TOWNSHIP OF NORTH ALGONA WILBERFORCE

BUSINESS RETENTION EXPANSION ACTION PLAN

NOVEMBER 2019

Business Retention & Expanstion Plan (BR+E) Township of North Algona Wilberforce

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to sincerely thank all of the 19 businesses who participated in the survey and the people who took the time to meet with us, share their stories, open their minds and genuinely participate in the listening exercise. The business community, made up of and well-supported by our local residents, is robust, strong, resilient, dynamic and a true strength of the region. Together you can achieve even more. Thank you for the chance to get to know you all in pursuit of your community's express and common purpose – thrive.

Special Thanks: Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) and the Township of North Algona Wilberforce for funding this project and demonstrating their ongoing commitment to a thriving rural Ontario.

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TOWNSHIP OF **NORTH ALGONA** WILBERFORCE



Introduction

There is no doubt about it – the business community in North Algona Wilberforce is robust, dynamic and poised for expansion.

The Township commissioned a Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) assessment to determine the best approach to realize and sustain the local business community's drive to thrive. Well-positioned for growth and riding a wave of creative energy, the business community is absolutely eager to leverage new opportunities they can clearly see within their reach.

Business owners and their senior staff were interviewed as part of the BR+E assessment. They told stories of purposeful work, rooted in deep family ties and sustained with the personal satisfaction that comes with building and defining personal success. This dynamic listening exercise revealed critical strategies and tactics the Township and business community can adopt to make the most of rural opportunity gems tucked away in North Algona Wilberforce.



North Algona Wilberforce BR+E 2019

Business Profile



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MUNICIPAL ENGAGEMENT

Business owners we interviewed shared their stories about how they engage with the Township today, if they do, and also what they feel is the fundamental role of the Township in business retention and expansion. This information is essential for you to consider when selecting interventions for support or determining strategic directions or investment opportunities. Thriving communities can demonstrate that each unique player understands their respective role on the journey to collective development.

Township leadership can best contribute to mutually beneficial outcomes by fully appreciating and adopting their essential role as identified by members of the community at large and by backing up this commitment through the input of elected officials and staff at the decision-making table.

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ROLES OF THE TOWNSHIP

The interview survey revealed that 68% of business respondents already engage with the Township to access information, bring forward concerns, use basic municipal services (permits, taxes, etc.) and engage in business collaborations. When asked about their views of the Township's role in business retention and growth, the narrative responses reflected strong and definitive themes:



ROLES OF THE TOWNSHIP THEMES

Many of these themes are also reflected in the opportunities presented to advance business support and coordination, which underlines the importance of informed action by effective leadership to deliver a robust marketing and promotion plan that is aligned with North Algona Wilberforce as a brand.

One of the most significant narratives we collected during the interview process did not arise from formal questions, but was woven throughout many responses: Hope for the future of doing business in North Algona Wilberforce. The stories we heard reflected a newly positive view of the leadership at the Township. Business owners feel better connected and supported than before. They are optimistic that the current decision-making team at the Township has the potential to lead the community into a dynamic and fruitful future.

Furthermore, the respondents provided ratings informed by their perspective of the level of support from the Township, other businesses and residents of the community. The results revealed that many are satisfied with the Township's level of support; those and others are even more satisfied with the support from other businesses; and nearly everyone is feeling the love from the community of customers and cheerleaders.

LEADERSHIP B+ 11/14 ARE SATISFIED OR BETTER WITH TOWNSHIP



14/18 ARE MORE SATISFIED WITH BUSINESS SUPPORT THAN TOWNSHIP SUPPORT **CUSTOMERS**



17/19 ARE EVEN HAPPIER WITH RESIDENT SUPPORT THAN BUSINESS SUPPORT

COMMUNITY Strengths

Four key community strengths emerged through the core BR+ E Survey:



COMMUNITY DRAWBACKS

66 Overall, more positive points to doing business in North Algona Wilberforce were reported than negative ones. Still, it is important to flesh out the drawbacks. According to the core survey, of the 47 negative responses, 17 spoke to access given your rural geography, 10 spoke to population and demographics, 10 more spoke to services and local infrastructure, and only three identified average income to be barriers to business.**99**

The four key drawbacks:



36 % | RURAL, GEOGRAPHIC ACCESS

COMMUNITY DRAWBACKS

In the community questions and narrative portion of the survey, the challenges identified had to do with services and infrastructure, such as road maintenance and consistent snow removal for customer and supplier access, lack of garbage pick-up service and the under-utilization of infrastructure and physical assets such as parking lots and community spaces.

Many respondents also spoke to the significant challenges brought about by an ageing demographic and declining population.

Difficulties hiring and finding the skilled labour they need is top of mind for the employers in the survey respondent group. Of those who have tried to hire workers, 79% say they have trouble doing so.



DRAWBACKS Related to Workforce

GENERALLY, WE OBSERVED THAT:

Larger employers are facing fewer challenges with respect to their workforce needs. Small businesses are struggling the most, especially when they are seasonal or have a skilled component to the work. Business owner/operators who want to grow hold back instead due to the workforce challenges.

BUT, ONCE THE WORKERS ARE HIRED, THEY STAY.

The employers we spoke with clearly have the skills required to value and retain their employees and may further explore competencies to connect with and adapt to a new workforce. The reality is that the North Algona Wilberforce area has experienced low in-migration levels and birth rates, resulting in fewer and fewer available workers year over year. This, combined with a mismatch between skills of available local workers and skills required for in-demand jobs, has prompted the region to pursue a secondary migration strategy to attract new residents and skilled workers into the future, while re-training and further developing the skills of local applicants.

Training on welcoming workplaces, intercultural competency, effective communication strategies and behavioural innovation among business and community leaders will be required to fully realize a more diverse workforce. For some employers, the pain point of a skilled worker shortage is already pronounced and limiting their ability to thrive. Most report a current shortage of workers, while also reporting that in the next 18 months they hope to add another 31 jobs to operations.

You Talked... We Listened

Ready for Specifics? Let's Go!

RECRUITS

Several respondents named specific jobs they have trouble filling today. The clear workforce deficit is in food service workers and professional cooks. Every business with a food component spoke to this challenge and they are desperately seeking a local training partner.

26% OF OCCUPATIONS IN NEED RELATE TO FOOD SERVICES

COLLAB LAB

Nearly every employer we spoke to wants to collaborate with other businesses and the Township. They feel the Township is the most appropriate coordinator of this opportunity and employers are ready to take part. Survey respondents identified the objective of this collaboration to be sharing information and learning together. Finding business synergies and efficiencies will likely be a welcome byproduct of these activities.

84 % ARE INTERESTED IN COLLABORATION

CAPITAL IS KING

There is a clear opportunity to focus information sharing and training events on acquiring capital investment. Every business who reported that they are planning to expand due to increasing market demand is concerned about how they will find the necessary funding to do so.

With essential business development resources like Enterprise Renfrew County, Renfrew County Community Futures, Business Development Bank of Canada and PARO already present locally, making connections and referrals while conducting place-based training events is achievable.

100% OF BUSINESSES EXPANDING HAVE CAPITAL CONCERNS

You Talked... We Listened

GO GARBAGE

Option 1: Store it. Pile it. Smell it. Release a worker. Load it. Transport it. Pay for it.

Option 2: Outsource it. Pay for it.

Business owners who generate significant amounts of trash from the tourism economy face two challenging options for waste management – store it until you can spare the employee to transport it to the dump or hire external pick-up. 77% of businesses interviewed are eager for improved garbage services, especially during the summer months. Businesses are already paying for garbage service in one way or another. There is a clear cost-sharing incentive to create a business garbage collaborative agreement for interested parties to buy into.

77% OF BUSINESSES ARE INTERESTED IN IMPROVED GARBAGE SERVICES

BUY LOCAL

Although most suppliers to the businesses we interviewed are located within 150 kilometers, 60% of respondents wished they could buy fresh food or food products locally. Recruiting or partnering with a green house or hydroponic farm or agricultural community is ideal to better serve the local ecosystem of food service. This sentiment was dominant among the survey responses in this category. The obvious business opportunity could be marketed to start-up support groups, business umbrella groups and among other entrepreneurs and existing businesses in the region.

60% WOULD LIKE TO BUY MORE FRESH FOOD/PRODUCE LOCALLY

ONE BIG MOVE

One critical question posed to survey respondents solicited their view on the most significant change that could create the largest impact on the community as a place to do business. Tellingly, of all responses, only four key activities were identified in the core survey. The limited and repeated set of responses demonstrates that the business community is clearly aligned in their perspective of the opportunities at hand for North Algona Wilberforce.

THE FOUR KEY 'ONE BIG MOVE' ACTIVITES

| 28 % | CLEAR TOV | VNSHIP BRAN | D AND MARI | KETING PLAN |
|-------------|------------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| | | | | |

- 33% | COORDINATED BUSINESS SUPPORT
- 33% | PROMOTION AND EXPOSURE
- **39 % | RESIDENT ATTRACTION**

A FEW MORE THOUGHTS

In the community questions and narrative portion of the survey, two additional ideas emerged that we feel you should hear.

There is a unique opportunity to embark on an intentional, respectful, reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationship with the neighbouring Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation community. The region has a rich Indigenous heritage, including ways of life, values and environmental stewardship. Responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action 92, local businesses in North Algona Wilberforce would commit to meaningful consultation, respectful relationships, informed consent and equitable opportunities for Indigenous people on economic development projects, as well as knowing and understanding our collective history.

Linked to this opportunity is use of available waterfront. Off script, several respondents referred to the potential of leveraging business and community opportunities of local shorelines. Only a community consultation that fully and respectfully includes and respects the Indigenous community and their principles concerning land use could lead to joint and mutually beneficial action.

INFORMED RESPONSES MENU

Appetizers

Easy WINS you could achieve today FOR FREE

- Considerations Make Township decisions with your employers in mind, e.g. road and driveway maintenance as business access points, including prioritized snow removal plans.
- Join the Local Immigration Partnership Council of Renfrew County Ask for a seat at the table and join the secondary migration working group to demonstrate your keen interest in recruiting skilled workers directly or through provincial programs.

Main Courses

Intentional effort that will sustain you in the long run with an investment in time and minimal budget

- Get Connected Create a business synergy group or Collab Lab where you offer timely, accurate and relevant information, listen to the perspectives of business owners more often, investigate synergies for improved collaboration and efficiencies, and find opportunities for collaboration with off-season organizations or other employers to offer year-round co-employment for seasonal workers.
- Coordination Offer coordinated joint marketing opportunities where complementary businesses intentionally come together and develop co-mingled tourism packages organized through the Township and develop a robust promotional plan that includes showcasing the champions and stories from the business community.
- 3. Support Consider on-boarding an outreach-based Business Coach or Business Development Advisor to connect directly with owners, deepen partnerships with Enterprise Renfrew County, Community Futures Development Corporation, and Algonquin College in the Ottawa Valley to bring forward key training opportunities to advance capacity in business and provide online connections and resources that can be accessed anytime.

INFORMED RESPONSES MENU

Main Courses cont.

- Business Garbage Collaboration Develop a plan to bring interested parties together to discuss options the Township can consider with respect to a subsidized or collective membership model for pick-up service, beginning in the summer months.
- 5. Recruit or Find a Grower Investigate local green houses as potential local food-produce suppliers for numerous businesses, consider developing relationships with local produce growers, explore agriculturally based communities for joint business development or recruit a grower to commit to a start-up here given the demand.
- Smart Assets Leverage existing infrastructure in better ways to suit the needs of the business community, including parking lots, parks and open spaces.



INFORMED RESPONSES MENU

Desserts

The sweetest piece, the effect of which lingers long after the meal

- Brand Identity What is NAW? What are we known for? There is major potential to leverage deep family histories via video storytelling to offer something well beyond natural beauty and landscape and recommend a unique North Algona Wilberforce brand that clearly speaks to the many opportunities and advantages found here.
- 2. Advocacy Prepare a business case for Algonquin College in the Ottawa Valley to bring back a culinary program for today's food service jobs Jobs For Foodies as an example or concurrently, attract young and vibrant interest in training in the field, tied to a job placement with local businesses. Lobby your MPP for an improved intersection in Golden Lake to ensure pedestrian safety especially during the summer. Assist businesses with navigating provincial agencies with respect to provincially maintained roads requiring modification, access to physical locations managed by the province or county and services to maintain those roads and intersections not under the portfolio of North Algona Wilberforce.
- 3. Keep Listening and Remember to Respond Most business owners are happy to give back to the community but would prefer to determine how they do it. It is important to inform about and promote these preferences in the community so as to sustain donations and sponsorships long-term, considering the small set of businesses able to give. This also signals to the business community that the Township is heeding advice and applying what they have learned.

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