



MERRICKVILLE-WOLFORD
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

PHASE II REPORT

INDUSTRY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
AND TOURISM ADVISORY COMMITTEE

February 28, 2010

M-W Economic Development Strategy

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

This initiative is being undertaken by the Industry, Economic Development and Tourism Advisory Committee (IEDTAC) on a volunteer basis with the support and assistance of Council. It provides a situation analysis, a Vision for the future of our community through to 2025, and a broad range of related recommendations to secure that future.¹

As a first step, the IEDTAC undertook a broadscale survey of the municipality's residents and businesses² and followed this up with consultations with a Community Focus Group comprising representatives of most key stakeholder organizations and/or groups in Merrickville-Wolford.³ The IEDTAC then developed the First Draft Report which documented common municipal stakeholder views on economic development in Merrickville-Wolford with respect to the community's competitive strengths and weaknesses, their strategic vision for the next 10 to 15 years, and recommended appropriate strategic directions.

This First Draft Report was then reviewed in collective and bilateral discussions with officials representing key funding and facilitation stakeholders including: the Village Council and CAO; Smiths Falls Economic Development; UCLG Economic Development; Rideau Heritage Route Tourism Association; Valley Heartland CFDC; three Ontario Government departments, and Parks Canada.⁴ The outcome of these discussions⁵ is reflected in this Second Draft Report which will now be reviewed with the Community Focus Group prior to the Final Report being submitted to Council.

The IEDTAC acknowledges the substantial contributions of the Community Focus Group members and the local, regional, provincial and federal government stakeholders who participated in the consultations and, in many cases, provided supplementary data and documentation. A listing of these contributors is provided at Annex III.

Where appropriate, the Report borrows from the 2006 Blais Report to Council entitled "Village of Merrickville-Wolford Economic Development Analysis and Plan". The IEDTAC expresses its appreciation to Paul Blais for his excellent

¹ Annex I – *Summary of Recommendations*

² Annex V – *Community Survey feedback*

³ Annex II – *Community Focus Group Members*

⁴ Annex III – *Other stakeholders consulted*

⁵ Annex IV – *Other stakeholders' feedback*

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document and his assistance in facilitating the February 2009 Community Focus Group Forum which has been a critical component of this initiative.

Finally, the Committee wishes to emphasize the challenges faced by small communities such as ours in establishing, financing and implementing sound economic development strategies. Our community relies to an extraordinary degree on our Municipal Council and staff and a wide range of volunteers. Thanks to all these dedicated people the Community is indeed making some progress, despite significant financial limitations.

This Report is designed to supplement these efforts by encouraging a more coordinated, structured and prioritized approach to our economic development strategy which will increase our economic vitality and quality of life by leveraging increased investment and more productive internal and external partnerships.

1.2 Situation analysis

Based on the 2006 census, the municipal population of 2,867 had grown by 2% since 2001 compared to the provincial average of 6.6%. Approximately 42% of inhabitants were 50 years of age or older compared to 32% provincially. Less than 20% of the working age population had a university degree compared to 26% provincially. While the percentage participation in the labour force was very comparable to the provincial average, 61% of employment was concentrated in the services sectors compared to 54% provincially. Manufacturing and retail accounted for a total of 21% compared to 25% provincially. Only 41% of the workforce worked in the municipality compared to 56% provincially. Median household income was approximately \$54,000 compared to \$60,400 provincially. Government transfers (e.g. pensions) and other income (e.g. investments) accounted for 30% of individual income, compared to 22% across Ontario.

The business community is extremely important to the community's economic stability and growth, with businesses contributing approximately 10% of the municipality's tax base and approximately 600 residents being employed within the municipality. The tourism sector is particularly significant from an economic multiplier perspective since each dollar spent by non-residents could account for up to \$1.66 of spending within the community. However, while there are a number of successful businesses, many are quite marginal, there is significant business "churn", and the majority are very dependent on the volatile tourism sector.

Day visitors are clearly providing a key revenue base for many community businesses in the current depressed economy, but this is not a sufficiently effective foundation for stabilizing and growing the community's economy. Merrickville-Wolford is losing ground as competing communities continue to enhance their facilities and tourism product in order to develop their residential and business base while capitalizing on the increasing awareness of the region

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by international visitors due to the World Heritage Site designation for the Rideau Canal.

There appears to be broad stakeholder agreement that the community's primary competitive strengths comprise its heritage structures including the Rideau Canal's UNESCO World Heritage Site designation, extensive natural resources, artist/artisan community, medical support structure, and its geographic location which offers an outstanding quality of life in a rural setting but with proximity to a major urban centre.

The primary weaknesses are seen to be the lack of coordinated leadership on economic development between the key municipal, business and non-commercial stakeholders; the deteriorating and/or inadequate municipal infrastructure and services; the sectorally undiversified economy; and the fragmented retail sector.

While Merrickville-Wolford is often regarded as a model community, particularly with respect to tourism, there is a strong sense that it is now losing ground relative to other communities and needs to reenergize itself. With our already significant competitive advantages now leveraged by the UNESCO World Heritage Site designation, our community is now well-positioned to establish a coordinated and sustainable strategy for our economic future.

1.3 Community vision

The Community Focus Group is providing guidance to this initiative. One of its first actions was to establish a Vision for the community's future based on the related survey of residents. This Vision incorporates a broad coordinated, sustainable approach to economic, cultural, recreational and environmental issues which will guide the formulation and priorities for the community's Economic Development Strategy. The Vision for Merrickville-Wolford comprises the following features:

- attractive living and working environment based on preserving the community's heritage character and natural resources;
- supportive community infrastructure;
- vibrant business sector serving residents, visitors and other businesses;
- moderate residential growth; and
- year-round cultural and recreational focus for residents and visitors

The Focus Group has also identified several key enabling elements for each of these features. Further details are provided at Section 3.4 of this report.

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1.4 Strategic directions

The strategy proposed in this Report covers the period from 2010-2025. It also incorporates a number of key themes:

- A broad-based approach to economic development which focuses on preserving the community's quality of life while continuing to develop our economic base. This requires the strategy to address a wide range of community development issues of which business development is only one.
- Capitalizing on the diversity and creativity in our community and region, our many other assets and attributes, and our geographic proximity and communication links to build knowledge and skills clusters that can increase our economic vitality;
- Accommodating and capitalizing on current and projected demographic trends with respect to residential, employment, business development and tourism issues;
- Strengthening partnerships between the community and other municipal, regional, provincial and Federal organizations to build critical mass for our community with respect to both skills and capital, and to capitalize on new economic development opportunities; and,
- Ensuring that any initiatives undertaken in connection with this strategy are well-planned and financially sustainable.

The strategic priorities which have been identified focus on the following community issues:

- the economic development framework;
- infrastructure and service facilities;
- tourism development; and
- sectoral diversification.

These priorities are outlined below and described at some length in Chapter 4.

1.4.1 Economic Development Framework

Institutional Framework

The Report notes that there is no unified institutional structure in Merrickville-Wolford to coordinate the various stakeholder organizations in understanding each others' agendas, establishing common economic development priorities, implementation planning, securing funding and liaising and building partnerships with related external stakeholders, This results in a lack of community focus, sub-optimal planning, and fragmented implementation.

It is recommended that the community's institutional approach to economic development be restructured by establishing an integrated lead organization

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comprising the municipal sector, business sector, and other key stakeholders. This will ensure a collective vision, integrated strategy, enhanced sourcing of program funding, improved partnering with other municipal, regional, and Government organizations, improved promotion of the community to current and future residents, businesses and visitors, and coordinated implementation of the approved strategy.

It is also emphasized that, in order to be effective, this organization must be supported by dedicated staff with the experience, networks and management skills required to coordinate the activities of this new structure. The Government stakeholders consulted have identified a number of potential program funding sources but they have also emphasized that the need for a sustainable investment by the community in the related institutional structure and support resources.

It is suggested that this lead organization be appointed by Council. Its overall mandate would be to enhance community economic development, and its primary roles would include developing Strategic and Annual Plans, related implementation planning and coordination, securing related funding, and building economic development partnerships.

Reflecting the proposed broad approach to community economic development, it is also recommended that membership of this lead organization include representation from: Council, including the Mayor; Chairs of selected Committees of Council; and other key business and community stakeholder organizations.

1.4.2 Infrastructure

This priority comprises four key issues: heritage structures; natural resources; municipal infrastructure; and municipal facilities.

The Report observes that, while publicly owned heritage structures such as the Rideau Canal and the Blockhouse are well maintained, many of the privately-owned heritage buildings on the main thoroughfares are under stress from traffic vibration, others need restoration, and the owners of some major commercial buildings are facing financial challenges. The Report notes that the Municipality's current by-laws are inadequate to protect the community's historical identity as a Victorian-Edwardian village and it recommends that the municipality consider designating much of the Village as a Heritage Conservation District or Area and implement by-laws and policies which support the respective goals of heritage protection and restoration.

It is also recommended that the municipality press the County for a resolution of the traffic impact on heritage structures through a truck bypass or other traffic calming measures.

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It is suggested that the municipality is paying too little attention and making insufficient investment in enhancing the community's natural resources including the beaches, walking trails, bird sanctuary and Limerick Forest. The Report recommends placing increased emphasis on enhancing all the community's natural resource assets for the benefit of both residents and visitors including such initiatives as improved signage, trail development, improved beach facilities and enhanced river activities.

The basic infrastructure issues are reviewed and it is recommended that the village's basic infrastructure on both the North and South sides of the river be improved by upgrading the sewer and water systems and burying the hydro wires.⁶ It is noted that the sewer, water and hydro initiatives could be coordinated to reduce the related costs and to accommodate the extension of natural gas services to the North side of the Village. The municipality is encouraged to move as quickly as possible on these issues in order to capitalize on current time-limited federal and provincial infrastructure and stimulus programs.

The absence of some basic public facilities and the need for improvement in others is a major source of concern to village and rural residents as well as tourism-oriented stakeholders. For the Village area, the report recommends the development of a multi-purpose cultural facility, public washrooms, visitor information services facility, increased parking, improving street lighting, sidewalk benches, youth and seniors' facilities, and animation facilities for music, festivals, etc. at the Blockhouse Park area. In the rural area, community facilities such as those at Eastons Corners should be refurbished.

1.4.3 Tourism Sector

The tourism sector priorities relate to product development, visitor facilities, and promotion.

With respect to product development where the community is seen to be lagging its competitors, the Report recommends a renewed focus on attracting more visitors from outside the region, extending the tourism season to make Merrickville a true four season village and increasing the length of visitor stays. A key element of this will be engaging in regional partnerships for product and market development which capitalize on the respective strengths of the partnering communities. Other priorities should include: replacing the hotel accommodation and conference facilities being lost with the conversion of Sam Jakes Inn to a retirement residence; enhancing Summer and Fall offerings with eco-tourism dimensions, a Farmers Market, theatre and special events offerings including sports tournaments and ice skating; more consistent core and extended retail business hours; and more unique stores.

⁶ See Section 4.2 for Build Canada funding which has been secured to co-finance a new sewage treatment plant.

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Given the significant commonality of interest between the village and rural residents as well as tourism-oriented stakeholders, the public facilities recommended in Section 1.4.2 above, are seen to be extremely supportive of the objectives of extending the tourism season and the length of visitor stays.

As a general principle, the Report recommends that the municipality become more active in stimulating, participating in, and supporting tourism partnership development both internal and external to the community. Tourism promotion initiatives should also be integrated with and complementary to the more general promotional initiatives of the municipality with respect to community and business development. On a more specific level, the community is encouraged to participate more actively in supporting the “Local Flavours” programming and the artist/artisan community, as well as benchmarking its tourism performance through Ontario’s First Impressions program.

1.4.4 Sectoral Diversification

While the community has limited attraction for the large scale manufacturing sector due to locational, service infrastructure and transportation factors, it should diversify its economy in other selected sectors through a combination of internal and external initiatives. Increasing the community’s economic vitality by building a more creative economy is central to many of these proposed initiatives which focus on enhancing creativity through diversity, establishing skills clusters, capitalizing on internet connectivity, and continuing to build on the exceptional quality of life offered by this “living heritage” community.

The internal initiatives focus on attracting low impact businesses, targeting seniors for residential growth, and promoting agri-business.

The Report calls for the community to attract new businesses including professionals, technology-based and medical services businesses which could lever off the community’s current large professional, scientific and technical services base while benefitting from the lower cost environment and still having excellent proximity to Ottawa. It also recommends using the municipal web site to market the community to potential businesses, and providing “business-friendly” information, pathfinding and facilitation municipal services.

Subject to availability of the required basic infrastructure, it is also recommended that Merrickville-Wolford capitalize on its “living heritage” character, natural resources, geographic location, and unique rural health services infrastructure, by marketing its residential opportunities to seniors and retirees seeking a rural and relatively economical lifestyle. This strategy would be consistent with the relatively high numbers of seniors currently residing in the community and would complement the parallel initiative to attract low impact businesses.

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The Report also recommends that initiatives designed to enhance the sustainability of our farming community should be key components of the community's economic development strategy. In addition to increasing the "Local Flavours" program participation, it is strongly recommended that a regular Merrickville Farmers Market be established as well as an annual Harvest Festival event.

External initiatives resulting from strengthened regional partnerships should also contribute significantly to employment opportunities and business diversification for Merrickville-Wolford stakeholders. For example, in addition to participating in regional team approaches to promoting the region to prospective businesses, developing and packaging tourism products, and collaborating in regional economic development planning, the municipality's involvement in such partnerships as the Smiths Falls Greater Community Economic Development Initiative could enable Merrickville-Wolford to assist in the development of larger regional initiatives which could address such opportunities as the redevelopment of the Regional Centre in Smiths Falls, the Provincial Correctional Facility in Montague Township, and possibly the Grenville Castings facility in Merrickville.

1.5 Next Steps

The IEDTAC will now undertake the next phase of its work by consulting on this Second Draft Report with the Community Focus Group. The Group's recommended modifications will then be incorporated in a Final Draft Report for submission to Council.

If Council then wish to move ahead with this Strategic Plan, or an amended version thereof, a related Implementation Plan will have to be developed. This will be a relatively complex undertaking involving the prioritization of the issues and related recommendations covering the next 10-15 years, developing detailed plans on a phased basis, and identifying the required project and administrative resources.

The IEDTAC strongly recommends that this Implementation Plan be developed by the proposed integrated economic development lead organization as outlined in Section 1.4.1 and discussed in more detail in Sections 4 and 5.

Developing a role and mandate, and structuring and resourcing this integrated lead organization on a sustainable (minimum three years⁷) basis is viewed as a mandatory investment if the community is to have an effective economic development function which can deliver coordinated planning, maintain the associated partnerships, and secure the required public and private sector funding on a continuing basis.

⁷ Provincial stakeholders have emphasized that this level of municipal commitment is required for many related economic development funding programs.

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2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Blais Report

The Village Council retained Blais and Associates to develop an Economic Development Analysis and Plan for the community which was presented to Council in April 2006.

2.1.1 Situation Analysis

In assessing the Village's competitive situation with respect to economic development, the Report saw its strengths as being the Heritage environment, the Rideau Canal/World Heritage Site location, its large artist community, and its proximity to Ottawa.

The major competitive weaknesses were identified as the water/sewer infrastructure, distance from major transportation arteries, and inconsistent visitor marketing. The report also noted that the fragile, tourism-dominated commercial sector (65% retail; 30% food & accommodation) represented a basic economic development threat.

2.1.2 Recommendations

The report recommended that the Village establish the following strategic objectives.

2.1.2.1 Rationalizing the Village Economic Development Structure

Correcting the current diversification of economic development between such organizations as Valley Heartland CFDC, the Chamber, Leeds and Grenville, and the volunteer IEDTAC by implementing the following measures:

- Establishing an integrated institutional approach; and;
- Implementing supportive by-laws and policies

2.1.2.2 Establishing a Strategic Plan for Tourism

Restructuring and strengthening the haphazard approach to Tourism marketing and the focus on related municipal facilities by:

- Focusing the Tourism Strategy;
- Introducing a Destination Marketing Fee (DMF);
- Strengthening participation in regional tourism marketing initiatives;
- Increasing investment in Tourism Product;
- Improving Visitor Services;
- Enhancing Tourism Promotion; and
- Benchmarking Tourism Performance

2.1.2.3 Diversifying the Business Base

Making a collective commitment to strategic transformation by:

- Increasing agri-business participation;

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- Promoting new business startups;
- Targetting Professional Services & technology-based businesses;
- Attracting more Artists;
- Building a “Business Friendly” Support Capacity in the Village Office

2.2 IEDTAC initiative

A few components of the Blais Report have since been actioned. The most notable of these is the municipality’s securing of Government co-funding for a new sewage treatment plant for that portion of the Village located on the South side of the Rideau. This initiative may also offer the opportunity to bury the hydro wires.

However the great majority of the Report’s primary recommendations have yet to be actioned. In addition, the community is greatly challenged not only by the global economic downturn, but also by the significant decline in tourism⁸ over recent years, as well as its deteriorating public infrastructure and heritage buildings.

Consequently, with Council’s support, the IEDTAC has now taken the initiative of reviewing this Plan and the municipality’s current circumstances with local community and other key stakeholders in order to provide recommendations to Council on an updated Economic Development Strategy.

2.2.1 Consultation Approach

The IEDTAC consultation approach comprises the following three sequential phases:

- I) Broad community consultation;
- II) Consultations with key governments & partners; and
- III) Preparation of Final Draft Economic Development Strategy.

2.2.1.1 Local Community Consultations

The Phase I consultation process has now been completed. Community stakeholders engaged in this process included: all village and rural residents; business stakeholders such as the Chamber, major employers, agricultural sector, retail, artists, home-based businesses, professional services, real estate developers; and the historical and heritage community.

The consultations involved a two stage process:

- 1) Surveying all stakeholders through a questionnaire accompanied by a Summary Analysis of the Blais Report. The survey was accomplished through a householder mailing and supplementary information was made

⁸ Tourism in this report generally refers to foreign and domestic travellers spending one or more nights away from home.

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available to respondents on the Village web site and at the library in the form of the full Blais Report and an Executive Summary.

A total of fifty completed survey responses were received from a broad cross-section of the community. These responses were tabulated and a Summary Report prepared.

- 2) On February 28, 2009 a representative group of survey respondents and community stakeholders attended a Community Focus Group meeting chaired by IEDTAC. The group included village and rural residents, business stakeholders such as the Chamber, major employers, retail, artists, home-based businesses, professional services, and real estate developers; the agricultural sector; the historical and heritage community, the Lions Club, and community volunteers,⁹

The Focus Group reviewed the survey findings and Summary Report and presented its own views in a facilitated discussion. The IEDTAC then incorporated these community perspectives in a First Draft Report which effectively concluded the Phase 1 activities. .

2.2.1.2 Government/Key Partner Consultations

Phase II involved reviewing the First Draft Report in collective and bilateral discussions with officials representing key funding and facilitation stakeholders. These included: the Village Council and CAO; Rideau Heritage Route Tourism Association; Valley Heartland CFDC; Smiths Falls Economic Development and their consultant; Leeds and Grenville Economic Development; three Provincial Government Departments comprising OMAFRA, MEDT, and Tourism; and Parks Canada.

2.2.1.3 Final Draft Report

Phase III will involve reviewing this Second Draft Report with the Community Focus Group in order to reach conclusions on a recommended Economic Development Strategy..

Based on these discussions, IEDTAC will then prepare the Final Draft Report for submission to Council.

⁹ See Annex III for participants

3. SITUATION ANALYSIS

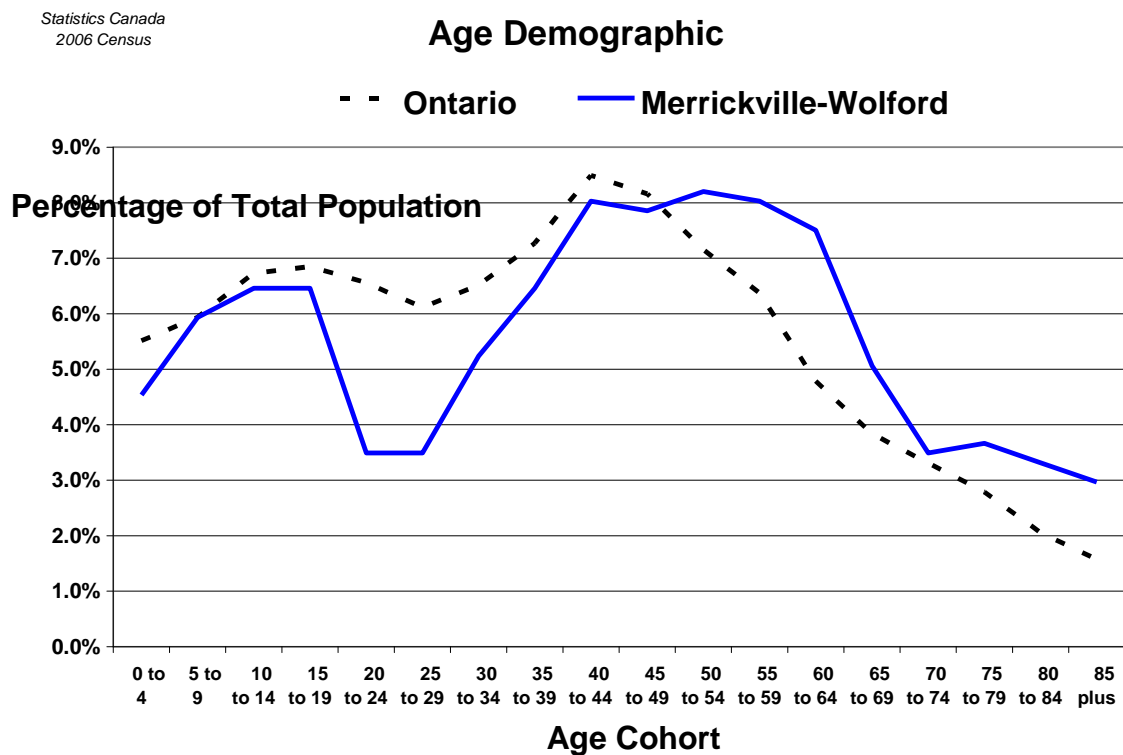
This section reviews some key economic indicators, the community’s competitive advantages and disadvantages, and the Community Focus Group vision for the future development of Merrickville-Wolford.

3.1 Selected indicators

A number of key economic indicators have been researched with the primary information sources being the Statistics Canada Census of 2001 and 2006. The report focuses on demographics, income and employment issues and related findings are summarized below.¹⁰

3.1.1 Demographics

The community’s population was recorded as 2,867 in the most recent Census. While its population growth of 6.9% exceeded the provincial rate of 6.1% over the



¹⁰ The 2006 StatCan Census forms the basis for statistics provided in Section 3.1 unless otherwise stated.

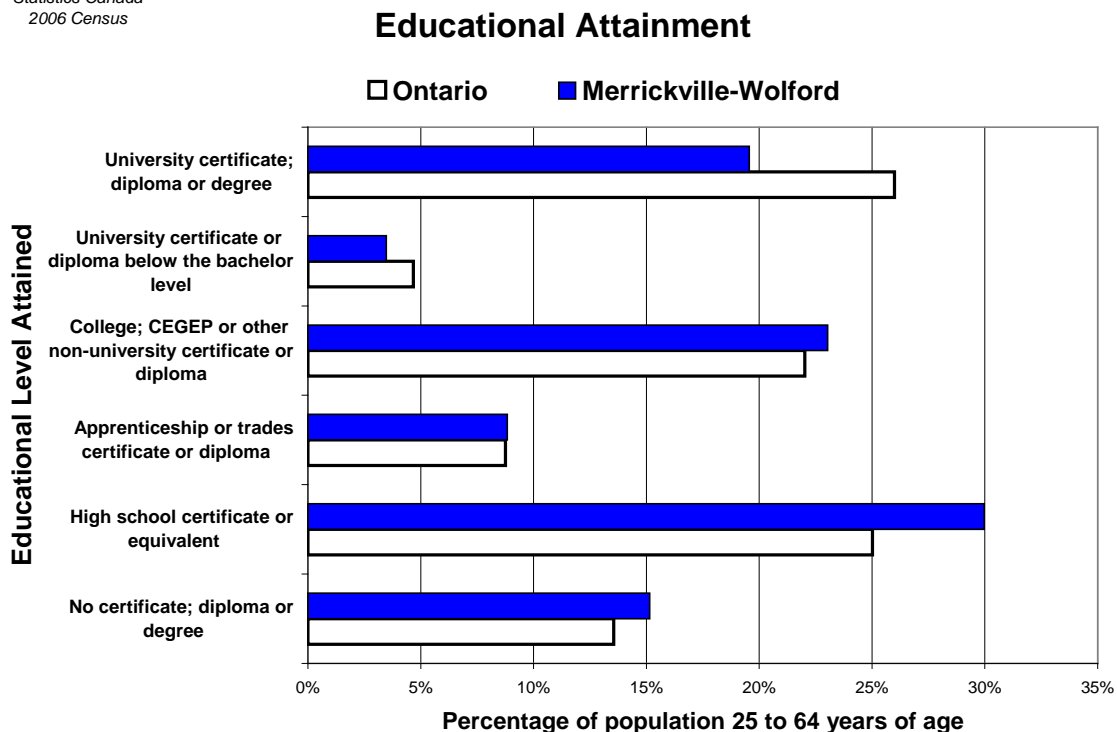
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period 1996-2001; this slowed to 2.0% over the 2001-2006 period compared to the provincial growth rate which increased to 6.6%.

The Census showed 42% of the population being 50 years of age or older, compared to the average of 32% across the province. 24% of the population were aged 50-64, and 18% were older than 64.

As shown in the figure below, Merrickville-Wolford is characterized by lower than provincial average educational levels with respect to university degrees or certificates, but equivalent or higher than provincial levels for college, apprenticeship, and high school graduation.

Statistics Canada
2006 Census



3.1.2 Income

The average household size in the community is 2.4 persons compared to the provincial average of 2.6.

Median income in 2005 for private households in the community was \$54,036 compared to the provincial average of \$60,455.

With respect to individual incomes for 2005 in the community, the 2006 Census showed that 69.5% of income was derived from earnings, 11.9% from

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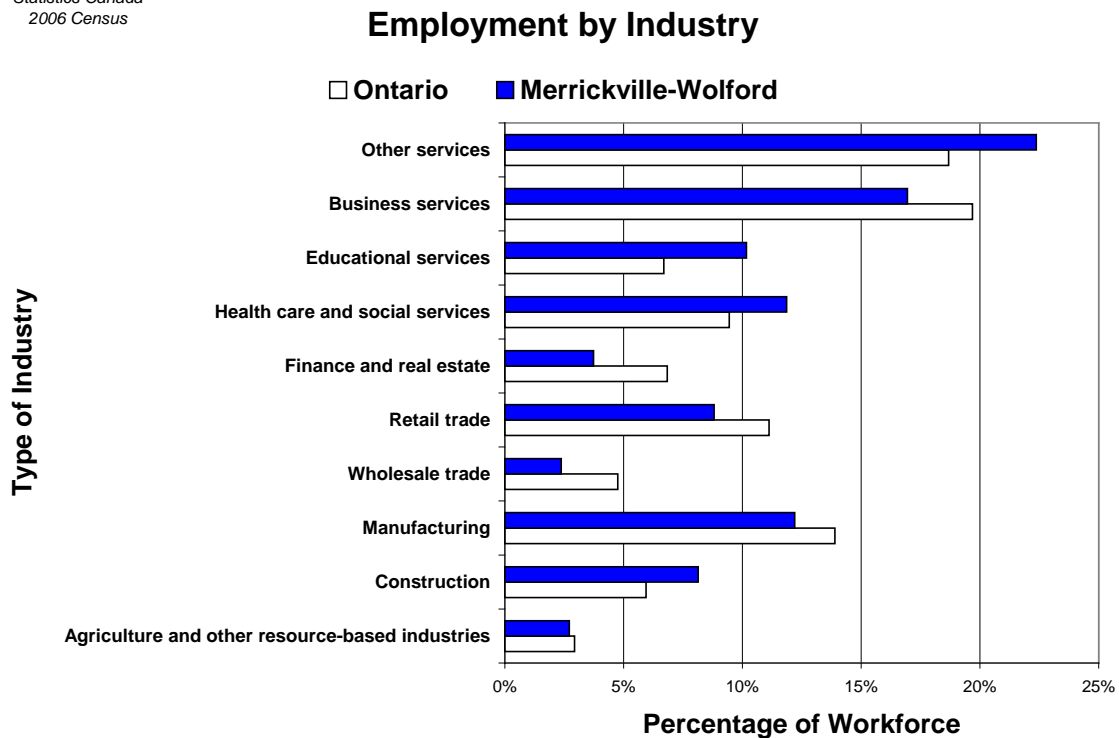
Government transfers, and 18.4% from other sources. This compared to the provincial averages of 77.4%, 9.8% and 12.9% respectively.

3.1.3 Employment

The 2006 Census recorded 2,270 persons in the community aged 15 years of age or older. Of these 66% were employed which is very comparable to the provincial average. The unemployment rate of 3.7% compares very favourably to the provincial rate of 6.4%.

61% of employment was concentrated in the services sectors compared to 54% provincially. Manufacturing and retail accounted for a total of 21% compared to 25% provincially

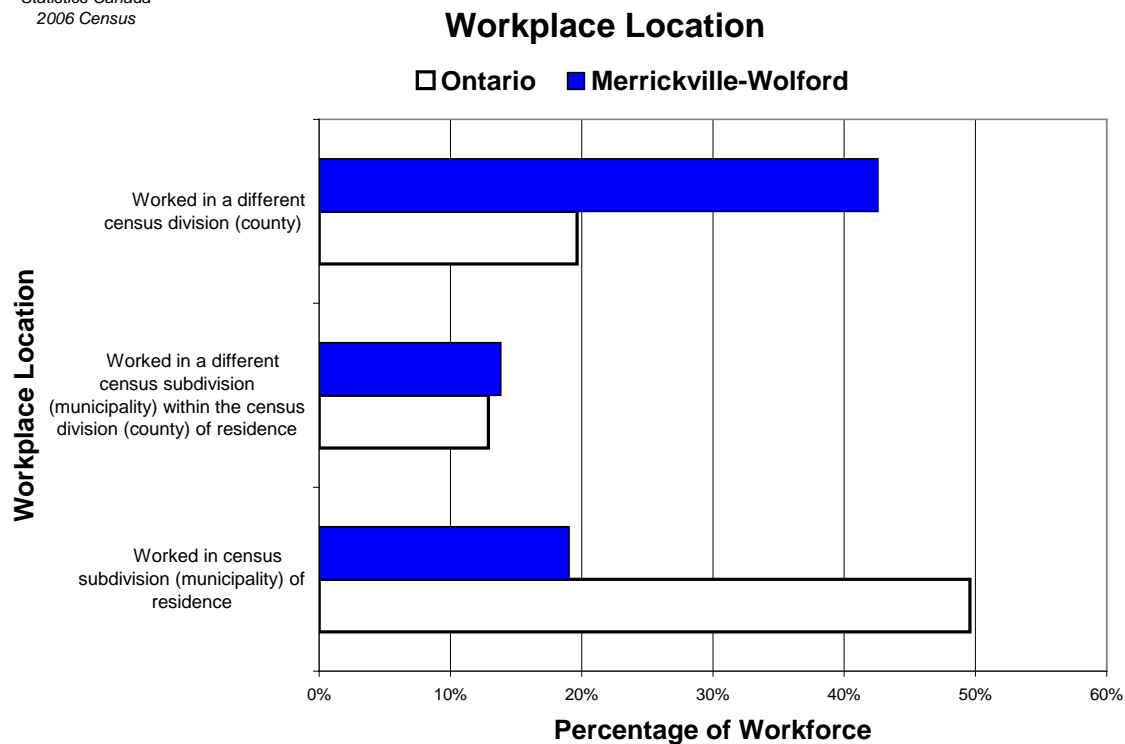
Statistics Canada
2006 Census



However it should be noted that this data reflects the occupations of residents rather than employment within the community. In fact, after including those who work at home and those who have no fixed workplace address, only 41% of the workforce actually worked within the municipality compared to 56% provincially.

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Statistics Canada
2006 Census



3.1.4 Business profile

The Table overleaf shows the sectoral concentration of the 255 business located in the community in 2007.¹¹ This shows that the business in the following sectors were the most common: Professional, scientific and technical services (54); retail (40); construction (38); and agricultural, forestry, fishing and hunting (17). When compared to the sectoral distribution of businesses across Ontario, Merrickville-Wolford had a relatively high concentration of businesses in the following sectors: retail; agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting; arts, entertainment and recreation; education services; and professional, scientific and technical services.¹²

Unfortunately, it was not possible to source the employment provided by these community businesses in any Federal or Provincial Government database.

¹¹ Sourced from Ontario's REDDI database 2007.

¹² Utilities was excluded from this analysis because of the limited business population.

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Community Profile by Business Concentration

Year: 2007

Creation Date: February 14, 2010 2:40:53 EST PM

Report Region: Merrickville-Wolford

Region: Merrickville-Wolford				
Industry (NAICS)	# Bus. in sector (local)	% of local businesses	Concentration per capita	Concentration, sector mix
11 - Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	17	6.667	0.916	1.532
21 - Mining and oil and gas extraction	0	0	0	0
22 - Utilities	1	0.392	2.084	3.485
23 - Construction	38	14.902	0.752	1.258
31-33 - Manufacturing	12	4.706	0.643	1.075
41 - Wholesale trade	7	2.745	0.309	0.516
44-45 - Retail trade	40	15.686	0.995	1.663
48-49 - Transportation and warehousing	7	2.745	0.304	0.508
51 - Information and cultural industries	3	1.176	0.432	0.722
52 - Finance and insurance	8	3.137	0.354	0.592
53 - Real estate and rental and leasing	11	4.314	0.286	0.478
54 - Professional, scientific and technical services	54	21.176	0.782	1.307
55 - Management of companies and enterprises	2	0.784	0.132	0.221
56 - Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services	10	3.922	0.483	0.808
61 - Educational services	4	1.569	0.83	1.387
62 - Health care and social assistance	7	2.745	0.397	0.663
71 - Arts, entertainment and recreation	7	2.745	0.879	1.469
72 - Accommodation and food services	12	4.706	0.64	1.07
81 - Other services (except public administration)	14	5.49	0.483	0.807
91 - Public administration	1	0.392	1.86	3.11

Source: Statistics/Statistique Canada, Canadian Business Patterns

Businesses in sector (local) - represents the total of all registered businesses in a particular sector/industry.

% of Businesses (local) - is the percentage of all registered businesses in the municipality that this sector/industry represents.

Concentration Per Capita - is a ratio of local businesses per capita to provincial businesses per capita and indicates the relative concentration or specialization of businesses in different sectors in the municipality. Any value higher than 1.0 indicates that the local economy has a higher per capita number of businesses than the provincial average.

Concentration, Sector Mix - is a ratio indicating the relative specialization of businesses in different sectors across municipality. Values greater than 1.0 indicate that the local concentration of businesses in a sector, relative to other sectors in the community, is higher than the provincial average, indicating a relative local specialization in that sector.

3.1.5 Business conditions

The 2006 Blais Report concluded that the municipality's commercial sector is both undiversified and fragile. In this context it noted that there were 42 businesses closures during the period 2001-2006 which is an extremely high level of business "churn" even for the small business community. It particularly noted the business community's extreme dependency on tourism. In this context it conducted a sample survey of forty businesses in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce which concluded that:

- if the number of visitors were to drop by 0-20%, 1 in 5 businesses would either close or be in danger of closing;

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- if there were a 21-40% decline, more than 20% of businesses would close and another 30% would seriously consider this option.
- With a decline of 50% or more, more than half of the businesses would definitely close.

While the tourism sector has declined significantly since 2006, the commercial sector appears to have survived to a large extent. Indeed several retail businesses and B&B operators advise that they experienced higher revenues than normal in 2009. In a similar context Parks Canada reported 5% higher boat traffic counts, increased numbers of larger boats, and more American visitors. This additional tourist activity appears to be particularly influenced by the currently depressed global economy with many people forgoing more expensive offshore vacations and taking more inexpensive, local excursions.

A few other niche businesses have also prospered by developing both national and international clientele; web marketing has been instrumental in some of these instances.

However there have also been some very significant casualties, including the ongoing closure of Sam Jakes Inn as an accommodation and conference facility, and it is anecdotally reported that many other continuing retail businesses are particularly fragile from a financial perspective.

3.1.6 Summary

In summary, the robust population growth rate experienced between 1996 and 2001 has now slowed to the extent that it is more than 50% below the provincial average. Compared to the provincial averages, Merrickville-Wolford has 31% more people above 50 years of age; and 20% less aged 20-50. This is reflected in income levels which are 10% below the provincial average, with almost 40% greater dependency on government transfers and investment income.

The municipal economy is dominated by the services, retail, construction and agricultural sectors with the retail economy being extremely fragile and very dependent on tourism. 59% of the local workforce is employed outside the municipality which probably accounts for the municipality's very favourable unemployment rate. The educational qualifications of the local workforce are very competitive with respect to high school graduation but relatively weak on university graduation.

3.2 Competitive advantages

Understanding the community's competitive advantages and disadvantages is fundamental to establishing a viable economic development strategy for Merrickville-Wolford since it enables the development of a vision of what the

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community can and should become. The community survey and Focus Group discussions have been instrumental in gathering viewpoints and facilitating the related analysis. This section will focus on the community's competitive advantages, Section 3.3 will address its competitive disadvantages, and Section 3.4 will outline the stakeholders' collective vision for the future.

There appears to be broad stakeholder agreement that the community's primary competitive advantages comprise its heritage structures, natural resources, artist/artisan community, medical support structure, and its location. These are discussed below.

3.2.1 Heritage structures

The recent designation of the Rideau Canal as a UNESCO World Heritage Site provides the community with a major competitive advantage since this designation is one of the world's most significant and elevates the Canal to a premiere heritage status. This further increases the competitive uniqueness of Merrickville-Wolford since there are no other world heritage sites in Ontario among the 817 UNESCO World Heritage Sites worldwide. Furthermore, the only designated built sites in Eastern Canada and the Northeast U.S. are Old Quebec City, Lunenburg (Nova Scotia), L'Anse Aux Meadows (Viking settlement in Newfoundland), Monticello, Virginia (Thomas Jefferson's home and 'academical village'), Independence Hall (Philadelphia) and Statue of Liberty.

The Village's numerous Victorian-Edwardian heritage buildings and its Blockhouse add significantly to this competitive advantage since there are so few examples in the region of the scale, type and consistency of built heritage and community history available in Merrickville-Wolford.

The beauty inherent in the built landscape puts Merrickville-Wolford in a class with very few communities. In Ontario these include Perth, Kingston, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Port Hope.

For these reasons, the heritage landscape is generally seen as the community's primary competitive asset in attracting both residents and visitors.

3.2.2 World class natural resources

Merrickville-Wolford's attractiveness is particularly related to its location on the Rideau Canal. This waterway provides a scenic community setting for the residents while attracting thousands of visitors every year, including many who dock overnight in Merrickville.

However, while the Rideau Canal waterway is the most prominent natural resource element, stakeholders believe that the community's other natural

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resources including the river, beaches, trails, bird sanctuary, Limerick forest, etc. represent important complementary attractions for residents and visitors alike.

3.2.3 Artist/artisan community

The community has an active, large and eclectic Artist/Artisan community including artists, glassblowers, and woodworkers amongst others. As noted by Paul Blais, a survey of Canada's rural communities, "*Artists in Small and Rural Municipalities in Canada*¹³, finds that artists in Merrickville-Wolford comprise 2.7% of the local labour force, second in Ontario's rural communities".

These artists contribute to the community's economy by manufacturing and retailing. Many have their own storefront locations with artisans demonstrating their work processes, while others sell through local galleries and studios which adds an important local flavour to the shopping experience. Several artists offer courses and some show their products on the international circuit.

The Merrickville Artists' Guild is also an active organization that holds a very successful Studio Tour Sale each Fall.

3.2.4 Medical services infrastructure

The community's health sector infrastructure is relatively unique for a rural community. It comprises two nursing homes and the Community Health Centre which collectively employ approximately 100 people. These organizations are funded through the Southeast Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) which, with the Champlain LHIN also funds the three area hospitals in Smiths falls, Perth and Kemptville.

Such unique health-based facilities are particularly attractive to seniors and retired residents especially when they are complemented by appropriate local infrastructure, services, and shopping,

3.2.5 Location

The opening of Highway 416 has greatly facilitated the community's potential for residential and tourism growth. In addition to making the community more accessible to numerous large metropolitan areas for tourism purposes, the highway has been particularly instrumental in leveraging a closer economic

¹³ Hill Strategies Research Inc. (2006). "Artists in Small and Rural Municipalities in Canada" *Statistical Insights on the Arts*, Vol. 4 No. 3.

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relationship with Ottawa, one of Canada's fastest growing and wealthiest metropolitan areas.

The local economic impact of this stimulus can be seen in numerous areas. For example, the completion of Highway 416 helped stimulate population during the period 1996-2001 resulting in a growth rate of 6.9% compared to the provincial average of 6.1%. This contrasted with other rural communities such as Mississippi Mills, North Dundas, Russell, etc. which all showed lower population growth rates over the same period. It should however be noted that this growth rate moderated to 2% during the period 2001-2006 compared with provincial growth of 6.6%.

The recent and relatively intensive commercial development in Kemptville, which has also been stimulated by the Highway 416 development, complements these local developments by providing access for residents to an emerging regional retail and services centre.

In summary Merrickville-Wolford is now a community within easy commuting distance of Ottawa and neighbouring regional centres thereby facilitating business, social interaction and tourism, as well as increasing its attractiveness as a retirement community.

Merrickville-Wolford's new Official Plan accommodates these prospects for future residential growth by designating land that does not hold agriculture promise as "Rural". As such, while future residential developments will still have to go through Official Plan and Zoning By-law amendments, these should not be as rigorous or contentious as for land designated as "Agricultural".

3.3 Competitive disadvantages

The primary disadvantages identified during the consultation process relate to: weak community leadership and coordination; the deteriorating and/or inadequate municipal infrastructure and services; the sectorally undiversified economy; and the fragmented retail sector. These are discussed below.

3.3.1 Leadership and coordination

Being a small community, Merrickville-Wolford is challenged in attracting and retaining strong public and private sector leadership. The primary reason is that the community does not have the economies of scale which are available to communities with a larger tax base. As a result, many responsibilities are shared between a limited number of nominally compensated Council members, a small Municipal staff, and other volunteers who endeavour to provide leadership for a wide range of municipal and volunteer organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, Council Committees, Community Health Centre, the Lions Club, etc.

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Compounding these challenges with respect to economic development planning and implementation is the absence of any unified structure to coordinate these various interest groups as noted previously.

Consequently, despite some notable achievements such as securing funding for the rehabilitation of the Village's sewage and water system, community stakeholders generally perceive local leadership as being fragmented and unfocussed, and the community not capitalizing on many opportunities for regional economic development partnerships.

3.3.2 Municipal infrastructure

Stakeholders are agreed that the major current deficiencies are the limited capacity, failing sewer and water system on the South side of the Village, the absence of sewer and gas services on the North side of the Village, the presence of overhead hydro wires on the main streets, and the absence of a truck bypass to direct trucks around, rather than through, the centre of the village.

These issues are currently restricting any significant residential and small commercial growth in the village core. The overhead hydro wires detract from the heritage appearance and tourism appeal and the heavy truck traffic threatens the structural integrity of heritage buildings on the major roads.

3.3.3 Community facilities

Most stakeholders, representing both residents and tourism interests, argue that the continuing absence of many normal community service facilities is a major competitive disadvantage in terms of attracting residents and tourists.

The primary common issues relate to the absence or inadequacy of washrooms, parking, benches, lighting, playgrounds, and facilities for youth, seniors and rural residents.

More specific community facility issues related to the tourism sector include the need for an information centre, better use of Blockhouse Park, and improved outdoor recreational facilities.

3.3.4 Tourism dependency, seasonality, and accommodations

The community's dependency on the volatile tourism sector and the lack of tourism-related year-round attractions, are major barriers to establishing a stable and growing economy.

Since the tourism decline which followed the attack on the World Trade Centre in September 2001, there has been major churn among local businesses, and many tourism-related businesses continue to operate in a precarious position.

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In addition, very few attractions have been developed to extend the tourist season and/or extend visits and Merrickville-Wolford is losing ground as competing regions continue to enhance their tourism product. For example, the Niagara Region has diversified well beyond the Falls and winery tours in the last 20 years; St. Jacob's has moved to attract factory outlets which make it more than just a quaint shopping town in "Mennonite Country"; and Kingston has invested heavily recently to restore The Grand Theatre and turn Market Square into a year-round people-friendly place.

The recent conversion of Sam Jakes Inn to a seniors' retirement residence has resulted in the loss of approximately 70% of the community's hotel accommodation, as well as its primary conference facilities. The remaining 12 hotel rooms, 34 B&B rooms and the campground constitute an extremely limited accommodation base particularly for tour groups and conferences. This further prejudices the community's capacity to attract and service longer stay visitors.

3.3.5 Weak marketing

The fragmented promotion and marketing of the community and its various sectoral interests to the primary audiences i.e. current and potential residents, businesses and tourists, has been identified as a major competitive disadvantage.

While the municipality has been more aggressive recently in undertaking and partnering in local and regional tourism marketing initiatives, it has done little to broaden its focus to target new residents and businesses, nor has it re-oriented its promotion medium to capitalize on the broadscale powers of Internet.

The business community has been active in cooperatively promoting Merrickville as a tourism destination primarily through the Chamber of Commerce including enhancing its website through a partnership between the Chamber and Destination Ontario. Individual members of the business community, such as Sam Jakes Inn, have also promoted their businesses directly to the public and accounted for a large percentage of the community's overall promotional expenditures over recent years. However the significant portion of this marketing which was previously undertaken by Sam Jakes Inn is not expected to continue as the business converts to a retirement home.

At the product level, there is significant fragmentation within the business community. Key issues relate to the need to establish consistent business hours in order to enhance service levels, as well as offering more unique and upscale merchandise so as to differentiate Merrickville-Wolford from competing local communities.

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3.4 Community Vision

The analysis of the survey of residents and subsequent discussion at the Community Focus Group enabled that Group to establish by consensus the following Vision for the future of Merrickville-Wolford through 2015-20. This Vision is intended to guide the formulation and priorities for the community's Economic Development Strategy.

3.4.1 Attractive living and working environment based on preserving the community's heritage character and natural resources.

Key elements would include:

- preservation of historical/heritage assets through effective by-laws;
- preservation and only targeted development of the community's natural resources; and
- enhancement and refurbishment of the downtown area with a truck by-pass, buried hydro wires, improved sidewalks, etc.

3.4.2 Supportive community infrastructure and facilities

Key elements would include:

- enhanced basic infrastructure with respect to sewer/water services, natural gas supply, and broadband availability would be operational on both the North and South sides of the Village.
- new washroom and visitor service facilities in the Village as well as enhanced parking facilities;
- refurbished rural community facilities, such as those at Eastons Corners;
- enhanced landfill capacity;
- enhanced transportation services;
- continued health care and police services

3.4.3 Vibrant business sector serving residents, visitors and other businesses

Key elements would include:

- a distinctive retail goods and service sector which differentiated the Merrickville-Wolford from neighbouring communities;
- a low-impact, technology-based business services sector; and
- extensive partnerships with the agricultural community.

3.4.4 Moderate residential growth

Key targets for residential growth would include:

- Government and private sector employees with teleworking options;
- Home-based businesses operating at distance from their markets;
- Seniors and retirees seeking a rural and relatively economical lifestyle;

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3.4.5 Year-round cultural and recreational focus for residents and visitors

Key elements would include:

- theatre facilities;
- year-round outdoor recreation;
- winter season indoor recreation;
- a regular Farmers' Market

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4 STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

By first developing a consensus on the Strategic Vision for Economic Development, the Community Focus Group and IEDTAC were able to rationalize the varying strategic priorities identified by the respective stakeholder groups in order to identify common directions that would enable achievement of this Vision.

The overall strategy incorporates a number of key themes:

- A broad-based approach to economic development which focuses on preserving the community's quality of life while continuing to develop our economic base. This requires the strategy to address a wide range of community development issues of which business development is only one.
- Capitalizing on the diversity and creativity in our community and region, our many other assets and attributes, and our geographic proximity and communication links to build knowledge and skills clusters that can increase our economic vitality;
- Accommodating and capitalizing on current and projected demographic trends with respect to residential, employment, business development and tourism issues;
- Strengthening partnerships between the community and other municipal, regional, provincial and Federal organizations to build critical mass for our community with respect to both skills and capital, and to capitalize on new economic development opportunities; and,
- Ensuring that any initiatives undertaken in connection with this strategy are prioritized, well-planned and financially sustainable.

The proposed strategic priorities focus on: the community's economic development structure; infrastructure and service facilities; Tourism development; and diversifying the economy. Each of these priorities are discussed below with respect to both the current situation and the recommended initiatives/responses.

4.1 Economic Development Framework

This strategic direction encompasses four key issues: the institutional structure; by-laws and policies; external partnerships; and promoting the community.

4.1.1 Institutional Structure

4.1.1.1 Current Situation

The Municipal Council currently retains responsibility for economic development, although it has established the IEDTAC to provide Council with advice on economic development issues. However, the Terms of Reference do not provide the IEDTAC with any delegated authority or operating resources.

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While the primary role of the Chamber of Commerce (MDCC) is to act as the advocate for the business sector, its mission of promoting a healthy business community plays an important role in the overall economic development and promotion of the community. In Merrickville-Wolford the MDCC has filled a void that, in most other communities, it shares with an economic development agency or Visitor and Convention Authority that may be government-operated or a partnership between government and business.

Other local organizations which are key to community economic development include the Historical Society, the Heritage Foundation, the Lions Club, and several other advisory committees of Council.

Critically, there is no unified structure in Merrickville-Wolford to bring together and coordinate these various organizations in establishing the community's economic development priorities, implementation planning, securing funding and liaising with external stakeholders. This results in a lack of focus, sub-optimal planning, and fragmented implementation. It also inhibits the community's capacity to respond quickly and effectively to major events such as the loss of the Sam Jakes Inn hotel and conference facilities.

4.1.1.2 Recommendations

Restructure the community's economic development approach by establishing an integrated lead organization comprising the municipal sector, business sector, and other key stakeholders. This will ensure a collective vision, integrated strategy and coordinated implementation.

It is also emphasized that, in order to be effective, this organization must be supported on a sustainable basis by dedicated staff who could provide expert assistance in planning and coordination, securing related program funding, responding to emerging economic development challenges, and building economic development partnerships on a continuing and/or project basis with community, regional, provincial and Federal stakeholders.

Additional related comments are provided at Chapter 5 – *Next Steps*

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4.1.2 External Partnerships

4.1.2.1 Current Situation

The small size of the community limits its ability to replicate the extensive administrative infrastructure which prevails in most larger urban areas. Instead, the community must rely on a small and modestly compensated Council, limited staff, and a broad range of committees staffed almost exclusively by volunteers.

Given the limited time available to the volunteer population, this inevitably leads to volunteer burnout, inconsistency, and an inability to initiate and sustain larger, longer term initiatives. It is also often reflected in more limited experience in such specialized areas as economic development.

4.1.2.2 Recommendations

The community should compensate for this lack of critical mass and expertise with respect to its administrative capacity, by seeking increased economies of scale through partnerships with local, regional and national organizations having compatible objectives. Such partnerships will also enable Merrickville-Wolford to partner in and capitalize on broader scale initiatives while positioning its internal initiatives in a more optimal manner.

While some initiatives are already in place, such as the municipality's participation in the Rideau Heritage Route and the Historical Society's partnership with Parks Canada, much more needs to be done to build relationships and lever external resources.

Specific examples of such initiatives should include: building a stronger and more comprehensive partnership with Valley Heartland CFDC; forming regional clusters with such initiatives as the Smiths Falls Greater Community Economic Development Initiative to explore regional challenges and assets; and building a stronger relationship with the County and provincial economic development organizations.

4.1.3 Promoting the community

4.1.3.1 Current situation

As noted in Section 3.3.5, promotion and marketing of the community by the municipality and its various sectoral interests is fragmented,

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At the community level, there has been limited progress since 2006 with respect to securing and promoting a consistent brand/image,¹⁴ the community web site has continued to focus almost exclusively on residents, and the municipal office has had limited capacity through its busy Chief Administrative Officer to establish a substantive business development support function.

Effectively the municipality has deferred to other community stakeholders with respect to promoting the community for economic development purposes. However these stakeholders have their own specific commercial interests and the messaging has been fragmented and unfocussed.

4.1.3.2 Recommendations

While the municipality must fully coordinate its promotional initiatives with other community stakeholders to realize optimal value for money, it must also assume the lead role in promoting the community to current and future residents, businesses and visitors.

Not only will this involve securing and promoting the “Jewel of the Rideau” branding and the Merrickville-Wolford.com, web address, but it should also involve a major restructuring of the Village web site to broaden its focus from the current residents by promoting the community to potential residents, businesses and visitors. Possible new features could include more scenic images as well as community facilities such as the medical centre, municipal offices, library, etc. This approach is already being used by competing communities, and is an extremely cost-effective communications medium.

At the administrative level, the municipality should assist the growth of the business community by providing related information, pathfinding and facilitation services for potential investors including maintaining directories of available properties, redevelopment opportunities and available office/retail space. A critical related success factor will be ensuring that the responsible human resources are adequately skilled and trained.

4.2 Infrastructure

This priority comprises four key issues: heritage structures; natural resources; municipal infrastructure; and municipal facilities.

¹⁴ A consulting project on Branding was initiated in 2009 and the consultant’s report was recently submitted to Council.

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4.2.1 Heritage structures

4.2.1.1 Current situation

As noted previously, the recent designation of the Rideau Canal as a UNESCO World Heritage Site provides the community with a unique competitive advantage as a built heritage structure in Eastern Canada and the Northeast U.S. Tourism interest is building but increased docking and tour boat capacity is needed at Merrickville to accommodate the growing demand.

In addition, while the attractions of the Rideau Canal are perfectly complemented by the wide range of Victorian-Edwardian heritage buildings in its Blockhouse Park, commercial and residential areas, many of the buildings on the main thoroughfares are under stress from traffic vibration, others need restoration, the owners of some major commercial buildings are facing financial challenges.

There is significant concern in the community that the current by-laws are inadequate to protect the community's historical identity. While Council has implemented a Heritage Tax Rebate which provides property owners with compensation for regular maintenance and repair, this program can only offer very limited assistance due to the Municipality's small fiscal base. There are also concerns that the design of new and modified buildings in residential and commercial areas is often inconsistent with the heritage flavour of the village.

4.2.1.2 Recommendations

Parks Canada should be approached with respect to plans for increasing wharf facilities for tour boats and smaller craft at Merrickville.

The municipality should implement by-laws and policies which support the respective goals of heritage protection and restoration and economic growth. To encourage heritage-conforming construction and renovation, streetscape improvements and the infill of vacant lots in residential and commercial areas of the downtown core, the community should consider designating much of the Village as a Heritage Conservation District or Heritage Area. Not only would such designation help conserve the community's history and identity through planning and design guidelines but, dependent on the approach selected, it might also enhance the potential for offering additional economic benefits to property owners in areas where there are heritage incentive programs.

In addition, as part of the downtown refurbishment which should accompany recommended enhancements to the municipality's basic infrastructure (see Section 4.2.3), the municipality should press the County for a truck by-pass around the downtown area or truck calming measures to relieve the stress on much of the built infrastructure while enhancing quality of life in the Village.

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4.2.2 Natural resources

4.2.2.1 Current situation

In addition to its built heritage, the community's scenic and wide ranging natural resources are a major attraction for both residents and visitors.

The historic Rideau Canal waterway quite appropriately receives significant attention; however stakeholders believe that there is insufficient attention and investment being made by the municipality with respect to enhancing other complementary natural resources including the beaches, walking trails, bird sanctuary and Limerick Forest.

There is also some concern that environmental protection is seen as a threat, rather than preserving natural resource assets which could assist economic development through e.g. tourism.

4.2.2.2 Recommendations

The community should place increased emphasis on enhancing all the community's natural resource assets for the benefit of both residents and visitors.

Possible initiatives could include: improved signage for all assets; continued support for the development of trails¹⁵, bird watching, and Limerick Forest facilities including roadway, parking, boardwalk, and educational aspects¹⁶; improved beach facilities; river activities such as paddling; etc.

Development and promotional themes could emphasize safe physical activity and "light adventures".

4.2.3 Municipal infrastructure

4.2.3.1 Current situation

As noted in section 3.3.2, the major infrastructure deficiencies comprise the limited capacity, failing sewer and water system on the South side of the Village, the absence of sewer and gas services on the North side of the Village, the presence of overhead hydro wires on the main streets, and the absence of a truck bypass around the centre of the village or effective traffic calming measures.

¹⁵ Council recently gave approval in principle for the Merrickville-Wolford trail Society to develop a Master Plan for general use trails

¹⁶ Council recently indicated its willingness to cooperate with UCLG on the Limerick Forest.

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However it should be noted that, after efforts spanning several years, the Municipality recently secured Build Canada co-funding for a new sewage treatment plant to serve the Village on the South side of the river.

4.2.3.2 Recommendations

The municipality should improve the village's basic infrastructure on both the North and South sides of the river by upgrading the sewer and water systems, burying the hydro wires, and advocating a truck by-pass with the County authorities. With some advance planning, the sewer, water and hydro initiatives could be coordinated to reduce the related costs and to accommodate the extension of natural gas services to the North side of the Village.

Current federal and provincial infrastructure and stimulus programs should also provide an early opportunity to source funding for a number of these initiatives.¹⁷

4.2.4 **Municipal facilities**

4.2.4.1 Current situation

The absence of several basic public facilities and the need for improvement in other facilities is a major source of concern to both village and rural residents as well as tourism-oriented stakeholders. While progress has recently been made on a few issues, such as village playgrounds, other key facility issues continue to languish. Successful resolution of these issues is seen as being critical to enhancing quality of life for existing and potential new residents and attracting visitors.

4.2.4.2 Recommendations

The municipality should place particular emphasis on improving public facilities in the village and in rural areas.

New municipal facilities in the Village should comprise a multi-purpose cultural facility, public washrooms, and a visitor information services facility. Enhanced Village facilities should include: stage and lighting to permit animation (music, festivals, etc) of the Blockhouse Park area; increased parking; improving street lighting; sidewalk benches; and youth and seniors' facilities.

In the rural area, community facilities such as those at Eastons Corners should be refurbished.

¹⁷ To assist Council in responding to these time-sensitive Government initiatives, the IEDTAC submitted a Progress Report to Council on April 4, 2009 which focused on infrastructure, municipal facilities, and natural resource issues.

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Once again, as with the recommendations on basic infrastructure, every opportunity should be taken to access the current federal and provincial infrastructure and stimulus funding programs while these are available.

4.3 Tourism Sector

The business community is extremely important to the community's economic stability and growth, with businesses contributing approximately 10% of the municipality's tax base and approximately 600 residents being employed within the municipality. The tourism sector is particularly significant from an economic multiplier perspective since each dollar spent by non-residents could account for up to \$1.66 of spending within the community. However, as noted previously, while there are a number of successful businesses, many are quite marginal, there is significant business "churn", and the majority of retail businesses are very dependent on the volatile tourism sector.

Day visitors are clearly providing a key revenue base for many community businesses in the current depressed economy, but this is not a sufficiently effective foundation for stabilizing and growing the community's economy. Merrickville-Wolford is losing ground as competing communities continue to enhance their facilities and tourism product in order to develop their residential and business base while capitalizing on the increasing awareness of the region by international visitors due to the World Heritage Site designation for the Rideau Canal.

The tourism sector priority covers three key issues: product development; visitor facilities; and tourism promotion.

4.3.1 Product development

4.3.1.1 Current situation

The tourism sector has been suffering badly since September 11, 2001 and Merrickville-Wolford's experience has been no different. However, while many competing municipalities in Ontario have been enhancing their tourism product, the same cannot be said of this Merrickville-Wolford. In fact, with the exception of the UNESCO designation of the Rideau Canal as a World Heritage site, there has been little advancement and possibly some decline in the community's tourism offerings.

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Key product issues which the community is currently facing include:

- the lack of Winter attractions which could extend the tourist season;
- the ongoing conversion of Sam Jakes Inn to a seniors' retirement residence which has left the community with only 12 hotel rooms and 34 B&B rooms. This provides very limited capacity to attract longer stay visitors, conferences and tour groups; and
- the inconsistent retail shopping hours.

4.3.1.2 Recommendations

The community should place a high priority on: attracting more tourists from outside the region, extending the tourist season throughout the year; and increasing the length of visitor stays. This would essentially mean adding longer stay visitors to the current day visitor base.

Key initiatives required to effect this change would include:

- engaging in regional partnerships for product and market development which capitalize on the respective strengths of the partnering communities;
- increasing the community's hotel room and conference capacity;
- enhancing Summer and Fall product offerings with eco-tourism ("light adventures", walking tours, paddling, water sports, etc.)
- establishing a regular regional Farmers Market and a Harvest Festival event;
- developing theatre and special events offerings;
- introducing more Fall & Winter attractions such as sports tournaments, ice skating, etc, and
- improving the shopping experience by more consistent core and extended retail business hours, and introducing more diverse but unique stores.

4.3.2 **Facilities**

4.3.2.1 Current situation

As noted at Section 4.2.4.1, there is significant commonality between the village and rural residents as well as tourism-oriented stakeholders, with respect to the need for improved municipal facilities. Particular concerns related to visitor

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facilities focus on the absence of effective information services, public washrooms, tour bus and car parking, and adequate indoor facilities.

4.3.2.2 Recommendations

Given the common needs and interests of residents and visitors, many of the recommendations with respect to municipal facility needs for the tourism sector have been addressed previously in Section 4.2.4.2. These comprise: a multi-purpose indoor facility for events and cultural activities; public washrooms; visitor information services; stage and lighting, etc to permit animation (music, festivals, etc) of the Blockhouse Park area; increased tour bus and car parking; improving street lighting; installing sidewalk benches; and youth and seniors' facilities.

4.3.3 **Promoting Tourism**

4.3.3.1 Current situation

The Chamber of Commerce, its members, and other local organizations such as the Lions Club do engage in significant cooperative promotional campaigns. However, following its conversion to a retirement residence, Sam Jakes Inn, one of the community's previous largest tourism promoters, is not expected to be a major contributor going forward.

To achieve maximum effectiveness, smaller community-based tourism promotion must capitalize on co-operative marketing opportunities where communities work together towards their mutual goals of attracting visitors. Such partnerships can significantly leverage financial resources because they have the bulk to attract funding from other levels of government and non-traditional private sector partners.

In this context, the municipality recently became a partner municipality in the Rideau Heritage Route Tourism Association (RHRTA) which has an overall goal of positioning the entire RHR Corridor as a tourism destination by promoting the region's authentic, arts, heritage, cuisine, agri-tourism and natural history experiences. The community's very modest financial commitment to the RHRTA is an important leveraging initiative.

In addition, the municipality has recently enhanced its Highway 401 signage to capitalize on the Rideau Canal World Heritage Site designation.

Finally, the Historical Society also partners with Parks Canada in maintaining and operating the Blockhouse Museum, and sources complementary funding from the municipality as well as both Provincial and Federal Governments to support the Museum and its historical archives.

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These are very important initiatives but much more needs to be done.

4.3.3.2 Recommendations

As a general principle, the municipality should become more active in stimulating, participating in, and supporting tourism partnership development. While Merrickville-Wolford is a relatively small community, the municipality often has much better access than its volunteer community to channels which can help stimulate more effective partnerships.

In addition, the community must ensure that its tourism promotion initiatives are integrated with and complementary to the more general promotional initiatives undertaken with respect to the municipality, as discussed in section 4.1.3. This will require the close coordination between the municipality and all other community stakeholders which is discussed in Section 4.1.1. Consideration should also be given to accessing the province's Celebrate Ontario program which assist festival and event development initiatives.

On a more specific level, more local retailers and restaurants should be encouraged to participate in the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Region's new "Local Flavours"¹⁸ program which builds on the strengths of the region by bringing together local food producers and consumers.

The large artist/artisan community is a relatively unique feature which differentiates Merrickville-Wolford from many other rural communities. It is also very complementary to the village's built and natural assets, and could be instrumental in supporting efforts to extend the season and thereby establish a more sustainable tourism sector. More promotional support should be given to this sector.

Merrickville-Wolford should also participate in Ontario's First Impressions Community Exchange Program which enables communities to benchmark their tourism performance against other communities. Under this program representatives of another Ontario community would visit Merrickville-Wolford on an anonymous basis to provide an independent structured perspective on the community's strengths and weaknesses with respect to tourism. Merrickville - Wolford would then reciprocate.

4.4 Sectoral Diversification

Increasing the community's economic vitality by building a more creative economy should be central to the community's internal initiatives. These should focus on enhancing creativity through diversity, establishing skills clusters, capitalizing on internet connectivity, and continuing to build on the exceptional quality of life offered by this "living heritage" community.

¹⁸ For more information on "Local Flavours" see www.localflavours.org.

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While the community has limited attraction for large scale manufacturers due to locational, service infrastructure and transportation factors, three key “internal” opportunities have been identified which would enable the community to diversify away from its current dependence on tourism. These comprise: attracting low impact businesses; targeting seniors for residential growth; and promoting agri-business.

It is also possible that some sectoral diversification may be realized through the external economic development partnerships referred to previously in Section 4.1.3. For example, the municipality’s involvement in the Smiths Falls Greater Community Economic Development Initiative could enable Merrickville-Wolford to assist in the development of larger external initiatives which could provide both employment and business development opportunities for Merrickville-Wolford stakeholders. Such initiatives could include the redevelopment of the Regional Centre in Smiths Falls, the Provincial Correctional Facility in Montague Township, and possibly the Grenville Castings facility in Merrickville.

4.4.1 Attracting low impact businesses

4.4.1.1 Current situation

Due to its rural location, limited service infrastructure and distance from major transportation arteries, the community has limited attraction for the manufacturing sector, as exemplified by the recent mothballing of the Merrickville plant of Grenville Castings, the community’s only major manufacturer.

Consequently, outside the construction, agricultural and retail sectors, the local business population is dominated by the services sector, with many of the largest business component i.e. professional, scientific and technical services, being home-based businesses.

It should also be noted that the municipality does not have an established strategy for attracting new businesses to the community.

4.4.1 2 Recommendations

Merrickville-Wolford has numerous and, in some cases, unique lifestyle assets which would be attractive to potential businesses and to older, successful entrepreneurs who are still in pre-retirement mode. These assets include the extensive built heritage, picturesque natural resources, recreation opportunities, broadband accessibility; proximity to major urban centres, and its safe environment. The community should establish a business development strategy which seeks to maintain and to capitalize on these assets.

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In this context the municipality should implement a strategy to attract new, low impact businesses including professionals, technology-based and medical services which could lever off the community's current large professional, scientific and technical services base. Small software development and other technology businesses which could benefit from the lower cost environment whilst still having excellent proximity to Ottawa could be prime targets.

While some of these businesses might be home-based, the Municipality should also work with local developers to identify the feasibility of establishing an office building or business centre for incubating small businesses or providing common accommodations and services for businesses who are graduating from home-based situations.

Key elements of this overall initiative, as outlined at Section 4.1.3.2, would include using the municipal web site to market the community to potential businesses, and providing "business-friendly" information, pathfinding and facilitation municipal services.

4.4.2 Targetted residential growth

4.4.2.1 Current situation

Residential development in the core village area has been constrained in recent years by the limited capacity and failing water system on the South side, and the need for sewer and gas services on the North side.

With the exception of Merrickville Estates which is under development and has planning permission for 69 lots, residential growth has predominantly been confined to individual lot severances and associated development.

Demographic experts advise that rural communities such as ours should expect that youth will leave the community for the urban areas as they reach adulthood but will be attracted back as they start to age by the slower paced lifestyle, larger lots, and rural amenities.¹⁹ Aging boomers will be particularly attracted by a lifestyle which offers more relaxed recreational opportunities and is more amenable to declining faculties such as driving, eyesight, hearing, etc.²⁰

These same experts also observe that, in addition to creating new opportunities for local businesses, seniors retiring at 65 in reasonable health can often contribute another twenty years of experienced part-time work and volunteer participation in community life.

¹⁹ Validated by 2006 Census Statistics for Merrickville-Wolford

²⁰ Per Dr. David Foote, Ottawa Seniors Advisory Committee.

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4.4.2.2 Recommendations

Subject to availability of the required basic infrastructure, it is recommended that Merrickville-Wolford capitalize on its heritage character, natural resources, geographic location, and unique rural health services infrastructure, by marketing its residential opportunities to seniors and retirees seeking a rural and relatively economical lifestyle.

This strategy would be consistent with the relatively high numbers of seniors currently residing in the community and would complement the potential increase in residents which could result from the parallel initiative to attract low impact businesses as well as the natural residential growth which could result from incoming government and private sector employees with teleworking options.

However care must also be taken to maintain the attractiveness of the community for families and younger persons in order to avoid the labour supply problems which have impacted communities with similar strategies, such as Elliot Lake. This reinforces the importance of addressing the municipal facility recommendations outlined at Section 4.2.4.

4.4.3 Increasing Agri-business participation

4.4.3.1 Current Situation

To date, there has been no concerted strategy to enhance the sustainability of the farming community. Any community economic development initiatives in relation to the farming community have been primarily focussed on the tourism aspect through regional ploughing matches.

Consequently, as in other rural regions, there is a growing trend towards farm consolidation and industrialization, depopulation, and the related loss of heritage and culture.

4.4.3.2 Recommendations

Initiatives designed to enhance the sustainability of our farming community should be key components of the community's economic development strategy.

Reference has already been made in Section 4.3.3 to the need for increased participation in the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Region's new "Local Flavours" program.

The community could take the lead in resolving problems of producer marketing and consumer awareness with respect to specialty produce such as blueberries, jellies, etc. by incorporating these features in the municipal web site and other stakeholder promotional initiatives.

In addition, it is strongly recommended that a regular regional Farmers Market be established in Merrickville to provide an outlet for community and regional farm

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producers. However, while they were very supportive, of this concept, a number of stakeholders cautioned that such an initiative must have quality products, a sound business case, be led by the agricultural community and be linked to “local flavours” in order to be viable.

In a similar context, Merrickville-Wolford is also well-positioned to establish an annual Harvest Festival event which could further profile local produce.

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5 NEXT STEPS

Having completed its consultations with key municipal, regional, provincial and federal stakeholders, the IEDTAC will now complete its Phase II activities by reviewing this Phase II Report with the Community Focus Group including the principals of the Chamber and the Historical and Heritage organizations,.

The perspectives obtained from those consultations will then be incorporated into a Final Draft Report for submission to Council.

Should Council then wish to proceed with further development of this Strategic Plan, or an amended version thereof, it will be critical that a related Implementation Plan be developed.

5.1 Organizational responsibility

The Implementation Plan should be developed by the integrated lead organization comprising the municipal sector, business sector, and other key stakeholders as proposed in Section 4.1.1.2.

More specifically this lead organization, operating as the Municipality's Economic Development Board (EDB) or equivalent, would be appointed by Council. Its mandate would be to enhance community economic development, and its role would include: identifying and prioritizing the community's economic development initiatives; building economic development partnerships; developing related Strategic and Annual Plans and Budgets; and, coordinating and monitoring related implementation activities.

Possible membership could include representation from: Council, including the Mayor; the Chairs of selected Committees of Council (e.g. IEDTAC²¹, Agriculture, Environment, Planning, and Heritage); the MDCC; the Historical Society; the Heritage Foundation; and the Lions. External stakeholders could be encouraged to attend Board meetings on an advisory basis.

Possible sub-committee structures could include:

- Planning, by-laws, residential development
- Infrastructure, facilities, and natural resources ,
- Community promotion, tourism development, & marketing

While all the EDB members would be volunteers, in order for the Board to be effective it must be supported by an experienced dedicated part-time resource, who could provide expert assistance to the Board on planning and coordination, securing related program funding, responding to emerging economic development challenges, and building economic development partnerships on a

²¹ It should be possible to sunset the IEDTAC with the establishment of the EDB

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continuing and/or project basis with community, regional, provincial and Federal stakeholders.

A modest budget should be established which could also incorporate the municipality's marketing/promotional budget. The Board would be expected to identify related funding partnerships/program access to supplement its budget as required.

Provincial stakeholders have emphasized that many related Government economic development funding programs require evidence of a concurrent financial commitment by the municipality for approximately three years.

5.2 Planning Priorities

In structuring this Implementation Plan the EDB, or its equivalent, should be guided by the strategic priorities approved by Council and should then establish a comprehensive plan which identifies goals, deliverables, activities, lead and partnering organizations, assigned responsibilities, target time frames, milestones, and funding provisions.

ANNEX I – SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategic Directions	Key Issues	Recommended Initiatives
Economic Development Framework	Institutional Structure	Integrated Economic Development Board Funded support staff
	External Partnerships	Valley Heartland, Smiths Falls GCEDI, UCLG, Provincial & Federal govts
	Promoting the community	Community branding Web site restructuring Municipal business support services
Infrastructure	Heritage Structures	Expanded Rideau Canal wharf facilities Heritage Conservation District/Area Truck by-pass/traffic calming measures
	Natural resources	Improve signage Develop walking trails Develop Limerick Forest facilities Improve beach facilities Enhance river activities
	Basic infrastructure	Upgrade South side sewer and water facilities Extend water & sewer to North side Bury the hydro wires Extend natural gas service to North side
	Municipal facilities	Multi-purpose cultural facility Public washrooms Visitor information services facility Blockhouse park stage and lighting

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Strategic Directions	Key Issues	Recommended Initiatives	
Infrastructure (cont)	Municipal facilities (cont.)	Increased car & tour bus parking	
		Improved lighting for main thoroughfares	
		Sidewalk benches	
		Youth & Seniors facilities	
		Refurbish Easton's Corners community facility	
Tourism Sector	Product development	Develop hotel and conference facilities	
		Enhance regional partnerships	
		Introduce eco-tourism/light adventures	
		Establish Farmers Market, Harvest Festival	
		Develop theatre & special events	
		Introduce Fall & Winter events	
		More consistent retail business hours	
		More unique stores	
		Facilities	See "Infrastructure/ municipal facilities"
		Promoting tourism	Coordinated community-level promotion
	Access "Celebrate Ontario" program		
	Increase participation in "Local Flavours"		
	Increase promotion of artists/artisans		
	Benchmark performance through "First Impressions". program		

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Strategic Directions	Key Issues	Recommended Initiatives
Sectoral Diversification	Regional	See Ec. Dev Framework – External Partnerships
	Attracting low impact businesses	Establish Business Development Strategy
		Target pre-retirement entrepreneurs, professionals, tech-based, medical services
		Business centre/incubator
		Promotion through Municipal web site
	Targetted residential growth	Market community to seniors & retirees
		Preserve community attraction for families and youth
	Increased agri-business participation	See Promoting the Community – municipal web site
		See Tourism Product Development – Regional Farmers Market
		See Tourism Product Development - Harvest Festival
		See Promoting Tourism – Local Flavours

ANNEX II – COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUP MEMBERS

Anne Barr

Merrickville resident, Aviation Simulation Engineer and Chair of the Merrickville-Wolford Municipal Heritage Committee

Barb Maitland

Wolford Resident, dairy farmer

Brian Fitzpatrick

Wolford resident, 25 years with Purolator, actively involved in Theatre Night in Merrickville (TNIM - Community Theatre Group) and several antique shops

Dale Sinclair

Merrickville resident, co-owner of Brewed Awakenings since October 2008, owner of Sinclair Accounting Services since October 2000.

Dave Ellis

Owner and Manager of the Baldachin Inn and Restaurant

Dennis Trodden

Owner of Foodmarket, St Lawrence St Merrickville for 12 years

Don Dutton

Wolford resident, formerly telecommunications service and manufacturing sectors, currently business consultant, Chair of IEDTAC, Director of Valley Heartland CFDC.

Eric Haar

Architect with over 30 years experience, accredited Project Management Professional, and has taught design studio at Carleton University.

Gary Clarke

Merrickville resident, Business Owner, Director, Rideau Heritage Route Tourism Association, Chair, Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve

George Atkinson

Merrickville Resident, retired high school teacher, B&B operator,

Gordon Glaze

Artist and property owner

Hubert Earl

Owner and operator of Haedae Farms since 1997 comprising a store and summer market stand offering organic, “au naturel”, and environmentally friendly agricultural foods and household products.

Hugh MacLennan

Co-owner of Millisle Bed & Breakfast & President of the Merrickville and District Chamber of Commerce. Formerly consultant, project manager and business executive in the IT industry sector.

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Ian Donald

Wolford resident, consultant, Merrickville-Wolford Economic Development Committee (IEDTAC) member

Jane Graham

CFP, Financial Advisor for 24 years, Wolford resident on the Rideau Canal, boater and hobby farmer.

Janet Campbell

Merrickville resident for 19 years, owner/founder of Mrs. McGarrigle's, a Merrickville mustard manufacturer and fine food shop, on St Lawrence St.

Jeff Trew

Resident of Montague Township, long time co-owner/operator of Lark Spur Line Ltd, one of the largest mail order/internet and retail model railroad shops in Canada. Former officer of Merrickville Chamber of Commerce

Jim Jordan

Fine Arts graduate, past senior technical illustrator for Atomic Energy of Canada. Presently artist-at-large, outdoor vendor, special event organizer and President of the Lions Club of Merrickville.

Jim Skelding

Merrickville resident since 1992, retired from Canada Post after serving as postmaster in Merrickville until 2003.

JoAnn Helmer

Long time Wolford resident. Community Health Promoter at MDCHC, past member of Merrickville Parks & Recreation Committee, present member Merrickville-Wolford Trails Group.

John Cowan

Retired Professional Engineer and long time owner of a designated historic home in the Village. Actively involved in heritage matters as a past member of Heritage Merrickville Foundation and the Municipal Heritage Committee, and currently immediate past-president of the Merrickville & District Historical Society.

John Mundy

Retired Canadian diplomat who has lived in Merrickville for the past several years, likes gardening and volunteer activities including the Board of the MDCSHC and a new group known as the Merrickville Trails Group.

Judith Moore

Proprietor of San Souci Gallery, interior designer, and property owner.

Kevin Gray

Merrickville resident, master glass blower, owner of Kevin Robert Gray Glass Blowing

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Linda Nash

Wolford resident since 2004, owner and operator of Miricks Landing Country Store, previously in the insurance industry, coordinator of the Annual Merrickville House and Garden Tour

Michael Cox

Co-owner of Satellite Truss Limited since March, 2008. Business established in 1974 - designs and manufactures engineered roof trusses and sells engineered joist flooring.

Mike Neelin

Retired military helicopter pilot, landlord and property owner, owner and manager of The Main Street Family Restaurant

Rod Fournier

Property Manager for Merrickville Estates

Sally Wanless

Past President & currently Treasurer of the Heritage Merrickville Foundation.

Tracy Sine

Tracy Sine, owner of The Goose and Gridiron for 11 years. Volunteer on the Merrickville Canalfest Committee..

OBSERVERS

Bob Cheetham

Manager of Economic Development, UCLG. Responsible for overall economic development with ongoing collaboration at the local municipal level and with community groups and organizations.

Ann Weir

Economic Development Coordinator, United Counties of Leeds and Grenville

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ANNEX III – OTHER STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTED

ORGN	MEETING					
	24/8 1:30	26/8 9:30	03/9 2:00	08/9 8:30	22/9 19:00	09/10 13:30
Council/& CAO					x	
Bob Cheetham				x		
Ann Weir				x		
Bruce Moore (OMAFRA)		x				
Blair Harris (TOURISM)	x					
Susan Hreljac (EC DEV - OTT)						
Chris Puddicombe (MEDT)			x			
George Schrijver(WCM)				x		
Elaine Mallory				x		
Chuck Hudson (RHR)			x			
Irv Mazurkiewicz (PC)						x
John Doherty (VH)		x				

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ANNEX IV – OTHER STAKEHOLDERS’ FEEDBACK

Themes from Consultations

General

Overview

- Consistent agreement with overall strategy
- Broad interpretation of Ec Dev is essential and appropriate given importance of Quality of Life for in strategy
- Council has reservations about public representation and wants final draft report to:
 - Outline consultation limitations
 - Be presented at public meeting
- Community vision – fine
- Increase emphasis on regional partnerships
- Solid assets available – issue is how do we lever
- But also deal with regional assets – regional health and correction centres
- Specific strategic directions appropriate
- Exec Summary and Main Report should provide more emphasis on WHS designation.
- Agree on limited community capacity – financial and human resources, tourism and ec. dev assets and need to partner in most activity areas e.g. Ec. Dev. planning, marketing, business and employment diversification, etc. to secure economies of scale
- Theme in the “creative economy” /economic vitality (Ontario Govt. theme)
 - Diversity=creativity (bohemian index – cafes – gays/tolerance)
 - Knowledge & skills clusters e.g. resident pre-retirement entrepreneurs, (also technical creativity, artisans, food production e.g. Prince Edward County);
 - Attract through asset mix/community attributes/quality of life (historic, natural resources, health care facilities, cultural facilities, educational levels, workforce, proximity to major centres, fibre links)
 - connect to creativity mega-centres (Ottawa in our case) by fibre/ other links
- Outline aging/youth strategies
- Notes on Ottawa (climate change, aging popn, energy costs) sustainability report “Choosing our Future” (\$1.1M) - managing growth, protecting the natural environment, mitigating risks, and fostering a strong economy - consultant – Rob Abbott
 - use strengths to address emerging economic issues chipping away at competitive edge- jumping off points for future
 - vision – big but manageable – 3-5 years & 10-20 year chunks
 - reform existing institutions to meet challenge and deliver vision – less planning more institutional reform to ensure implementation
 - facing new issues. opportunities & risks – can’t employ same basic approach

Situation Analysis

- New data provided for inclusion in report (socio; biz profile; labour analysis; sectoral analysis, demographics, education, occupations, employment, workplace location, Tourism) – need time to review further - but support basic conclusions in report

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- Clarify weak “community” leadership theme
- Council provided update on ec dev developments post-Blais
- Council agree with Vision with reservations ref feasibility.

Strategic Directions

1. Economic Development Framework

- Consensus on need for broad-based Ec Dev Board reporting to Council – will also provide cross-cultural understanding/perspectives.
- Council want more definition on Board mandate & scope (Implementation Planning Phase?)
- CAO has some ideas on structuring and third party funding but recognize this is for Implementation Phase.
- Needs staff resource and financial commitment – volunteers lack availability, time, sustainability
- Staff needed not just for development but also defensive issues (e.g. Hersheys)
- But also look to advisory support from e.g. county professions
- Strategic partnerships critical to mitigate lack of economies of scale (Council agree)
- But even if regional bodies emerge – need own staff to participate (skin in the game). (Council noted fiscal challenge).
- Partnerships are generally complementary even though sometimes competitive. For example, industrial development in Smiths Falls, retail development in Kemptville provides employment for our residents (youth). Each community has its unique strengths.
- Partnerships increasingly supported at Provincial, Regional and possibly County level

2. Infrastructure

- Agreed – important to capitalize fast on stimulus funding – not likely to last
- Position Canal as built Heritage asset

3. Tourism

- Some evidence that WHS is starting to pay off; B&B bookings; boat traffic; wide media interest;
- Sorbara – Regional Destination & Marketing Boards
- Tourism zone teams – Merrickville needs to help develop regional complementarity
- Rideau Landscape Strategy – could be helpful (Blair Harris)
- Regional Commissions could strategically assemble and market tourism packages
- Some regional inn investment & development–Perth (prov); Westport; Jones Falls
- Expand access to river (boat tours) for land-based visitors
- Should note benefits of tourism marketing training
- Possible funding sources (Investment Development Office)
 - Tourism Devlpt Fund (non-capital; good planning studies, but cash flow issues)
 - Premier ranked Tourism Destination Develpt (prov funded; community analysis and proposed approach)
 - EODF – (capital; MEDT-led +Tourism+OMAFRA)

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4. Sectoral diversification

- Senior orientation strongly supported – particularly given built and natural assets, medical, and proximity to Ottawa (nearby, but lower cost living)
- Beef up professional/technical emphasis (attracting successful pre-retirement people)
- Regional partnerships to capitalize on different community strengths e.g. Smiths Falls (mfg); Kemptville (mainstream retail)
- Regional Farmers Market initiative must have sound business case, local produce, and substantive Agri-business leadership

5. Next steps

• Ec Dev Board

- Agreement on structure/stakeholder composition
- Establish clear mandate with stakeholders – and re-assign other strategic areas.
 - Initially – implementation plan - prioritizing; funding sources; partnerships; operational management; Board secretariat
 - Ongoing – partnerships; operational management; strategy development; Board secretariat.
- Needs Council commitment to staff & O&M resources (e.g. 3 year) @ 100% prior to funding.
- Could be \$50k-\$150k but have to consider the funding which that levers.
- Program cost sharing c/b available through Rural Ec Dev (RED) Program
 - w/b cost shared e.g. Valley Heartland
 - criteria - sustainability
 - sub-component is Mainstreet Ontario
 - \$50K matching over 3 years
- Key consideration is leveraging funding vs. direct municipal cos

ANNEX V – COMMUNITY SURVEY FEEDBACK

Developing a comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

*“Encouraging change to achieve
economic, social and environmental progress”*

*Community Focus Group Meeting
February 28, 2009*

MERRICKVILLE - WOLFORD 1

Survey Feedback.....

- 50 responses
- Broad community cross-section
- Rankings generally consistent in supporting Blais recommendations
- Extensive commentary on open-ended Qs
 - primary challenges
 - other priorities/measures

2



Common concerns

- **Complacency**
- **Fragmentation**
- **Weak leadership**

3



Economic development structure.....

- **Integrated institutional approach (3.8)**
 - collective vision
 - integrated strategy
 - coordinated implementation
- **Supportive by-laws and policies (4.0)**
 - heritage environment
 - natural resources
- **Strengthened external partnerships**
 - more structured interfaces, economies of scale
- **Coordinated community marketing**
 - branding and image
 - Village web site

4

Local infrastructure

- **Preserve heritage character**
 - Heritage district
 - Restoration incentives
- **Invest in natural resources**
 - Trails, Bird Sanctuary, Limerick Forest
 - River/Canal, Beaches
- **Improve basic infrastructure**
 - Sewers
 - Truck bypass
 - Hydro wires
 - Broadband
- **Improve community facilities**
 - Washrooms, Parking, Benches, Lighting,
 - Playgrounds, youth, seniors & rural facilities

5

Tourism Sector (1)....

- **Extend stays and seasons**
 - Move to sustainable tourism rather than day shopping
 - Increased investment in product (4.0)
 - Theatre & special events
 - Fall & Winter attractions
- **Increase emphasis on natural resources**
 - Farmers market
 - Eco-tourism – “light adventures”, walking tours, paddling, water sports
- **Improve visitor service facilities (4.3)**
 - Information, washrooms, parking
 - Indoor facilities for events, cultural activities

6

Tourism Sector (2)

- **Coordinate tourism marketing**
 - more targeted strategy (3.6)
 - structured consolidated promotional approach (3.9)
 - regional tourism marketing partnerships (4.1)
 - benchmarking against other communities (3.6)

7

Diversifying our economy (1)...

- **Promote residential growth**
 - capitalize on character, natural resources, location, and unique health services infrastructure
 - particularly target retirement/seniors market
 - encourage unique shopping
 - “buy local”
- **Target professional & tech-based businesses(3.9)**
 - develop more local professional & medical services
 - encourage low-impact businesses
 - promote new business start-ups (3.7)
 - Business-friendly municipal office (3.8)

8

Diversifying our economy (2)

- **Increase agri-business participation (3.8)**
 - Local flavours (restaurants – agricultural partnerships)
 - Farmers market/local produce
 - Harvest festival
- **Attract more artists (3.0)**
 - Enhance Artist Guild/Tour

9

Overall messaging ...

- **Sound base for economic growth**
 - Built heritage & natural resources
 - Tourism, artisan & agriculture
 - Unique medical services system
- **Improve economic development coordination**
 - Within community
 - Across region
- **Enhance community infrastructure**
 - Village - Truck by-pass, hydro wires, broadband
 - Community – North side services, rural facilities
- **Diversify our economy**
 - Residential/retirement
 - New professional & tech. businesses
 - Increasing agri-business participation

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