

Merrickville-Wolford Strategic Plan 2017-2025



Adopted on Jan 23, 2017
By-Law 10-17

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Message from the Mayor

January 23, 2017

Dear Residents,

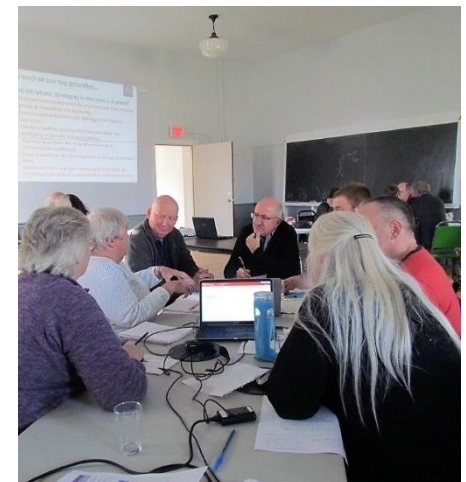
In keeping with our commitment to transparency, accountability and open communication your government has put in place a strategic plan.

The plan is the result of extensive public consultation and thorough analysis reflecting the values and priorities of our residents. It is meant to communicate a long term vision that takes into account a wide range of issues, challenges and opportunities that may impact the long term sustainability of our community. It addresses our commitment to customer service, satisfaction and partnering with our community organizations. It will provide a template to guide staff and Council in the decision making process through 2017 and beyond. It identifies what your Council feels are priorities based on your input. Council can then move forward in implementing them. It is another tool which, when combined with our updated Economic Development Plan and Asset Management Plan, will help guide your Council in setting budget priorities. It puts in place both macro and micro performance monitoring tools that will allow us to report to you on our progress both quarterly and annually.

I wish to extend my special thanks to all of our residents who gave so generously of their time and the other advisory committees that worked with our very talented and dedicated Ad Hoc Strategic Planning Committee to bring this plan to fruition.

Sincerely,

Mayor Nash



Introduction

Why a Strategic Plan?

Strategic planning is a process by which an organization assesses how it is doing, figures out where it wants to go, and charts a path to get there. Strategic plans also help define important goals, set specific directions, and clarify policy and budget priorities. Given Merrickville-Wolford's infrastructure obligations in relation to its revenues and demand for services, it is essential that the municipality has a strategic plan that effectively articulates a long term vision for the community and establishes the priorities that will enable Council and staff to manage municipal operations and make informed decisions for years to come.

How will the Plan be used?

This plan will enable the municipal administration, business and community stakeholders and Council to work collectively to champion a sustainable growth agenda for the community. The plan will also be modified on an ongoing basis to adapt to changing conditions, but will continue as the foundation for strategic direction.

For the public, this plan is meant to:

- Communicate a long term vision for the municipality and the related priorities for this term of Council.
- Reflect the community's aspirations and input for the services they receive.
- Formalize Council's commitment to customer service and satisfaction for all residents of the municipality.

For businesses and community organizations, this plan is meant to:

- Reflect Council's commitment to partnering with businesses and community organizations to achieve the municipality's long term goals.

For Council, managers, and employees, this plan is meant to:

- Inform policy, operational, and budget decisions
- Provide a structure to ensure oversight and management of municipal programs and services

This plan is designed to be realized beyond the current term of Council. However, consideration has been given to the implementation of those actions that will have the most immediate impact on the Merrickville-Wolford's long term financial sustainability, economic growth & prosperity.



Strategic Planning Process

Phase One Project Initiation

- Council initiated process in August 2015 with Committee to frame objectives, scope and process
- In June 2016, Council created the Merrickville-Wolford Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) with a mandate to develop a Strategic Plan for the community.

Phase Two Establish a process framework

- Identified information requirements and sources;
- Established stakeholder (residents, local cultural, social and business leaders etc.) engagement steps.

Phase Three Collect & analyze Data

- Gathered resident input via a survey and two focus groups;
- Assembled all available demographic, social, health and economic data.

Phase Four Develop goals & action plans

- Representative group of residents invited to a workshop to develop priorities and strategies;
- Joint meeting of Council & SPC drafted plan;
- Council reviewed Draft Plan with community.

Phase Five Implement & Monitor

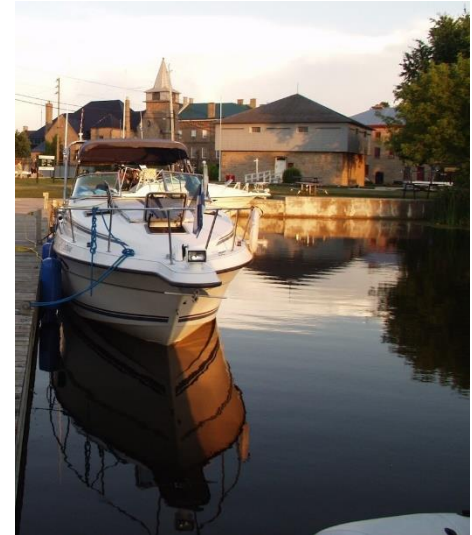
- Council approves Strategic Plan.
- Municipal staff (in consultation with Committees of Council) prepares Implementation Plan including performance measurement and reporting framework.

Looking to the Future

In developing this Strategic Plan, Merrickville-Wolford has given consideration to a wide range of issues, challenges and opportunities that may impact the long term sustainability of our community – some within our ability to influence and some that are not.

Challenges

The key challenges comprise: **fiscal constraints; good governance; changing community expectations; growing our economy; and servicing our urban and rural communities.**



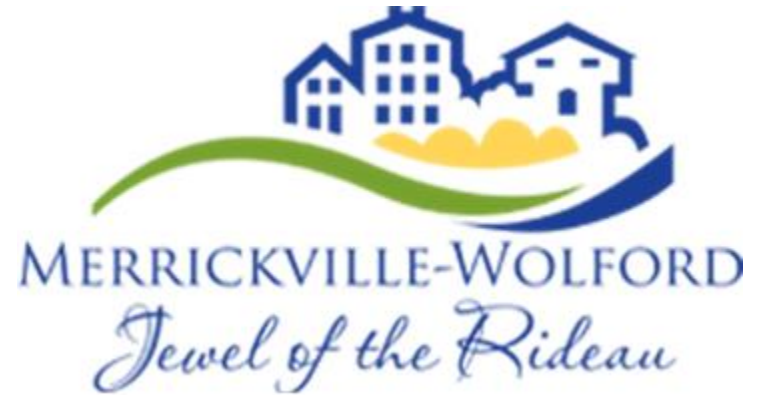
Fiscal Constraints

Merrickville-Wolford will continue to face significant financial challenges for the foreseeable future. These challenges result in large part from the limits on available provincial and federal funding associated with maintaining core infrastructure. These challenges are also impacted by relatively static population growth, limited taxation options and service level requirements that are prescribed for many of the Municipality's services. With limited resources, the Municipality will need to consider how best to manage infrastructure and provide services to a large geographic area, with differing rural and urban communities, while continuing to appeal to both future residents and business investors.

Trust in Government / Good Governance

Governments today face ongoing challenges to maintain the public's trust and establish better accountability for the tax dollars that are collected and spent on their behalf. Merrickville-Wolford's accountability to residents is no different. Transparency and accountability will be central to achieving the desired outcomes of the Strategic Plan.

Effective communication between Council and senior staff will ensure the prioritization of actions based on approved corporate strategies and plans. Good governance requires establishing the requisite operational capacity and management systems, building trust between Council, senior management, municipal staff and the community, and having a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities in the delivery of municipal services to residents.



Changing Community Expectations



Rural communities are facing a number of challenges related to their changing human capital needs such as stagnant population growth, an aging population and the out-migration of youth. Merrickville-Wolford is being challenged with a similar outlook.

Demographic factors have put pressures on local schools, while an aging population is generating significant concerns among seniors with respect to the scale and availability of primary care services, accommodation for the aged, and related community services.

More generally, residents of all ages in Merrickville-Wolford are seeking to build on existing assets and establish a community that supports physical and mental well-being, preserves local natural beauty, and helps people to pursue their recreational passions.

In this context there is robust demand for building a more environmentally-friendly community which will care better for river and aquifer resources, enhance landfill operations, and take a more active partnership role on energy generation with other stakeholders.

Growing the Economy

The community recognizes the need for residential and commercial growth in order to ensure its financial viability. However it is also insistent that future growth must be compatible with the heritage nature of the community.

The agricultural, health, and retail business sectors are fundamental to the community's economy.

In the business sector in particular, there are significant opportunities for growth. In the retail sector there is also a need for enhanced product and service lines, marketing approaches and promotion.

Growth could also be achieved through sectoral diversification by attracting new entrepreneurs including professional services, home based businesses, other new economy small business owners who can choose where they want to live, and establishing business incubators.

Expansion of existing natural gas, water and sewer infrastructure to the North side of the river could also assist the development of light manufacturing.

Finally, technological innovation is also changing business and customer expectations for how products and services are delivered. Rural broadband is becoming an essential tool for business, whether that business is a retailer, a farmer, or a professional service firm. It is essential that Merrickville-Wolford be able to support the integration of new technologies if it is to ensure the sustainability of its economy over the long term.



Urban and Rural Communities



The municipality provides a wide and varied range of services to both urban and rural communities.

With approximately 45% of residents* and most of the retail business community concentrated in the geographically small urban area of Merrickville, much of the focus tends to be on the residential, commercial, social and infrastructure issues related to this community.

However Wolford, a widespread and predominantly rural area, comprises the majority of the population of Merrickville-Wolford and numerous important commercial operations, many of which are

agriculture-based. While WOLFORD's geography presents significant municipal servicing challenges, it also contains several important hamlets which offer potential for future growth. The challenge is to optimally align the municipal support and planning for these regions to best respond to the respective interest and concerns of residents.

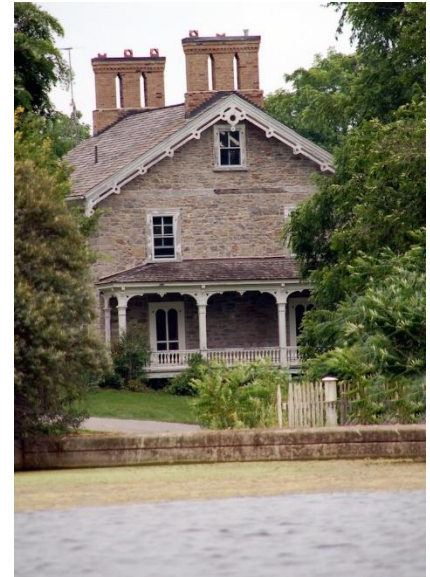
* Approximation based on 2014 UCLG data on populations and households

Strengths

The community also has many important and unique assets which will provide a sound foundation for its future development . **These include its heritage structures, natural resources, artists and artisans, health services, and its strategic location.**

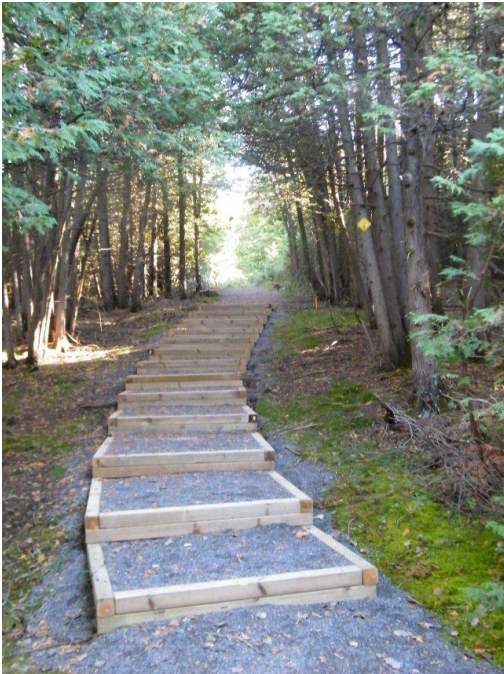
Heritage Structures

The designation of the Rideau Canal as a United Nations Education Science and Culture Organization (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.



The Village's numerous Victorian-Edwardian heritage buildings and its Blockhouse, as well as the many historic buildings in Wolford, add significantly to this competitive advantage. This is particularly important 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. For these reasons, the heritage landscape is generally seen as the community's primary asset in attracting both residents and visitors.

World Class Natural Resources



The community is also blessed with prosperous farms and extensive acreage of fertile farmland which has been preserved by visionary community planning for future generations.

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 tens of thousands of visitors every year, including many who dock overnight in Merrickville.

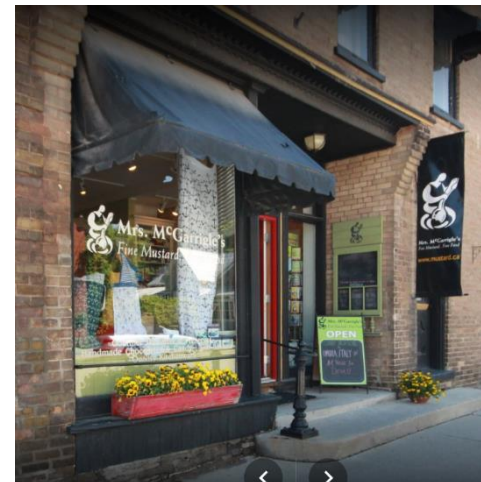
While the Rideau Canal waterway is the most prominent natural resource element, stakeholders also believe that the community's other natural resources including the river, beaches, trails, bird sanctuary, Limerick forest, etc. represent important complementary attractions for visitors and contribute significantly to the quality of life of the community's residents.



Artisan Community

The community has an active, large and eclectic Artist/Artisan community including artists, glassblowers, woodworkers, musicians, and food specialists amongst others.

These artisans 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.



Health Services



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 two nearby hospitals – the Kemptville District Hospital and the Perth and Smiths Falls District Hospital.

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.

The community benefits as well from a pharmacy, a dentist and a family medical practice. It is also home to a private addictions rehabilitation residence.

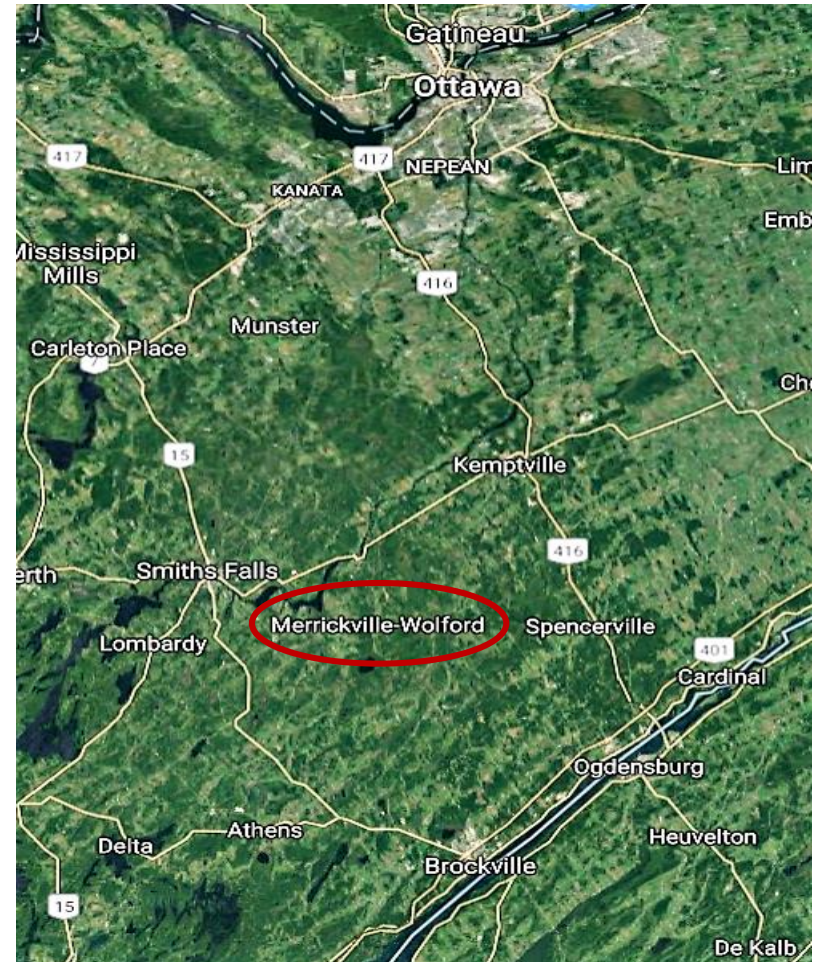
Healthy
Living

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

The recent and relatively intensive commercial development in Kemptville also provides access for residents of Merrickville-Wolford to an emerging regional retail and services centre with large retailers and box stores, while enabling their own community to maintain its distinct and very unique identity.

In summary, Merrickville-Wolford is now within easy commuting distance of Ottawa and neighbouring regional centres thereby facilitating business and social interaction. In the tourism sector this is evidenced by extensive regional participation in the community's many cultural events, one of the largest being the Agricultural Fair. These factors all combine to increase the attractiveness of Merrickville-Wolford as a residential and retirement community.



The Road to Success

Merrickville-Wolford Council and administration will be guided in the implementation of this Strategic Plan by the following Vision Statement which expresses the aspirations of the community and will guide the transformative initiatives in this Plan.

Vision

Preserving a quality of life on the Rideau River that is vibrant, natural, rural, and historic.



Achieving Our Priorities

The priorities of the community strategic plan are the framework that will guide the municipality's policies, initiatives and operations for the remainder of this Council term and into the future.

While the priorities describe the results Council intends to achieve through the implementation of this plan, they are also intended to be enduring, as they may continue beyond the lifespan of this plan. They are meant to reflect the breadth of the municipality's responsibilities and its role as a service provider.



This document is action-oriented and moving quickly to establish an Implementation Plan will be critical to its success.

To effectively implement the Strategic Plan and achieve its goals, there are roles for everyone in the community to play.

Actions undertaken by Council and staff to implement that plan and monitor progress will be critical. To this end, Council objectives will be identified annually and departmental planning will be linked directly to the priorities and objectives of this Strategic Plan.

Achieving Our Priorities (cont'd)



Finally, a sound implementation plan and measurement framework that establishes accountability and tracks performance will ensure that the Strategic Plan generates concrete results. There are many linkages and ways in which the priorities and respective strategies are interrelated. Advancing one particular objective or strategy tends to have an impact on multiple priorities. Strategic plans are an opportunity to take stock, look forward, and prepare for the future. The objectives and strategies that follow reflect the priorities of Merrickville-Wolford's stakeholders. They are designed to guide budget and policy decisions moving forward, making sure the most important issues are addressed. As conditions change, the Plan will adapt but will remain a key source of strategic direction.

How did we arrive at priorities?

Survey

- September 26 to October 24 - **250 Respondents**
- Age: <25 - 3%; 25-55 - 48%; 56+ - 49%
- Residency: Merrickville 55%; Wolford 40%; Neighbouring 5%

Focus Groups

- Merrickville (Nov. 9) – **28 participants**
- Wolford (Nov. 10) – **27 participants**

Workshop

- November 18, Centennial Hall – **32 participants**
- **Initial Priorities:** Economic vitality; Rural & Heritage; Healthy Community; Natural Environment; Maintaining a Strong Agricultural base; Younger & More Diverse Demographics
- **Subsequent Priorities:** Aging in Place; Transportation Infrastructure; Fiscal sustainability; Coordinated communications; Excellent Municipal Services

Council Meeting

- November 24, Council, Staff, Strategic Planning Committee – **17 participants**
- **Ongoing Priorities:** Healthy Living; Progressive, Growing Economy; Protecting Heritage, Rural, and Natural Environments; Efficient and Effective Services.
- Council presentation on December 1 and December 9 at **Town Hall meetings.**

Priorities



Promoting Healthy
Living



Building a Progressive,
Growing Economy



Protecting Heritage,
Rural, and Natural
Environments



Ensuring Efficient, Effective Services & Civic Engagement

Priorities and Strategies

Promoting Healthy Living

A community that supports physical and mental well-being and helps people pursue their passions.

Healthy Community - *Ensure a healthy community that considers the wellbeing of people and ecosystems.*

- Trails - support further develop & connect trails - Merrickville trails, Rideau Canal & Rideau trail.
- Create a sustainable health and wellness infrastructure
- Better support to people with disabilities

"Aging in Place" – *A strategy that encourages and supports residents to remain in the community.*

- Accommodate people with accessibility issues
- Change by-laws to allow for granny flats / Allow multiple buildings on single lot to assist seniors
- Attract developer for residential facilities for aged including small, single floor units

Younger, More Diverse Population - *Attract & retain younger demographic/families, to encourage diversity & sustainability in the community.*

- Improve recreational facilities and programs for young children
- Develop a young family attraction strategy to make it attractive for young families
- Work with developers to market to young families, promote starter homes and affordable housing

Priorities and Strategies

Building A Progressive, Growing Economy

Encouraging economic growth by offering a development environment that is welcoming to potential business owners and residents but consistent with the community's overall goals.

Strong Agricultural Base - Enhance supports to maintain a strong agricultural base.

- Undertake a feasibility study on sustaining a farmer's market
- Plan for transportation of agricultural product & supplies on rural roads and through village
- Promote and support value added agriculture
- Develop Agri-tourism strategy
- Campaign for local residents and businesses to support local farmers

Economic Vitality - Create a supportive business-friendly environment that retains, grows and diversifies our economy.

- Update economic development plan
- Single contact for interested businesses
- Economic Development capacity
- Water, sewer and gas expansion, including North side
- Explore promotional program with Parks Canada as well as other potential partners

Transportation Strategy – Improve how people get around.

- Long-term plan for the safety of rural roads including eliminating narrow/no shoulders / Cost-effectiveness of tar & chip
- Improved parking plan to deal with summer and weekend load
- Street calming measures / Merrickville bridge and in Jasper crosswalk in village / truck bypass

Priorities and Strategies

Protecting Heritage, Rural, and Natural Environments

A community that preserves local natural beauty and ecosystems.

Community Resilience - *Enhance and protect the natural environment*

- Water quality and River Management/Protection
- Build an ecologically-oriented beautification plan
- Waste reduction strategies

Rural and Heritage Nature - *Nurture and enhance rural and heritage character.*

- Implement Bylaws to help protect heritage properties and encourage compatible new building
- Beautification of St. Lawrence Street (signage, buildings, etc.)
- Heritage walk/drive (electronic)

Priorities and Strategies

Ensuring Efficient, Effective Services and Civic Engagement

The Municipality will offer a great customer service experience and instill confidence in municipal spending.

Enhanced Municipal Services - *Providing a great customer experience.*

- Create a one-stop-shop for development
- Develop a stronger customer service approach between municipal staff and public
- Governance structure should be reviewed to streamline committee structure, reflect the strategic priorities, and address rural-urban divide
- Improved building regulations, more service capacity, property standards
- Marketing capacity

Fiscal Sustainability - *Sound financial plan and reasonable reserves.*

- Increased capacity to obtain funding through government grants & partnerships, shovel-ready (pre-engineered) projects
- Increased tax revenues through residential and commercial development
- Inter-municipal sharing of regional assets and expert resources

Improved Communications - *Better information sharing for all.*

- Enhance Municipal communications practices and systems to improve connectivity with community
- External communications, start with awesome M-W website, portal
- Council interaction with community should be improved: Council meetings should be better structured, managed and resident-friendly, location of Council meetings should alternate between Merrickville & Welford
- Measurement and Reporting of progress on strategic priorities
- Improved information sharing between all stakeholders so residents are aware of what services are available.

Implementation Plan & Performance Measurement

- Establishing a sound Implementation Plan and Performance Measurement Framework will be critical to the success of this Strategic Planning initiative
- The Implementation Plan will be developed by the CAO in consultation with Council and Municipal Departments
- It will ensure ongoing accountability to the community by incorporating a clearly defined and communicated performance monitoring and reporting framework
- The community consultations to date have identified the following range of possibilities related to both performance indicators and reporting approaches which should be considered when establishing the Implementation Plan.



Performance Monitoring

Macro Indicators:

- Population growth
- Housing starts
- New senior housing units.
- Business start-ups and failures
- Health services available
- Canadian Index of Well-being
- Tax revenue ratios
- Budget surplus/deficit
- Citizen feedback



Micro Indicators

- Youth & Adult recreational activities available
- People using the food cupboard
- Seniors' activities and participation rate
- Senior's residence beds and occupancy
- Regional hospice beds and % usage
- Days the beach is closed
- Dilbit spills into the Rideau River/aquifer
- Trail developments/activities
- Beautification projects/initiatives
- Community in bloom scores
- Visitor satisfaction survey



Performance Reporting

- Publish the workplan
- Provide a dynamic tool on the Municipal website to show live progress
- Provide quarterly progress update
- Provide an Annual Report card on activities completed and in progress, possibly through a third party.

PERFORMANCE



- ☒ **EXCELLENT**
- ☐ **GOOD**
- ☐ **AVERAGE**
- ☐ **POOR**

Annex A

Other Community Suggestions

- Participants at the Merrickville Wolford Strategic Planning Workshop held on November 18, 2016 in Centennial Hall (Easton's Corners) were asked to build on the findings from the community survey and focus groups and develop the major elements of a Strategic Plan for the next ten years.
- A primary output of this exercise was an inventory of suggested strategies and projects. These were grouped under appropriate headings and ranked by the participants. Only those items meeting a minimum threshold (minimum score of 10 when ranked) were carried forward in the development of the Strategic Plan.
- Although the remaining suggestions were not incorporated in the Plan they were captured in the workshop report and remain as a valued element of the process. They will be taken into consideration by the CAO and staff as well as the responsible Committees of Council when implementing this Strategic Plan.
- Background reports are available, as required: Socio-Demographic Statistics; Themes From Survey and Focus Groups; November 18 Workshop Summary Notes; and, November 24 Joint Council/SPC Meeting Notes.
- The tables on the following pages provide a listing of these remaining strategies categorized under the relevant priorities and sub-themes established for the Strategic Plan.

Promoting Healthy Living

A community that supports physical and mental well-being and helping people to pursue their passions.

Healthy Community - *Ensure a healthy community that considers the wellbeing of people and ecosystems.*

- Outdoor intergenerational game nights in Merrickville in the summer - under the summer student program
- Outdoor concerts of local artists in the summer
- Walk-in Clinic approach to care at MDHC
- Expansion of health services at the Health Centre - testing, capacity increase.
- Need impact assessment tool -> e.g. measuring by Gross Community Happiness Index
- Practitioner visits to Hospital (get hospital privileges for docs)

Younger, More Diverse Population - *Attract & retain younger demographic/families, to encourage diversity & sustainability in the community.*

- Improved awareness building via communication pathways that speak the 'language' spoken by the younger population: e.g. 'community calendar', 'Historic Merrickville' video tour (e.g. via Algonquin College Program) to be shared online.
- Add an engaging 'game' element to the community/public spaces

Building A Progressive, Growing Economy

Encouraging economic growth by offering a development environment that is welcoming to potential business owners and residents but consistent with the community's overall goals.

Economic Vitality - *Create a supportive business-friendly environment that retains, grows and diversifies our economy.*

- Support start-up businesses via grants, marketing, decreased fees/taxes etc (need to improve tech access to do this)
- Develop communication infrastructure to support home based business
- Promote fibre optics capacity now available on County Road 16
- Build a network of amenities to attract start-ups ..Support businesses VIA Tourism marketing through use of a singular, easy to use website and 'community calendar'
- Consider pitching to potential international investors through federal program
- Improve tourism capacity: committed/full time tourism position with a focused strategic plan
- Review bylaws and OCP to remove restrictions in order to be more friendly to industrial development
- Improve our overnight accommodations offerings: Like to attract more overnight guests to the municipality.
- Liaise with Fulford Academy to establish international relations that could lead to investment opportunities
- Business retention and succession for retiring business owners

Protecting Heritage, Rural, and Natural Environments

A community that preserves local natural beauty and ecosystems.

Community Resilience - *Enhance and protect the natural environment*

- Remediation Strategy - encouraging tree planting, infill, improving hazardous sites
- Develop anti-dumping & littering thrust
- Serious look at how MW can make use of existing rail lines
- 1 stop resource: Coordination among various players and education within the community and the region
- Ensure developers adhere to proper transportation & disposal

Rural and Heritage Nature - *Nurture and enhance rural and heritage character.*

- Signage and Q-cube identifiers on historical buildings containing information about the building
- Coherent Heritage site sign posting system
- Look to incentives to encourage historical building preservation.
- Consider Carleton Place model (council more active in preservation)
- Municipal Historical Designation Voluntary