



## Committee Report

**To:** Councillor Steve Hammell, Chair and  
Members of the Planning and Development Committee

**From:** Mark Paoli  
Director of Planning and Development

**Date:** November 18, 2021

**Re:** Economic Development Strategic Framework

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### Staff Recommendation:

That the Economic Development Strategic Framework report be received; and,

That the Economic Development Strategic Framework Report be used as a foundation for development of the 2022-2026 Find Yourself in Bruce County Economic Development Strategic Plan.

### Background:

An Economic Development Plan provides the directions and support actions that frame the work of the economic portfolio for Bruce County. In 2017, The “Find Yourself in Bruce County” Economic Development Plan was created with Council’s direction and identification of broad goals that won’t change in the new plan. These are as follows:

- Growth of Tax Base / Tax Assessment
- Growth of Population
- Diversify the Economic Base
- Business Retention and Expansion

In accordance with the 2021 Planning and Development Business Plan, development of a new Economic Development Strategic Plan, building on the current Find Yourself in Bruce County Economic Development Strategic Plan 2017-2021 - is underway. The new strategic plan will form the direction for economic support initiatives for the next five years from 2022-2026.

It is important to note that what sits at the top of the work advanced through economic development is marketing and communications. Our grounding framework is to motivate people to visit here, live here or invest and grow a business here - in Bruce County.

Through a strong, strategic, and well-executed marketing plan the objective is to attract visitors, entrepreneurs, investors, and future residents to Bruce County. Marketing objectives include:

- Resident Attraction - To attract residents through the “Be An Explorer” Brand

- Visitor Attraction - To attract visitors focusing on shoulder seasons, increasing length of stays, pushing visitation across the Bruce region (Interior, Lakeshore and Peninsula), through the “Explore the Bruce” Brand
- Attracting Entrepreneurs and Investors - To attract entrepreneurs and investors to start a business in Bruce County, through the “Be An Explorer” Brand

Understanding these target audiences is vital to building economic growth opportunities within Bruce County and positioning it as an area where investment is welcome, entrepreneurial opportunities are abundant, and exploration is encouraged.

### Economic Development Strategic Plan Development:

In order to ensure a fulsome plan that incorporates research, a post-pandemic understanding, and engagement with key stakeholders and partners, this work involved five phases.

1. Research and Analysis
2. Engagement and consultation
3. Reporting - Key findings from phases 1 and 2
4. Strategic Framework Development
5. Final Plan / Implementation and measurement

The diagram below illustrates the approach taken:



MDB Insight was hired to complete Phases 1, 2 and 3. Phases 4 and 5 will be completed in house by County Staff. MDB Insight undertook a comprehensive review of the County's Economic Development programs, an assessment of the current economic landscape and coordinated extensive engagement with key stakeholders. The purpose of this important initial work was so that staff have a solid understanding of the post-pandemic economic landscape and the identification of areas for opportunity and gaps in the current service delivery model. This process ensures that the new plan includes the appropriate supports and programs to advance the continuing growth and sustainability of the Bruce economy working alongside Bruce County's local municipalities.

Phases 1, 2 and 3 are now complete. A synopsis of these phases and results are below.

### **Phase 1: Research and Analysis**

The research and the analysis provided the following information:

- Demographic profile with details of population, related trends, income levels, and education profiles by municipality
- Labour force and employment profiles with details of unemployment trends, labour force by industry, labour force concentration, and commuting patterns
- The business environment and an assessment of the number and type of businesses in Bruce County classified by the number of employees, size of business establishments, and businesses by industry
- Analysis of the major local support chain
- A complete picture of the County's key sectors and how local, regional, and global trends are impacting businesses in Bruce

### **Phase 2: Engagement and Consultations**

In Q2 (2021), MDB Insight, in partnership with Bruce County staff, completed research and undertook engagement activities aimed at gaining insight from key stakeholders, businesses, and groups of economic participants as part of the Bruce County Economic Development Strategy.

In summary, MDB completed:

- 27 Stakeholder interviews
- 10 Focus Group Workshops
- 138 Business Surveys

### **Phase 3: Reporting - Results of Findings in Phases 1 and 2.**

This phase combined the research from Phase 1 with the feedback from the engagement and consultations in Phase 2 and then pulled together analysis to provide recommendations for priority directions in the new Economic Development Strategic Plan 2022 - 2026.

These key areas of focus noted in the findings from the research and engagement include the following:

1. Demonstrate Meaningful Collaborations
2. Balance Community Transformation
3. Anticipate Supply Chain Opportunities
4. Stabilize Workforce Reliability

These broad areas are covered and detailed as part of the framework highlighted in the following section.

#### **Phase 4 - Strategy Development - Strategic Framework**

Phase 4 includes the development of the strategic plan beginning first with the strategic framework which is the focus of this report. This will set the priority areas and directions for the actions to be set on an annual basis, including taking our existing Strategic Plan and building in the recommendations made by MDB Insight from their research and engagement analysis.

A key guiding principle of the 2017-2021 “Find Yourself in Bruce County” Economic Development strategic plan was a focus on collaboration and communication among local, regional, and senior levels of government. This was developed into the community economic development model, ‘The Macro Approach’, which involves the County, municipalities, business groups, and local entrepreneurs working together to ensure successful changes on the ground. In their findings, MDB Insight recommended making improvements on communication with Municipal partners and leveraging supports for other Economic Development stakeholders and partners.

#### **Evolving the Macro Approach (Collaboration and Communications):**

As such, and with the realization that economic development efforts in Bruce County have evolved over the past five years, so has the need to evolve ‘The Macro Approach’ to recognize the collaborative relationships among federal, provincial, and local governments as well as other groups such as: Nuclear Innovation Institute, Indigenous Communities, Four County Labour Board, YMCA Grey Bruce, Region Tourism Organization 7, and more.

This evolution emphasizes the need to encourage collaboration and communication with regional and community partners to ensure that a coordinated approach towards economic growth is realized to support prosperity for the long term.

# Macro Approach



**Regional Counties**

- Grey County
- Huron County
- Perth County
- Simcoe County

**Provincial / Federal Government**

- Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA)
- Ontario Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade
- Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario
- Parks Canada
- Ontario Parks

**Other Partners**

- Indigenous Communities
- Community Futures Development Corporation
- Four County Labour Market Planning Board
- Grey Bruce YMCA
- Nuclear Innovation Institute
- Ontario Tourism Innovation Lab
- Regional Tourism Organization 7
- Rural Ontario Municipal Association
- Saugeen Economic Development Corporation
- Etc.

Two fundamental objectives to move an evolved Macro Approach forward include:

1. Develop a Joint Regional Economic Development Working Group to collaborate and work on regional issues:
  - Work alongside municipal Economic Development Officers (EDOs) on a continuous basis
  - Foster a collaborative approach to regional issues and solve problems together for the benefit of all communities
  - Develop regional initiatives that allow municipalities to share resources and ideas
  - Work alongside municipalities and seek collaboration along industry lines (agriculture, tourism, nuclear, retail, home builders, etc.) and on topical issues (affordable housing, workforce, transportation, broadband, youth, etc.).
2. Community Relations with External Partners (i.e., Indigenous Partners, Four County Labour Board, etc.)
  - Cooperate and collaborate between the various levels of government, supporting organizations, and regional organizations in and around Bruce County
  - Expand opportunities to collaborate and share resources among organizations.

The Macro Approach sits at the top of everything we do to ensure we are working alongside our Municipal partners in a coordinated effort so there are no gaps and no overlaps for service delivery.



## **Economic Development Strategic Framework - Three Priorities:**

Below is a description of each of the pillars and its objectives:

### **1. Business Development (Extended to include supply chain opportunities)**

To support entrepreneurs and existing businesses and provide grants, training, and support programs to foster growth through the Business to Bruce brand while attracting new business and investment by leveraging the “Be An Explorer” brand. This means creating a solid base upon which businesses can grow, which will be done through:

- a. **Business Foundations:** Provides support for business development opportunities along all facets of the supply chain and lays the groundwork for sustainable, successful businesses. This brings a greater emphasis to outreach to larger employers and a scheduled annual business, retention and expansion survey working with municipal economic development colleagues to execute.
- b. **Business Supports, Outreach, and Education:** Supporting business growth and development consultations by connecting businesses to resources and providing access to educational opportunities.
- c. **Sector Development and Enhancements:** Removing the siloed approach to working with business sectors and better understand the issues they face together. By doing so, we can find common solutions to problems that span sectors or uncover opportunities in the same vein. This initiative also fosters opportunities for advancements unique to key sectors; tourism, agriculture and clean energy while leveraging their strengths to grow and develop new opportunities.

Bruce County entrepreneurs are being supported everyday as they navigate their way through the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on business. The shift to operating nearly all Business to Bruce programming in a virtual / phone format has offered staff and the clients with flexibility and ease of providing and receiving services in 2021. As a result, the numbers have increased: 369 one-on-one consultations have been held, 27 business start-ups have been supported, 448 outreach connections have been made, and 81 job creation have been supported (January 1 - October 31, 2021). The lessons learned in improving service delivery for entrepreneurs will continue in implementing the new Strategic Plan.

### **2. Workforce Development (Workforce reliability)**

Bruce County is facing several workforce challenges, including:

- a shrinking labour pool;
- a significant amount of outbound youth migration;
- a mismatch between skills needed and those currently available; and
- a number of issues related to specific sectors.

Companies are struggling to grow their businesses because they are unable to fill vacant positions, hire the skills they need, or have difficulty locating someone to take over their business. Primarily, these challenges are related to the shortage of workforce in Bruce County. The pivotal piece of the workforce development strategy is connecting business with education and government so that all understand the skills requirement now and into the future.

Stabilizing workforce reliability in Bruce County will require a 4-pronged approach as follows:

- a. **Continuous Data Collection:** Using the 'Jobs in Bruce' web platform and external data sources to continuously collect data and then interpret that data to build the required knowledge of local education and skills gaps to assess industry needs, labour needs, hiring trends, and grow workforce talent in the region.
- b. **Attraction:** Show target audiences of Newcomers, New Canadians, and Millennials that Bruce County is a desirable place to live and work through coordination across all sectors of government, community, and business. Through the "Be an Explorer" brand, will attract these target audiences while showcasing the lifestyle.
- c. **Retention:** Develop inclusive communities that provide opportunities and assets that people look for in a place to call home. Work with employers and communities to foster a culture that creates opportunities, finds pathways to positive progress, and supports diversity. This will be done through the Spruce the Bruce Community Development Program, assisting communities with improvements that make them more attractive, distinctive, and pedestrian-friendly.
- d. **Skills Building:** Implement ongoing measures to combat the skills gap between industry and traditional education including local skills development to address anticipated labour needs, bridge education gaps, and raise awareness with local employers about pathways to employment and how to foster development.

An example of the current work being undertaken with respect to workforce development is connecting employers to job seekers. Bruce County partnered with Grey County in 2020 to host three individual virtual job fairs. This new virtual framework was successful in making connections that would have been otherwise difficult under the constraints of the pandemic. This has become an annual event. Opportunities like these, where government, education and business can interact to work on labour issues together will enhance in the coming years.

Another area that staff are pursuing is on the attraction side. In February 2020, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) approved the Grey Bruce Local Immigration Partnership (GBLIP) for five years to support the development of community-based partnerships and planning to support the unique needs of newcomers. The Grey Bruce Local Immigration Partnership brings together service providers, settlement agencies, community groups, employers, newcomers, and other key organizations across the region to foster a welcoming and inclusive community for newcomers. The Partnership Council is advancing the five-year Settlement Strategy 2025 developed from the findings uncovered from community and stakeholder engagement and is working to



identify, select and implement targeted activities to address community priorities. In the strategy, seven community priorities are endorsed through four pillars of actionable objectives: Build Capacity, Strengthen Community, Cultivate Prosperity and Foster Inclusion. This program seeks to help alleviate the labour shortage in the County.

### **3. Community Development (Balance community transformation)**

Community Development is about creating welcoming and attractive places that people want to live in. It is more important now than ever as quality of life is leading economic development. This is done through Spruce the Bruce Community Development Program. Identifying each community's unique selling proposition (Community Branding), making it attractive through product development and infrastructure improvements that will attract residents and entrepreneurs, based on an understanding that people are looking for a superior quality of life and place to build a business.

This work will include:

- a. **Product Development and Destination Development:** Work with municipalities to develop communities into destinations while revitalizing commercial cores.
- b. **Environmental Innovation and Adaptation:** Work alongside municipalities on innovative projects with an environmental lens, climate change and a focus on the future while fostering partnerships between local businesses and other organizations to support one another. An example in the tourism sector is eco-conscious tourism programming while dispersing tourism throughout all regions in Bruce County and into the shoulder seasons.
- c. **Addressing Regional Initiatives (i.e., Housing, Transportation):** Support innovative and affordable residential development initiatives while developing community amenities and investing in infrastructure improvements to encourage long-term resident growth and attraction.

Examples of work currently underway are, in 2021, Bruce County launched a marketing campaign called 'Book and Look' to encourage visitors to make a reservation at the Bruce Peninsula National Park and Lion's Head Bruce Trail Parking Lot (McCurdy Road) to manage the capacity on the Peninsula. If visitors did not have a reservation, the campaign encouraged visitors to visit other regions of Bruce County and to visit Bruce County during the shoulder seasons.

Another example is, also in 2021, the review of the Spruce the Bruce Community Development Program which was done to see how it could be enhanced to address the current economic context. The Spruce the Bruce Program provides communities with resources to maintain and grow healthy commercial areas. It brought stakeholders together to create a vision for future growth and development providing tools and grant incentives to achieve that vision. The Enhanced Spruce the Bruce Program has an added 'Industry Stream' to address regional issues such as transportation and housing. This Enhanced Program will launch in 2022.

### Next Steps:

The work prepared by MDB Insight including the research, engagement and recommendations, along with the strategic framework prepared by staff was shared with Economic Development staff from the Member Municipalities for their feedback. Their input in the final plan is critical to the development of a consolidated plan that is truly built on the Macro Approach.

The next step is to take the framework presented today and build out the full plan - the new five-year Bruce County Economic Development Strategic Plan and annual Action Plan (Phase 4). The final plan will be presented to PDC (Planning and Development Committee) in Q1, 2022.

### **Financial/Staffing/Legal/IT Considerations**

There are no financial, staffing, legal or IT considerations associated with this report.

### **Interdepartmental Consultation:**

None.

### **Link to Strategic Goals and Elements:**

The Economic Development 5-Year Strategic Plan was identified as a major initiative and Council priority in the 2021 Planning and Development Business Plan.

### **Report Author:**

Jill Roote  
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### **Departmental Approval:**

Mark Paoli  
Director, Planning and Development

### **Approved for Submission:**

Sandra Datars Bere  
Chief Administrative Officer