



## Report to County Council

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**From:** Abigail Moore, Business Enterprise Facilitator

Carolyn Krahn, Manager of Economic Development, Tourism & Strategic Initiatives

**Date:** August 13, 2024

**Subject:** 2024 Business Retention and Expansion Program – Final Report and Action Plan

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### **Recommendation(s):**

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THAT the report titled “2024 Business Retention and Expansion Program – Final Report and Action Plan” from the Manager of Economic Development, Tourism & Strategic Initiatives dated August 13, 2024 be received and filed; and

THAT Council endorse the *2024 Business Retention and Expansion Program Report and Action Plan*.

### **Introduction:**

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The *Elgin County Economic Development and Tourism Strategy 2022-2025* focuses on engaging with local businesses to understand their needs and working with them to create an attractive place to live, work and play. The plan identified several initiatives and actions, including implementing a Business Retention & Expansion program (BR&E). This program aims to address the needs of existing businesses, help them grow, and provide crucial data to attract new companies and support new business creation.

### **Background and Discussion:**

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Between November 2023 and February 2024, Economic Development staff conducted 92 in-person interviews with businesses across all sectors to gather insights on their needs, challenges, and opportunities. This process was coordinated with oversight from a leadership team of representatives from all seven Local Municipal Partners. This team played a crucial role in shaping the program, reaching out to local businesses, reviewing the data collected, and developing the action plan. Members of the leadership team also joined staff on the business interviews.

The attached report outlines the findings from the program's first round. It presents the priorities identified by the leadership team and an action plan to promote a thriving business environment.

The interview results showed clear themes, including:

- Housing options are scarce, especially for seniors and factory workers.
- There is a general lack of serviced land.
- There are misunderstandings and frustrations around the development and building permit process.
- Businesses generally express satisfaction with commercial property taxes, but some request additional infrastructure and services.
- Overall, Elgin County is considered a great place to do business, but there are some areas for improvement in communication and transparency.
- Additionally, 61% of participants plan on expanding within the next two years.

A resource team comprising representatives from local organizations, such as the Elgin Business Resource Centre and the Elgin St. Thomas Small Business Enterprise Centre, supported the BR+E. We aimed to address any issues raised in the BR&E interviews by supporting businesses facing specific challenges and making referrals to the resource network.

The action plan focuses on laying the groundwork for supporting businesses now and into the future with a focus on enhanced engagement, communication and increasing education around the development and building permit process.

### **Financial Implications:**

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Receiving the final report and action plan has no financial implications, but staff will return to Council with recommendations from the action plan that may have financial implications. Implementing these programs will enhance Elgin County as a place to do business and support the growth of the commercial and industrial tax base.

### **Alignment with Strategic Priorities:**

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Serving Elgin	Growing Elgin	Investing in Elgin
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ensuring alignment of current programs and services with community need.  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Exploring different ways of addressing community need.  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Engaging with our community and other stakeholders.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Planning for and facilitating commercial, industrial, residential, and agricultural growth.  <input type="checkbox"/> Fostering a healthy environment.  <input type="checkbox"/> Enhancing quality of place.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ensuring we have the necessary tools, resources, and infrastructure to deliver programs and services now and in the future.  <input type="checkbox"/> Delivering mandated programs and services efficiently and effectively.

**Local Municipal Partner Impact:**

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The action plan was developed in partnership with our Local Municipal Partners, and it includes recommendations for our Local Municipalities. We will continue to work with our Local Municipal Partners to implement the action plan across the County.

**Communication Requirements:**

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The Final Report and Action Plan will be shared with all Local Municipal Councils and the BR+E participants. A copy of the Report will be posted on our website, along with updates on the implementation of the action plan.

**Conclusion:**

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Businesses were pleased to be engaged and appreciated the municipality seeking their input. Sustained engagement and follow-up on commitments are crucial to building a successful relationship with our businesses and keeping them in our community. Implementing the action plan and making continued improvements in the local business environment can lead to increased local employment, a more satisfied business community, better government-business relations, and a more diversified economy.

All of which is Respectfully Submitted

Approved for Submission

Abigail Moore  
Business Enterprise Facilitator

Blaine Parkin  
Chief Administrative Officer/Clerk

Carolyn Krahn  
Manager of Economic Development,  
Tourism & Strategic Initiatives