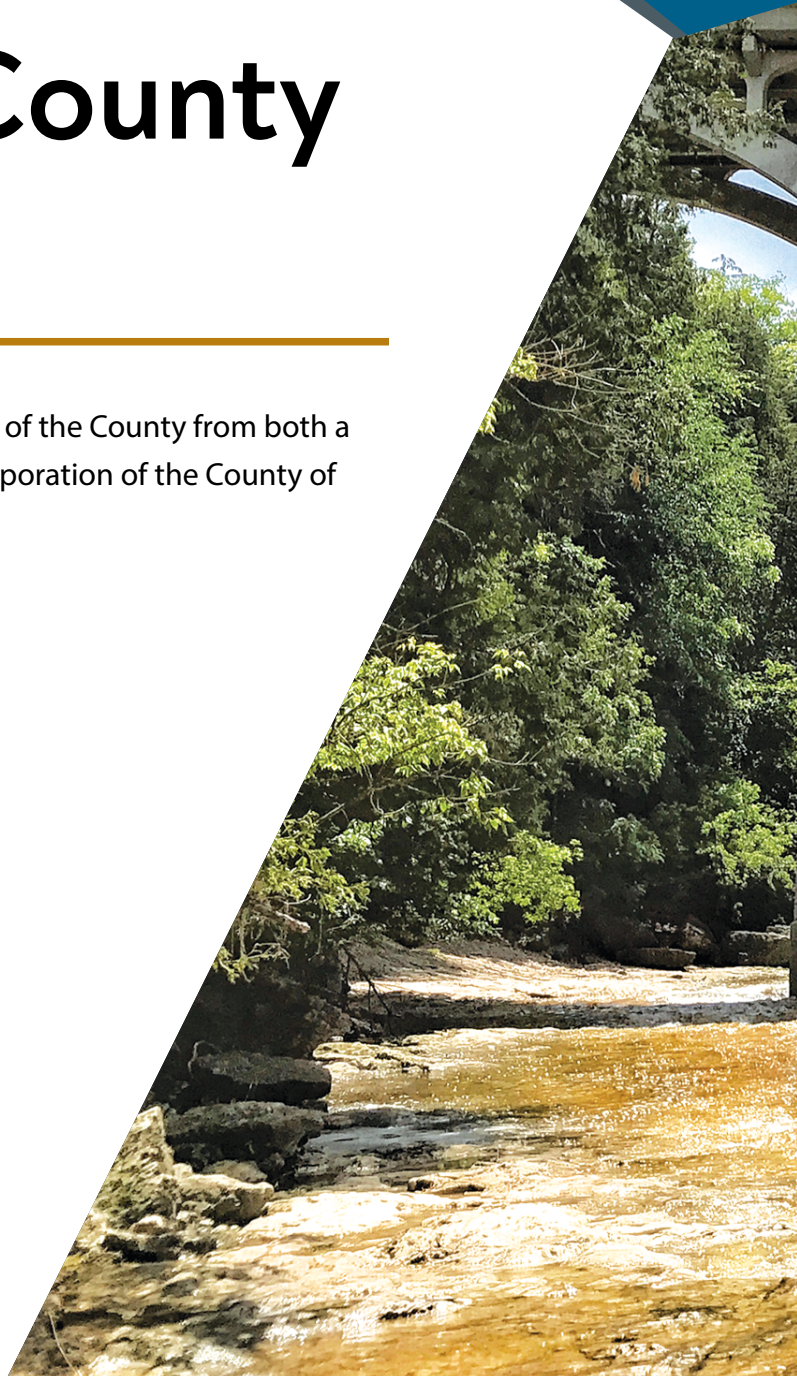




# Wellington County at a Glance

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The next four pages provide a visual representation of the County from both a community statistical perspective as well as the Corporation of the County of Wellington responsibilities.









# Wellington County Community SNAPSHOT



81,143

2001

85,482

2006

86,672

2011

90,932

2016

103,010

2022

## Population Profile

MEDIAN

AVERAGE

County Age

43

County Age

42

Ontario Age

42

Ontario Age

42

Apprenticeship/trades  
certificate/diploma

9%

No certificate, diploma/  
degree

15%

University diploma/  
degree - bachelor or above

21%

College or other  
non-university certificate

27%

High school certificate  
or equivalent

28%

## Highest Education

Population ages 25-64



28%  
Secondary

57%  
Post-secondary

## Household & Earnings



21%

ONTARIO  
24%

of Wellington County's population  
spends 30% or more of household  
gross income on shelter costs.



Average Dwelling Value **\$1,158,198**

Median Dwelling Value **\$972,540**

83%

Single detached house

10%

Apartment / detached duplex

3%

Rowhouse

3%

Semi-detached  
house

Total number of households

**36,540**



# Wellington County Community SNAPSHOT



## Labour Force & Local Economy

Median Employment Income | Average Employment Income

**\$42,901** | **\$58,551**

ONTARIO MEDIAN

**\$41,200**

ONTARIO AVERAGE

**\$56,350**

### PARTICIPATION RATE\*

ONTARIO  
62.8%

**68.9%**

### EMPLOYMENT RATE\*

ONTARIO  
55.1%

**66.0%**

### UNEMPLOYMENT RATE\*

ONTARIO  
12.2%

**4.3%**

## Top 5 Sectors by Industry\*\*

\*\* By business counts, Source: LightCast Analyst 2022.3.



Construction  
(663 businesses)



Professional, Scientific  
and Technical Services  
(342)



Agriculture, Forestry,  
Fishing and Hunting  
(341)



Other Services  
(except public  
administration)  
(338)



Retail Trade  
(334)

## Top 5 Sectors by Occupation\*\*\*

\*\*\* By labour force employment.



Trades, Transport  
and Equipment  
Operators  
(18%)



Sales and Service  
(17%)



Management  
(15%)



Business, Finance  
& Administration  
(14%)



Education, Law and  
Social, Community and  
Government Services  
(11%)



# Wellington County Community SNAPSHOT



## Regional Resources

Wellington County  
employs over

**900**  
people!



The County  
oversees an  
operating  
budget of

**\$277.9**  
**Million**



1,434km of  
laned roads



103 Bridges  
&  
97 Culverts



County Fleet  
of 183 Vehicles  
(tractors, trucks, snow  
plows, etc.)





# Wellington County Community SNAPSHOT



## Quality of Life & Culture



**Paramedic Services**  
responded to  
approximately  
**30,000 calls**  
in 2022, **82 per day**.



**Wellington Terrace  
Long Term Care**  
**176 Beds**



**Wellington County  
Library** is home to **14  
branches**.  
The 36,000 sq foot  
**Wellington County  
Museum and Archives**  
was opened in 1877  
(Archives in 2010).



**Wellington County**  
is home to over **2,500  
farms**.  
The highest number of  
farms in Southwestern  
Ontario!

## Sustainability



### The Green Legacy

Started in 2004, Wellington County determined to plant **150,000 trees** by the County's 150th Anniversary (2012). The initiative has since led to the planting of **over 3 Million trees** within the County!



### Rural Water Quality Programme

Since 1999, **51 KMs** of stream fencing to protect livestock access and water quality have been built across the County.



### Waste Reduction

In 2021, the County was able to divert **46.7% of all waste** from landfills.

From 2020 to 2021, **garbage collection** dropped 15.2%, while **green bin collection** rose 143%!





# Summary of the Situation

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As a refreshed Strategic Action Plan, it was not the intent of this undertaking to simply recreate the 2019 Strategic Action Plan, or to ignore it altogether. Instead, the approach included a revisiting of the 2019 plan to assess what similarities existed, and also what new challenges and opportunities have arisen. This summary presents a high-level assessment of the issues that remain the same from 2019, and those that are new in 2023.

## What seems to be the same from 2019?

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First and foremost, when speaking to Wellington County's Council and Staff, it is clear that "people" remain the priority focus for the Corporation. This is an important approach for the County to have, as Council and Staff are leaders in public service – serving people within the County.

Within this heading, similar trends and issues from 2019 include:

- Finding housing solutions (continuum of care, attainable/ diversity in housing, and housing for people currently experiencing homelessness) for Wellington County residents.
- Providing services and infrastructure to support the needs of people (residents) – social services, child care, safe roads, ambulance services, access to trails and parks, solid waste disposal/recycling, septage management, etc.
- Growth is coming to the County, which creates both opportunities and challenges. Staff and Councillors both again stressed the importance of determining how this growth will be managed and communicated to local residents?
- A focus remains on providing exemplary communications with Wellington County residents and engaging in ways that ensure the best information is being shared and collected (e.g., for staff and Council, understanding who does what).
- Finally, continuing to acknowledge that people are the energy that drives Wellington County as a Corporation – staffing, staff safety and well being, housing staff, having/retaining the best people, are all critically important to drive the organization successfully.





The second notable similarity from the previous Strategic Plan is the need to consistently make sound, sustainable and prudent decisions on behalf of the people of Wellington County.

Within this heading, similar trends and issues from 2019 include:

- When discussing roles and responsibilities, staff and Council are still focusing on the collective “we”, highlighting the collaborative approach the Corporation has to bettering Wellington County.
- The importance of understanding roles and responsibilities of the County and its Municipal and community partners was also stressed. To that end, the County cannot and should not do everything and its partners cannot do everything.
- Adequately reviewing and understanding how Council makes decisions and communicates these decisions was another key point of discussion. This includes the importance of providing adequate information, sustainability as a base, in-person verses virtual dialogue, etc.
- Continuing to always remember the importance of financial sustainability in Council and Corporate decisions.
- Being fiscally responsible as a Corporation.
- Being a key partner when making group decisions and leading by example was further noted as being important. Examples include group buying and setting best-in-class policies and corporate frameworks that can be shared among and acted upon by the County and its Municipal partners.





## What seems to be new or different?

While many of the general challenges remain the same from the previous Strategic Plan, for many of the challenges there is a sense of urgency that was not prevalent in 2019.

With respect to new or different challenges, it was found that:

- Housing, Housing, Housing – while this was a burgeoning challenge in 2019, it is a significantly greater challenge today. A shift from planning to adapt to actionable building is considered to be needed essentially immediately.
- COVID has accelerated the need for continued and enhanced staff well-being, safety, health and wellness.
- The waitlist across Wellington County's Long Term Care facilities is getting longer as more support is needed. This growing need is not expected to slow down in the coming years.
- People experiencing homelessness is a rising challenge, no longer being isolated to only urban areas, but moving across the entirety of the County.
- Growth is not only coming its now here – while in 2019 it was starting to become an issue it is now a significant daily challenge. Given this, how do we manage it and how do we deal with it are much more pressing questions.
- Communicating with people in a variety of mediums is more necessary – especially since the pandemic began and virtual mediums are becoming expected more often, how does the County balance traditional verses emerging virtual approaches.
- Sustainability is more prevalent in the language being used within the Corporation and the County more broadly.
- There is a more pressing shortage of workers in the community – not just general labour but identifying how to attract the right and the best people to work at the County is paramount.
- Climate Change and Mitigation Strategies are at the fore in a much more impactful way when compared to 2019.





## Noteworthy Milestones and Successes arising from the 2019 Plan

- The creation of the County's Long-Term Financial Sustainability Strategy, updated Asset Management Plan, and fine tuning of the Annual Budget and 10-Year Plan – resulted in an upgraded AAA credit rating.
- Began capturing and reporting to County Council on the successes in Human Resources including the Human Resources Annual Report, the Wellness Strategy and a unique project to capture the County's Culture.
- County's Solid Waste Services Strategy is being implemented. A notable project includes the opening of Phase II of the Riverstown Landfill Site in 2022.
- New waste collection contract implemented with added service of organics collections, leaf and yard waste collection, and compressed natural gas collection vehicles.
- Completed Future Focused – the County's first climate change mitigation plan.
- Our Food Future went from pilot to implementation. Our Food Future is a project that created Canada's first circular food economy, demonstrated a true cross-department collaboration and is now a proven model for the rest of Canada to follow.
- Wellington County's Indigenous Gathering Circle was opened at Wellington Place.







# Aspirations

As this 2023 strategic planning process unfolds, those tasked with following through on the actions and themes addressed must remain grounded by Wellington County's core aspirations and values (see below). To that end, the County remains committed to continuing to fulfill its aspirations from 2019, to ensure the County has the:

- Best **people** in place to provide the best services and make the best decisions.
- Best **processes** in place to collectively make the best decisions.
- Best **services** in place to service the County's residents and businesses.
- Best **infrastructure** in place to meet the current and future needs of the community.

Additionally, the County – in the way it functions daily – aspires to:

- Remain open and transparent in its decision-making processes.
- Respect the different members and needs of the Wellington County community, across different cultures, socio-economic backgrounds, and lived experiences.
- Always look to the future and consider sustainability impacts with respect to social, environmental, economic and fiscal realities.
- Drive Corporate success and remain an employer of choice by supporting staff in maximizing their quality of life and career opportunities.





# County of Wellington Corporate Values

The following County of Wellington values are a representation of how the County (elected officials and staff) wishes to guide its day-to-day conduct, decision making and overall Corporate culture and attitudes. These values were vetted through individual one-on-one conversations with the County's leadership, an validation exercise in the form of an online survey as well as a fulsome open group discussion:

- **Personal well-being of its residents, employees, elected citizen representatives** – Wellington County respects that the People it serves, the People it employs and the People that help provide direction and guidance are what make the County special. They give it character and are ultimately the reason why the County is in business.
- **Openness and transparency in the decisions the County makes and how it conducts business** – Wellington County understands that to be successful in being the best at providing services and making decisions it needs to ensure they are working in an environment that promotes openness through trust and transparency. This also includes creating a corporate environment built around principles of accountability, inclusion and diversity.





- **Respectful collaboration** as a base for how the County works internally and with external partners – Wellington County understands that it is better to work together as a cohesive team and with its partners instead of going it alone. True community success is built more effectively and most efficiently through collaboration and unison of efforts.
- **Responsibility for the County's future** – Wellington County understands that as an organization it is the gatekeeper to the County's future – a responsibility it does not take lightly. This entails being fiscally responsible, ensuring sound financial practices are followed, and means the County is a good steward of the environment as it employs principles of sustainability in its daily operations and decision-making processes.

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

- Helen Keller





# County of Wellington Strategic Actions

## Tackling a Major Community Opportunity - Housing

A lack of attainable and affordable housing is not distinct to Wellington County, with almost every community across Ontario seeing the same pressures. This does not mean, however, that the challenge within the County is any less pressing. Specific to Wellington County, there are challenges related to housing new families, older residents, and those facing economic and social hardship. As such, housing stock, affordable housing, and the attainability of general housing are all issues for residents in Wellington County.

### Why is this Important?

Housing is one of the most basic necessities required by residents and potential residents. There is a growing need for housing across a range of socio-economic cohorts, without which the homelessness crisis will continue to grow in Wellington County. If more residents continue to find themselves priced out of the Wellington County market and unable to afford accommodations, the County will face surging challenges across a range of social services.







### Strategic Actions Include:

#### Continue working to ensure all County residents have a safe place they can call home:

- With the on-going goal of finding immediate and long-term solutions to best support those people who are experiencing homelessness:
  - Continue implementing, updating and communicating the status of the County's Housing and Homelessness Plan.
- To assist in solving the current housing crisis:
  - Mapping out roles of the various stakeholders across the different levels of government, not-for-profit, and private business sectors.
  - Assess the County's role in providing solutions.
- Ensure the Wellington Terrace Recruitment Strategy remains a top priority for the County.
- Make a decision regarding whether or not to proceed with the Continuum of Care project.

#### In those communities poised to grow, help manage community expectations by:

- Creating an educational programme aimed at highlighting for new residents the existing culture and lifestyle of the various rural communities within Wellington County as well as the changes that the residents of these growth communities can expect due to the impending population growth.



## Doing What the County Does Best – Providing Critical Daily Services for Your Residents

Wellington County's population has risen to over 100,000 residents in 2022, showing significant growth. This growth brings with it considerable opportunities, but also brings new needs and responsibilities for the County. Given this growth is not expected to slow in the coming decades, adapting the provision of County and Municipal services to match the increased population will be paramount.

### Why is this Important?

Wellington County residents rely on the County for a wide range of services, each of which is critical to the daily functioning of the community. If the County is to manage growth in a positive way and harness its potential, the Corporation will need to continue to deliver the necessary daily services for its residents as those requirements expand. If critical daily services do not maintain their standard of excellence, then the residents of the County will suffer.

**“Be the change you wish to see in the world.”**

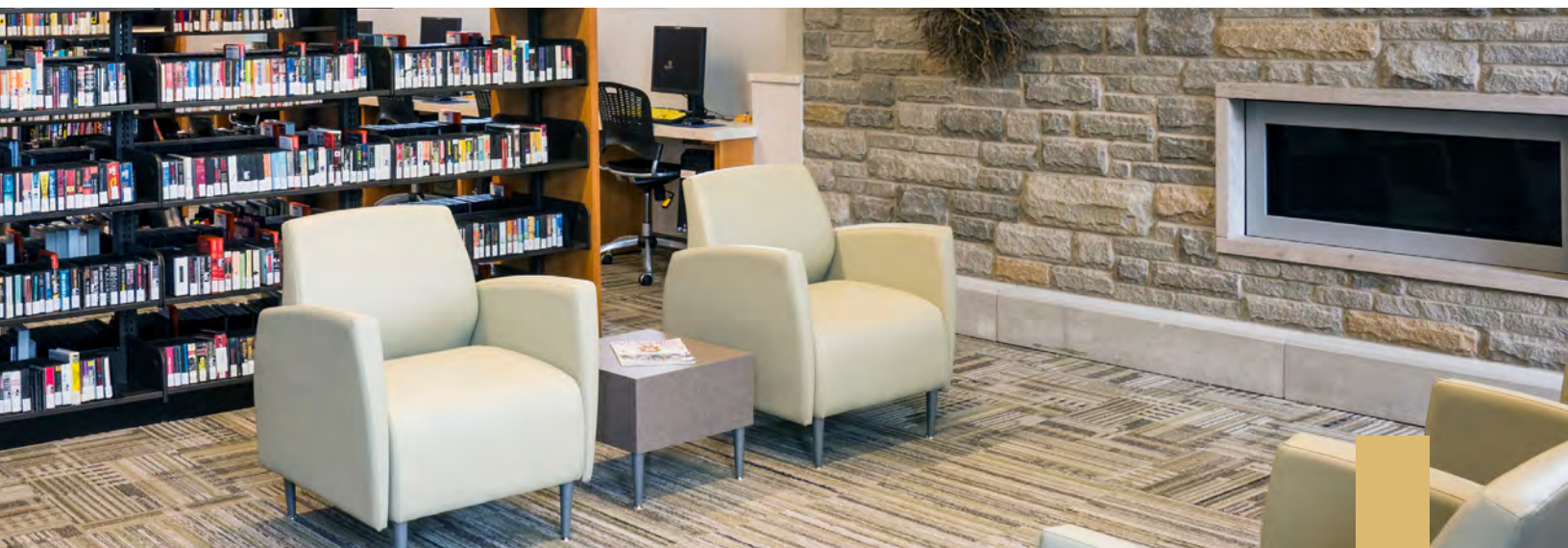
**- Mahatma Gandhi**





## Strategic Actions Include:

- Working with the City of Guelph to update the Guelph-Wellington Paramedic Service Master Plan. Paying attention to the Station Location Plan, determine new ambulance facility and location requirements in the County that best support the needs of a growing population.
- Preparing a new communications and information programme aimed at ensuring a smooth transition and roll out of the Individual Producer Responsibility recycling collection programme when it rolls out in Wellington County.
- As the County's population continues to grow, continually:
  - Assessing residents' need for quality child care spaces;
  - Identifying any gaps and opportunities in the provision of child care (all types);
  - Exploring opportunities to fill any gaps in the delivery of child care spaces (private, public, licensed, etc.).
- To safeguard the continued and safe disposal of rural septage:
  - Working with member Municipalities and assessing the current process of septage removal and disposal, with the goal of ensuring that as the County's population grows member Municipalities have the capacity to accept and dispose of septage at their municipal wastewater treatment facilities.
- Updating the County's 2019 Wellington Walks trails map and hiking guide. As a part of the update, consider adding new public spaces that are being readily accessed but not yet recognized as publicly accessible space in the past.



## Making the Best Decisions for the Betterment of the Community

As a public service entity, the Corporation first and foremost serves its residents. Embedding this messaging across all decisions and ensuring to the best of the County's ability that residents remain aware of County initiatives will help build a cohesive community and improve Corporate capabilities.

### Why is this Important?

Public trust and awareness will ensure that County initiatives are generally supported and decisions are approached in the most democratic of ways. Moreover, as a public entity reliant on taxpayer dollars, responsibly managing County assets will help to avoid saddling future taxpayers with significant debts or much higher taxes.

### Strategic Actions Include:

#### Ensure long-term financial sustainability to allow for the continued delivery of the highest quality service:

- Continue to implement the County's Long-Term Financial Sustainability Strategy and update the Annual Budget and 10-Year Plan.
- Accommodating Provincial regulations, continue working with all County's Departments to update the County's Long-Term Asset Management Plan.
- Continuing with the implementation and progress reporting of the Future Focused climate change mitigation plan.
- Working with member municipalities to create a set of standard criteria which member municipalities can use to evaluate their abilities to withstand extreme weather events resulting from climate change.
- To assist in the decision-making process for major capital projects:
  - Continuing the conversation to establish a set of benchmarks or criteria from which the County can base its decisions.







## **Cherishing the County's Most Valued Asset – its Staff**

The Corporation of Wellington County is only as strong as its staff. At the same time, staffing is a challenge for many municipalities across Canada, with Corporations struggling to hold onto and recruit staff. Moreover, adaptive workforce dynamics have led to shifting employee demands related to workplace supports and circumstances, ensuring the County must remain agile in its recruitment and retention efforts.

### **Why is this Important?**

As noted above, the Corporation is only as strong as its staff, and maintaining and recruiting staff is therefore of the utmost importance. Continuing to build on the current, strong, corporate culture and attracting and retaining the best staff will help the County continue to deliver top quality service to its residents.

### **Strategic Actions Include:**

#### **Focus on People as the main driving force behind Wellington County by:**

- Ensuring Recruitment and Retention remains a top priority for the County.
- Continue reporting on Human Resources' successes in the County (i.e., Human Resources Annual Report).
- Continuing implementing and growing the County's Wellness Strategy.
- Begin embedding the notions of the Wellness Strategy into the County's Human Resources policies.
- Continue capturing and sharing the County's Corporate culture.
- Building on the Human Resources Annual Report, engage County staff and build out a comprehensive Human Resources Strategy.



