



**POWERING ONTARIO'S
ECONOMIC ENGINE**

The Western Ontario Wardens Caucus Inc. (WOWC) serves as a unified voice for the 15 upper and single tier municipalities in Southwestern Ontario, advocating for their collective interest.



WOWC'S VISION

To realize Western Ontario's full potential for sustainable economies and prosperous communities.



WOWC'S MISSION

To advocate with a unified voice to all levels of government, advancing common needs and opportunities through collaboration and evidence-based solutions, ensuring a prosperous and connected future for Western Ontario.

The WOWC recently adopted its strategic advocacy approach for 2025-2027 and identified a series of key priorities for the coming year. This information is intended to continue building on the collaboration with the member municipalities in rural Western Ontario.

The WOWC has conducted significant research on its priority issues and is proposing concrete solutions to address the challenges in rural Western Ontario. Being part of the process and the conversation will be crucial as we move forward. Governments need to be all in this together – this partnership will ensure collective success for Western Ontario.



 **300**
COMMUNITIES SERVED
ACROSS 15 UPPER-TIER AND
SINGLE-TIER MUNICIPALITIES

 **250k**
**BUSINESSES
OPERATING**

 **1.6m**
PEOPLE REPRESENTED

WOWC STATEMENT ON TARIFFS

Our communities in Western Ontario thrive when we work together. Supporting our local producers, manufacturers, and farmers is critical to ensuring continued growth and sustainability. The WOWC will remain a vocal advocate for solutions that protect our industries and communities, as we are committed to working with all levels of government to safeguard our region's economic future.

Western Ontario's economy is closely linked to trade, particularly with the United States, but also within Canada. Western Ontario's exports outside of the region totaled over \$226 billion in 2022. Exports outside the Western Ontario region in the largest industry – manufacturing – totaled \$145 billion in 2022, representing 64% of total regional exports. Tariffs on agriculture and food also present substantial risks to the regional economy.

The WOWC will remain a vocal advocate for solutions that protect our industries and communities and is committed to working with all levels of government to safeguard our region's economic future. As part of this, the WOWC strongly supports efforts to develop and implement procurement policies that alleviate some of the financial and administrative burdens on municipalities.

By collaborating with other levels of government we can together work towards policies that streamline procurement, promote local economic development, enhance the efficiency of public investments, and make the region prosper, benefiting all of Ontario and all of Canada.

Western Ontario's strength comes from our ability to adapt and respond as a region – and, through its priorities such as housing, infrastructure, and workforce, strengthening the region's economy. The WOWC remains dedicated to partnering with all stakeholders to achieve our common objectives and to ensure our communities remain strong and resilient.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT AND FUNDING



PRINCIPLES

- Rural municipalities do not have the per capita tax revenue to fund the water/wastewater systems, lane kilometers of roads, bridges and culverts needed to keep the municipality in a state of good repair.
- Infrastructure Drives Growth – Roads, water, broadband, and transit attract housing and business investment.
- Demand Outpaces Capacity – Rapid population growth and workforce expansion strain existing infrastructure, limiting housing supply.
- Provincial and federal funding propose subsidies to infrastructure to support rural communities, Western Ontario's contribution to the provincial GDP must be taken to account as this funding is allocated.

GOALS

- Secure provincial support for municipalities to maintain and improve existing infrastructure projects, in addition to funding for new infrastructure.
- Demonstrate the importance of robust transportation options to connect individuals to their workplaces and recreational activities in other communities.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY AND AVAILABILITY



PRINCIPLES

- The relationship between infrastructure and housing creates a cycle of availability and affordability challenges for WOWC municipalities.
- Strained infrastructure stalls housing expansion, limited municipal budgets and slow provincial/federal funding create delays, reinforcing housing shortages, existing housing stock becomes out of reach for Ontario families.
- High Costs Reduce Affordability – Municipal infrastructure costs are passed to developers, increasing home prices and rents.
- Affordability Challenges Slow Development – Rising prices push workers and families out of the region, affecting economic growth and workforce stability.
- The Cycle Repeats – When infrastructure catches up, demand surges again, restarting the cycle.

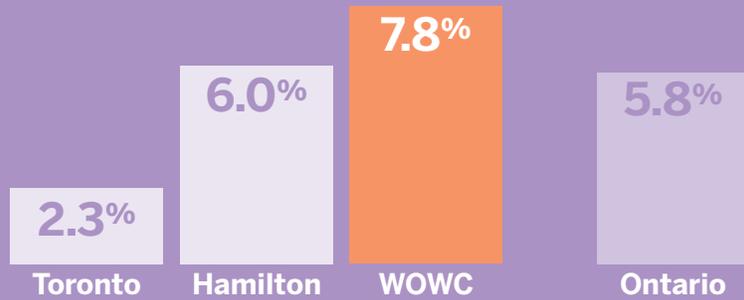
GOALS

To stabilize housing availability and affordability, WOWC municipalities must:

- Secure sustained infrastructure funding from senior governments to match county growth.
- Leverage innovative financing (*P3s, tax increment financing*) to expand services. Prioritize smart growth by building housing near existing infrastructure and transit.
- Advance caucus planning and advocacy to align housing, workforce, and economic growth strategies.

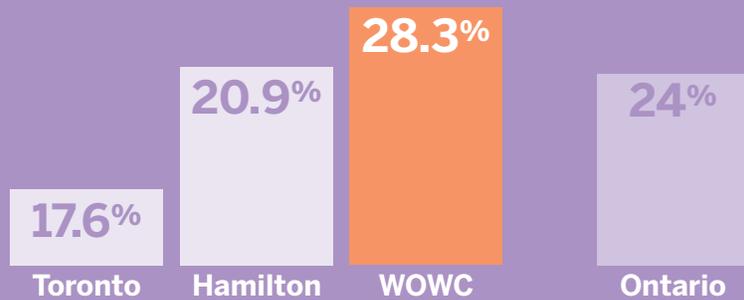
POPULATION GROWTH

BETWEEN
2016 TO 2021



ADDITIONAL HOUSING UNITS

ADDED
2016 TO 2021



POPULATION GROWTH

BETWEEN
2016 TO 2021



In **2022** the annual value of building permits in WOWC was **\$8.9 billion** with **\$6.4 billion** allocated to **residential permits.**

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND PRESERVATION



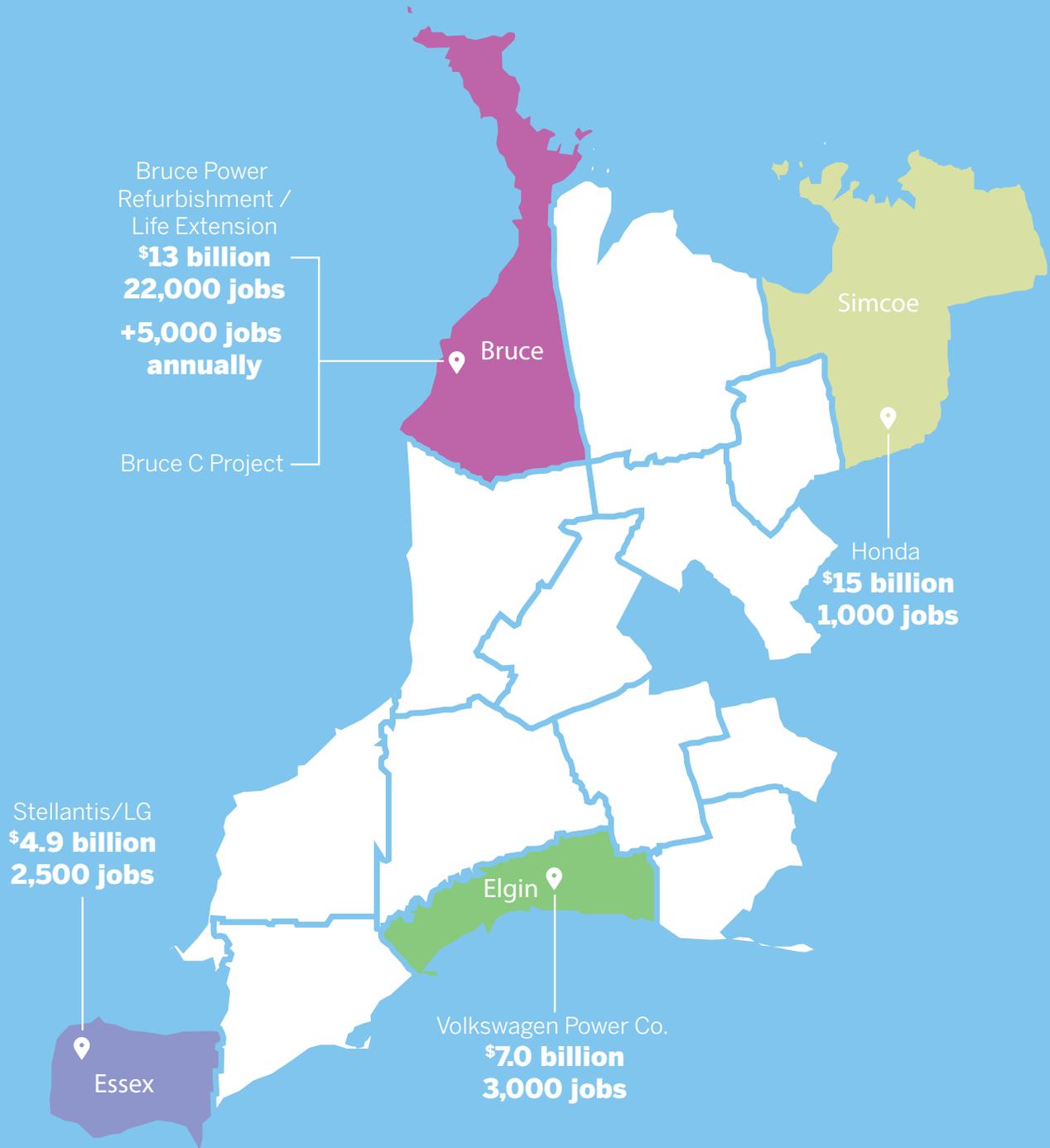
PRINCIPLES

- Southwestern Ontario is the economic engine of Ontario. It is home to concentrations of critical industries like agriculture and manufacturing not found elsewhere in the province.
- The tourism industry in Western Ontario is also a major driver for seasonal jobs and on farm diversified uses (e.g. farmers' markets/wineries/cideries).
- The ongoing trade war with the United States reinforces the need for Ontario to protect and develop provincial industry and workforce.

GOALS

- Expand Workforce Housing – Increase affordable and attainable housing to attract and retain skilled workers, ensuring businesses can fill critical positions.
- Enhance Regional Workforce Training – Strengthen partnerships with colleges, universities, and industry to align training programs with local job market needs.
- Invest in Rural Infrastructure & Broadband – Improve transportation, digital connectivity, and servicing to support business expansion, remote work, and economic growth.
- Advocate for Sustainable Economic Incentives – Work with governments to secure funding, tax incentives, and policies that attract investment and support local businesses.

INVESTMENTS IN WESTERN ONTARIO



TOTAL

\$40 billion | 30,000 jobs

Top 5 In-Demand Sectors



MANUFACTURING



**HEALTH CARE
& SOCIAL ASSISTANCE**



CONSTRUCTION



RETAIL TRADE



**ADMINISTRATION
& SUPPORT**

Forecast Additional Jobs by Sector, 2030

*WOWC region includes replacement and growth demand. Source: EMSI



29,922

MANUFACTURING



28,265

**HEALTH CARE
& SOCIAL ASSISTANCE**



21,304

CONSTRUCTION



20,286

RETAIL TRADE



12,355

**ADMINISTRATION
& SUPPORT**

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AND SUPPORT



PRINCIPLES

- Mental health and addictions challenges are the result of a convergence of factors, many of which require broader societal change to address.
- Although the provision of health care is a provincial government responsibility, municipalities have been forced to take an outsized role in address mental health and addictions challenges, with limited fiscal ability to do so.
- The rate at which municipalities allocated resources to mental health and homelessness supports is unsustainable and diminishes their ability to respond to other key issues.

GOALS

- Secure dedicated funding for wraparound community supports in small and rural communities, echoing the supports offered by the HART hub model found elsewhere in Ontario.
- Funding relief from other orders of government for the root causes of homelessness, to ensure the burden does not disproportionately fall to municipalities.

Shelter Usage Over 5 Years



Housing Wait List Over 5 Years



Social Assistance Clients With No Known Address Over 5 Years



The WOWC strives for partnership, collaboration, and dialogue with other levels of government—and embodies these values in its advocacy efforts in the spirit of maintaining and supporting these critical relationships. Investing in municipal services will lay foundations for the continued recovery and future prosperity of our communities.

WESTERN ONTARIO
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