



WEST ELGIN
**COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT
HANDBOOK**

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“Residents and visitors enjoy West Elgin’s small town neighbourhoods, Port Glasgow’s Blue Flag beach, farm markets and agricultural bounty.”



INTRODUCTION

THIS COMMUNITY TOOLKIT IS A COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE WEST ELGIN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE, the Municipality of West Elgin and Elgin County. This toolkit represents the inaugural effort to harness the power of committed volunteers, the local municipality and Elgin County's economic development department to mobilize local residents, businesses and other interested parties to build the economic potential of this region.

ABOUT WEST ELGIN

The Municipality of West Elgin is a community of approximately 5,000 residents with urban centres in Rodney, West Lorne and Port Glasgow. The Municipality is located on the west side of Elgin County between Highway 401 and Lake Erie.

Residents and visitors enjoy West Elgin's small town neighbourhoods, Port Glasgow's Blue Flag beach, farm markets, trails, water based recreational activities

and agricultural bounty. Highway 401 provides easy access to larger urban centres and markets.

West Elgin is home to some unique annual events, including 'Cactus, Cattle & Cowboys' and the Rodney-Aldborough Agricultural Fair. The Port Glasgow Marina, with 80 slips, full-service washrooms and paved pier, is one of Ontario's prime pickerel and perch fishing spots. Adjacent to the marina, is Port Glasgow's beautiful Blue Flag beach. Back-roads and trails beckon trekkers, hikers, bikers and bird-watchers are rewarded with vistas of rural beauty and several farm gate markets offering the best in local produce, West Elgin's jewels include a historic bank turned cultural hub in West Lorne, friendly country accommodation and food services, shops, retreats, and a historic jail in Rodney.



DEVELOPING OUR PLAN

A SERIES OF STEPS LED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS PLAN. COMMUNITY STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND OPPORTUNITIES were identified through an economic and demographic analysis of the Municipality.

Residents were asked about their hopes for West Elgin's future and their current purchasing behaviour. Over 550 people participated through a resident survey. Business owners and managers shared their thoughts and experiences of operating a business in West Elgin. A further 60 people attended two community visioning workshops.

The Economic Development Committee members also reviewed best practice research and case studies in community development programming to inform the strategic planning process. The community development plan was adopted by the Economic Development Committee in December, 2017.

This Community Handbook provides the detailed action plan to achieve the goals developed through the Community Development Planning process.





RESEARCH

THE ECONOMIC ANALYSIS FOR WEST ELGIN PROVIDED SOME KEY INSIGHTS INTO THE COMMUNITY.

- Similar to many small rural communities, West Elgin's population declined by 3.2% between 2011 and 2016.
- The population is aging. One of every five residents is over the age of 65.
- The average income in West Elgin is slightly less than that of Elgin County.
- West Elgin is highly connected with the surrounding municipalities and region. More than half the people working in West Elgin come from other municipalities and two thirds of West Elgin residents work outside the municipality.
- There are slightly more retail trade locations than in London and in Ontario on average but those businesses are smaller.
- There are fewer specialty food stores, health and professional care stores in West Elgin.
- There may be potential for additional dental and child care services, restaurants and seasonal accommodations. There also appears to be opportunities to attract professionals drawn to the small town / rural lifestyle and low cost of living.

Photo credit: Jan Row



CONSULTATION

A SURVEY OF 546 WEST ELGIN RESIDENTS PROVIDED KEY INSIGHTS INTO THEIR SHOPPING PATTERNS AND PREFERENCES.

While residents are currently leaving the community for some items, West Elgin was the most popular choice for pharmacy, automotive supplies, coffee shops, medical appointments, hardware, paint and plumbing supplies.

The most popular features in West Elgin evolved around Lake Erie, Port Glasgow, the marina, campgrounds, parks and the beach. Other popular choices included the Arts and Cookery Bank, the Old Jail, sports facilities, Backus Page House Museum,

blueberry farms, and hiking trails. The most popular description of West Elgin was as a friendly community.

Business and community leaders provided their insights from a business perspective. Key themes include investing in the downtowns, the small but loyal customer base, addressing negative attitudes, leveraging the community's geographic local, supporting local business, reducing red tape, addressing an aging population.



WEST ELGIN AT A GLANCE

PARTICIPANTS HELPED DEFINE THE COMMUNITY'S PRIORITIES ALONG WITH ITS STRENGTHS, OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS.

STRENGTHS

1. Location (*Highway 401, proximity to larger centres, Lake Erie*)
2. Affordable (*land costs, taxes, buildings, housing*)
3. Room to grow

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER ACTION

1. Tourism
2. Lakefront development
3. Seniors related services and businesses
4. Agri-business
5. High speed internet
6. Businesses Highway 401 access
7. Development approval process improvements
8. Childcare

BARRIERS TO GROWTH

1. Lack of vision/decisive action & focus
2. Resistance to change
3. Bureaucracy
4. Taxes
5. Zoning and planning restrictions
6. Infrastructure (*old buildings, water connections, water/ sewer rates, gravel roads*)
7. Access to affordable high-speed internet
8. Funding incentives
9. Dispersed geography



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



"This Community Handbook provides the detailed action plan to achieve the goals developed through the Community Development Planning process."

STRATEGIC PLANNING

WEST ELGIN WITNESSED THE INTEREST AND PASSION ITS RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES HAVE IN THE FUTURE OF ITS COMMUNITY.

VISIONING WORKSHOPS

Over 60 people participated in workshops to review the community research and consultation and contribute to the community plan. The workshop participants provided the filter to define their vision and priorities along with the community's strengths, opportunities and barriers.

PARTICIPANTS WOULD LIKE:

1. City expansion (*residents and business*)
2. More residents (*engage, attract & retain youth; additional focus and services for seniors*)
3. More Jobs
4. Housing (*affordable and available*)

THE WEST ELGIN STRATEGY

West Elgin witnessed the interest and passion its residents and businesses have in the future of its community. Together residents, businesses, the Economic Development Committee, Municipality and County can build on this passion to move toward the future.

The West Elgin Community Development Plan is designed to focus the energy and resources in the community on a set of common goals and strategic actions to achieve a shared vision.

VISION

The vision statement describes the future we hope to create for West Elgin.

West Elgin is a vibrant, growing community where residents and businesses are engaged in ensuring the community's continued vitality by working together to support and facilitate business growth and investment.

ACTIONS

There are four main actions to achieve our vision:

1. Leverage West Elgin's strengths and resources
2. Become investment ready
3. Develop targeted information and communication
4. Focus on downtown development

Each of these actions is described in detail with a series of individual tasks in the following pages.

ACTION 1 LEVERAGE WEST ELGIN'S STRENGTHS AND RESOURCES

ONE OF THE GREATEST ASSETS WEST ELGIN HAS IS ITS PEOPLE. WEST ELGIN CAN BUILD ON A PASSIONATE AND COMMITTED BASE

of volunteers including residents and businesses, the West Elgin Economic Development Committee, Municipality of West Elgin Council and staff and the professional resources of Elgin County's economic development department. An annual workplan will establish clearly identified roles for the County, Municipality, economic development committee members and volunteers. It will also provide these partners with the basis to review their progress.

Businesses are encouraged to participate in combined marketing activities which will extend their reach and build on their collective strengths. Networking events

provide opportunities for businesses to learn and grow together through small business workshops and information sessions. These events create a platform for encouraging participation in the Community Improvement Plan, tourism and marketing programs.

A business directory is an important tool in engaging and promoting local businesses. The directory will be updated annually. Hosting the directory on the Municipality of West Elgin website will provide a profile for the local businesses and a platform to link to the businesses' own websites.



	TASKS	PARTNERS	TIME FRAME	BUDGET	PRIORITY
1	Establish an annual work plan for the West Elgin Economic Development Committee with clearly identified roles for Elgin County, West Elgin staff, Economic Development Committee members and volunteers.	WEEDC, ECED, WE	IM and ON	N/A	High
2	Pursue combined marketing activities (Rodney, West Lorne, Port Glasgow) and others.	WEEDC, local businesses	Y1 and ON	N/A	High
3	Host business networking, workshops and information programs in the community.	WEEDC, ECED, WE	Y1 and ON	\$1000	Medium
4	Promote existing County programs including the Community Improvement Plan, Tourism marketing program and business workshops and events.	WEEDC, ECED	Y1 and ON	N/A	Medium
5	Create and maintain a current online business directory with links to business websites.	WEEDC, ECED, WE	Y1 and ON	N/A	High

LEGEND

Biz: Local businesses
 ECED: Elgin County Economic Development
 IM: Immediate
 ON: Ongoing

WE: Municipality of West Elgin (Council, staff)
 WEEDC: West Elgin Economic Development Committee
 WEEDC-C: Communications Committee
 WEEDC-DI: Downtown Improvement Team
 Y1, 2, 3: Year One, Two, Three

“An annual workplan will establish clearly identified roles for the County.”

INVESTORS CONSIDERING LOCATING OR EXPANDING IN WEST ELGIN REQUIRE INFORMATION TO HELP MAKE THEIR BUSINESS DECISION.

The business directory is a key piece of information to understand the existing business environment. Another critical piece of information is an inventory of land and buildings for investment. This information when assembled will assist County economic development staff to promote the Municipality for investment. It will also provide an opportunity for municipal staff to ensure there is the appropriate supply of industrial, commercial and residential land to address the community's needs.

Affordable, reliable high-speed internet connectivity was identified as a priority during the community development planning process. Additional high-speed internet services coming to the Municipality in 2018 will provide more choices and access for a large portion of the community. In the initial stages residents and businesses will want information on the timing and process to access this service. Workshops for businesses and residents on how to create and leverage their new or expanded digital presence

will help ensure West Elgin receives the maximum economic impact from these new services.

The economic analysis completed through this Community Development exercise provides valuable data to assist entrepreneurs to identify gaps in the product and service offerings of the Municipality and assess the potential for their new business. This data should be shared with the Elgin Business Resource Centre and the and Elgin/ St. Thomas Business Enterprise Centres to ensure their clients are aware of these opportunities and the data to assess overall market conditions.

The overall appearance of the Municipality is an important contributor to creating an environment that is attractive to business. The West Elgin Streetscape developed in 2013 provides the framework to create an attractive and cohesive design for the community. The Municipality should review the report and develop a multi-year implementation plan to fund and begin this important work.

	TASKS	PARTNERS	TIME FRAME	BUDGET	PRIORITY
1	Create and maintain a current online business directory with links to community businesses. (See SO1-5)	WEEDC, ECED, WE	Y1 and ON	N/A	High
2	Prepare and audit an available property inventory for residential, commercial, industrial development).	WEEDC, WE	Y2 and ON	TBD	High
3	Establish an internet access rollout plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a communications plan on how to access. • Host business workshops on building and leveraging your digital presence. 	WEEDC, ECED, WE	Y1	N/A \$500	Medium
4	Share retail/service gaps (restaurants, specialty food, day care). with referral targets (Small business centre, CFDC, banks, accountants).	WEEDC	Y1	N/A	Medium
5	Review & implement the West Elgin streetscape plan.	WE	Establish plan Y1 to Y5	TBD	High

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“The business directory is a key piece of information to understand the existing business environment.”

ACTION 3 DEVELOP TARGETED COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION IS A CRITICAL ELEMENT TO ANY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT EFFORT. RESIDENTS, PROSPECTIVE INVESTORS AND

local businesses all have specific information needs and preferred communications methods.

A communications committee will ensure that the contents, development and distribution of community development / economic development materials address all the actions identified in this plan. These

materials will include a common look and feel to harmonize the communications efforts. The Municipal website should be the primary platform supported by print, social media, print ads and other tools as appropriate.



	TASKS	PARTNERS	TIME FRAME	BUDGET	PRIORITY
1	Develop specific data for potential residents, prospective investors and local businesses.	WEEDC, WE	Y2	TBD	High
2	Create a unified branding and appearance for West Elgin communities.	WE, WEEDC-C	Y1	Starting at \$500 to \$1,000	High
3	Incorporate economic development information on Municipal website – link to County and other partners as appropriate.	WE	Y1 and ON	N/A	High

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“The Municipal website should be the primary platform supported by print, social media, print ads and other tools as appropriate.”

ACTION 4 FOCUS ON DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT

THE APPEARANCE AND FUNCTIONING OF THE DOWNTOWN IS A BAROMETER OF A COMMUNITY'S VITALITY. INVESTMENTS IN

the downtown demonstrate the community's commitment to their economic growth while supporting and enhancing the existing business community. This action addresses infrastructure and community building for West Elgin's downtowns in Rodney and West Lorne.

INFRASTRUCTURE

A downtown improvement team will lead the effort by meeting with interested business owners and residents in both communities. Together, they will establish a wish list of improvements that could be addressed by volunteers including flower bed plantings, holiday decorations and painting vacant storefronts in disrepair. The committee will also host clean up days to spruce up the downtowns for the spring/summer and Christmas seasons.

Walkable downtowns are an important consideration for West Elgin's tourists and aging residents. The Municipality of West Elgin will play an important role in addressing identified safety hazards such as broken sidewalks as identified by the committee. The Municipality also lead the review of bylaws and work with the County to support the development of outdoor patios for the restaurants / cafes in the downtowns.

The downtowns improvement team will also conduct a review of the tree plantings, lighting and street furniture requirements as outlined in the Municipal Streetscape Plan. A sponsorship program for these

downtown infrastructure elements will give local businesses and community leaders an opportunity to contribute to these important downtown fixtures.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

Community building is the invisible but essential element of the downtowns plan. The downtowns improvement team will not only contribute to the appearance and function of the downtowns but also build stronger connections among the team members. The team will be important advocates for the implementation of the Streetscape plan. They will also play an important role in promoting and educating business owners about the Community Improvement Plan.

This team will work closely with property owners to host an annual vacant property tour aimed at filling these vacancies.

They will also work with the County and Municipality to develop a window display / wrap program to improve the appearance of vacant properties while promoting their reuse.

The downtowns improvement team will encourage businesses to work on co-operative marketing and promotions programs and establish similar business hours. Anchor community operations including the library, community centre and health care centre should be active participants and, where appropriate, host sites for the downtown meetings and events.

	TASKS	PARTNERS	TIME FRAME	BUDGET	PRIORITY
1	Engage and inform vacant building property owners in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business development, • Streetscape plans, • Community Improvement Plan projects, • Vacant property tour and promotion, • Window wrap/display program. 	WEEDC, WE	Y1 kickoff and ON	TBD	High
2	Develop community signage program in collaboration with County signage strategy. Gateway signage.	WEEDC, ECED, WE	Y2 and ON	\$4000 each	Medium
3	Downtown Improvements Team <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wish list: Downtown improvements that require sweat equity (e.g. flower beds, holiday decorations, storefront paintings). • Street furniture needs and wishes – sponsorship program. • Clean up days. 	WEEDC, Downtown businesses	Y1 and ON	\$3000 annually	High
4	Encourage retailers to maintain similar hours.	WEEDC	ON	N/A	Medium
5	Continue and expand combined marketing activities.	WEEDC, Downtown businesses	Y2 and ON		Medium
6	Engage library, community centre, health care centre in community and business events.	WEEDC, WE	ON	N/A	High
7	Ensure a walkable downtown <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete an inventory and assessment of downtown sidewalks and other potential hazards. • Review bylaws and incentives for the development of outdoor patios. • Assess downtown tree plantings, lighting and street furniture. 	WEEDC, Downtown businesses, WE	Y1 and ON Y2 Y3	N/A	High

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2018 ACTION PLAN

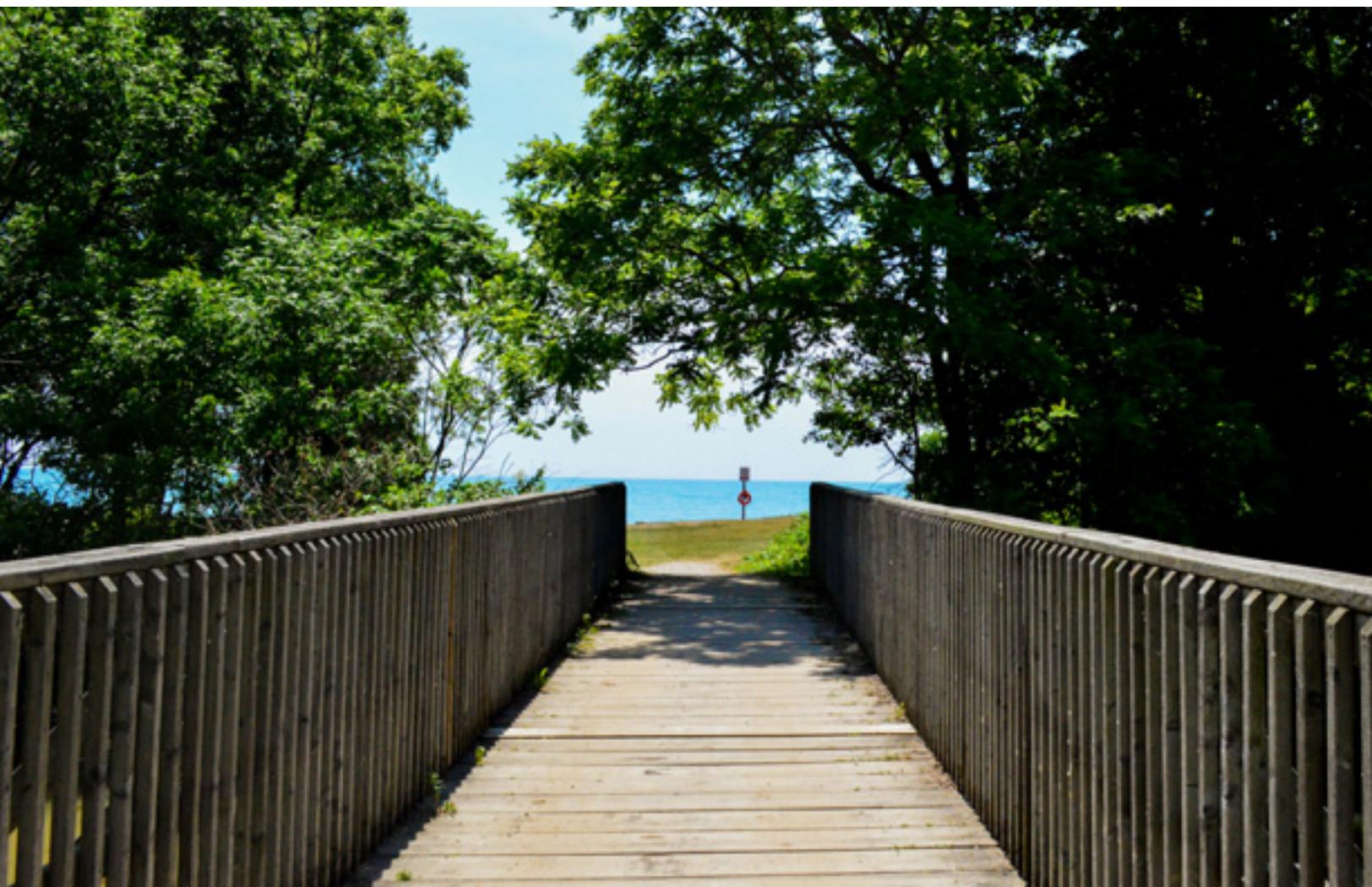
ACTION 1: LEVERAGE WEST ELGIN STRENGTHS AND RESOURCES	PARTNERS	TIME FRAME	BUDGET	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Establish an annual workplan.	WEEDC, WE	Immediate	NA	●			
Pursue combined marketing activities.	WEEDC, biz	Q2 & ON	N/A		●		
Host business networking, workshops and information programs.	WEEDC, ECED, WE	Quarterly starting Q2	\$1,000		●	●	●
Promote existing County programs.	WEEDC, ECED	Q3	N/A			●	
Create online business directory with links to business websites.	WEEDC, ECED, WE	Q1, Q2	N/A	●	●		
ACTION 2: BECOME INVESTMENT READY							
Establish an internet access roll out plan.	WEEDC-C, ECED, WE	Q1	N/A	●			
Implement a communications plan on how to access.		Q2	\$500		●		
Host business workshops on building and leveraging your digital presence.		Q4					●
Share retail/service gaps with referral targets.	WEEDC	Q1	N/A	●			
Review the West Elgin streetscape plan.	WE	Review Q2	TBD		●		
Plan to implement the West Elgin streetscape plan.		Q4					●
ACTION 3: DEVELOP TARGETED INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION							
Economic development information on Municipal website.	WE, WEED-C	Q1, 2, 3, 4	N/A	●	●	●	●
ACTION 4: FOCUS ON DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT							
Engage and inform vacant building property owners.	WEEDC-C, WE	Q2	TBD		●		
Establish Downtown Improvements Team.	WEEDC-C, biz	Q1	\$500	●			
Wish list: Downtown improvements that require sweat equity (e.g. flower beds, holiday decorations, storefront paintings).		Q2			●		
Encourage retailers to maintain similar hours.	WEEDC	ON	N/A			●	●
Engage library, community centre, health care centre in community and business events.	WEEDC, WE	ON	N/A	●	●	●	●
Ensure a walkable downtown.							
Inventory/assessment of sidewalks & other potential hazards.	WEEDC: DI, biz, WE	Q2	N/A		●		

SUMMARY

WEST ELGIN'S COMMUNITY HANDBOOK IS A CALL TO ACTION FOR THE RESIDENTS, BUSINESSES, MUNICIPAL COUNCIL, STAFF, COUNTY and community members to come together and create the economic opportunities we want for West Elgin.

This Handbook is a first step to achieve the vision we established together. It provides many low or no budget activities over three years to get us started. These actions depend on us to roll up our sleeves and

work together. Short-term actions in Year 1 create the foundation for longer-term actions. All actions build toward our vision of a vibrant and growing community where we work together to support business growth and investment.



January 2018

West Elgin Community Development Toolkit

West Elgin Economic Development Committee

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