

Based on Community engagement, a Strategic Plan was developed to identify Municipal Priorities. These Strategic Priorities will guide the Municipality in future decision making with regards to budgets, policies and services.

Strategic Plan

For the Municipality of Thames Centre



Ken Hewitt

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Executive Summary

When a Strategic Plan is developed with significant community participation, the municipality can be confident they are setting future community goals based on local public feedback. With this community collaboration, Council can direct municipal staff in the allocation of resources to successfully achieve the identified community goals.

The prioritization and allocation of municipal resources – both in terms of staff and financial resources – signals a commitment to the community that their engagement was paramount and adopted into the plan. This is communicated with the public reporting and support of the Strategic Plan.

From the community consultation, primary themes emerged, identifying the priorities of citizens. The themes focused on: Smart Planning, Community Communications and Engagement, Active Living, and Economic Development.



Smart Planning: A prioritized community goal to make smart planning decisions to grow the community, while maintaining a “hometown feel”. Smart planning also includes diversifying residential housing, providing affordability for young families the capacity to purchase their first home, and, providing the opportunity for seniors to stay within the community.

Community Communications and Engagement: A prioritized goal to increase communications between the municipality (Council and Staff) and the Community, for greater transparency in decision-making on budgets, planning, and infrastructure. Also a goal to better communicate annual community events.

Active Living: A prioritized goal to increase the accessibility and programming of recreational services, especially to community youth and seniors. In parallel, to keep pace with community growth by increasing recreational services.

Economic Development: A prioritized goal to retain and attract businesses into the community to enhance availability of local amenities, and, accessibility by active transportation (such as walking and biking).

Additional sub-themes that developed from the community survey were:

- Greater presence of police services,
- Increase active transportation (sidewalks and bike routes); and
- Increase parks and walking trails.

In regards to existing local municipal services, there was additional public commentary on the need for:

- Reduction in water rates;
- Increased bylaw enforcement; and
- Greater accountability and reporting in the performance of municipal services.

Overall, the survey provided the opportunity for participants to comment on the best features of living and doing business in Thames Centre. The top five common themes were:

✓ Small Town Feel of the Community	26.9 %
✓ A Sense of Community	12.3 %
✓ Quiet Nature	11.6 %
✓ The Proximity of Living Close to London	7.6 %
✓ The Green Space	5.0 %
✓ Not a City	4.0 %

Summary of Recommendations

Category	Number	Recommendation
Strategic Priorities		
	1A	Council adopt the Strategic Pillars of Smart Planning, Community Communications & Engagement, Active Living, and Economic Development as key community priorities.
	1B	Council incorporate the strategic priorities into: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Budgets – To prioritize the allocations of financial resources; ▪ Policies – When reviewing, updating or developing new policies, incorporate strategic priorities into the “purpose” of the specific policy and ▪ Staff Reports – Continue with identifying how report relates to a Strategic Community Priority.
	1C	The Municipality should identify and promote the strategic priorities on the Municipality’s web site, publications, and future marketing campaigns.
Smart Planning		
	2A	The Municipality should reassess the administration of certain planning functions by the upper-tier municipality. Although this may create a “two-step” process for planning applications (such as amendment to the Official Plans), the community can have confidence that local planning decisions are being made by local elected officials.
	2B	Thames Centre Council should consider creating a standing committee of Council entitled “Planning and Development Committee”, where all planning matters are discussed in a dedicated meeting, and thereafter, planning recommendations are forwarded to Council for adoption with the associated bylaw.
	2C	When approving new residential sub-divisions, Council should adopt policies (and zoning bylaws) that promote greater diversity in housing stock, such as increased number of apartments, townhouses, and semi-detached homes for young families and seniors.
	2D	When approving site plans, Council should adopt policies that promote “small town” features, such as themed street light poles and lighting, sidewalks, signage, building facades, parks and trails.
	2E	The Municipality should partner with the County of Middlesex to develop a Transportation Master Plan specific to the Thames Centre community.

	2F	The Municipality could implement a “Community Improvement Plan” as recommended in the recent Stantec report completed in October 2023.
Community Communications and Engagement		
	3A	The three Ward Councillors could conduct annual “town hall” meetings in their respective wards to update their constituents on Council decisions, budgets, policies, and in turn, receive citizen feedback on ward and municipal issues.
	3B	The Mayor and Deputy Mayor could attend the ward annual Town Hall meetings (as recommended in 3A) to update the community on decisions and issues that impact Thames Centre from the County level. This could include “guests” from the County (such as public health, land ambulance, community services) who can provide updates, in addition to, updates from police service management.
	3C	The Mayor can conduct an annual “Business Breakfast” event, focused on the business community, but welcoming the general public. The event can provide Business Awards for a variety of business categories (such as best small business, best produce, best store front, etc.) and best local winery.
	3D	Live streaming of Council meeting can be improved by implementing additional camera views to showcase delegations, and Council members, when speaking.
	3E	The municipality could fund the initial establishment of the Thames Centre Chamber of Commerce, in addition to, funding for community groups and local arts and culture initiatives.
Active Living		
	4A	As recommended within the Community Services and Facilities Master Plan, the plan should be reviewed annually as part of the Municipality’s budget cycle.
	4B	Based on the community feedback received in the Strategic Plan process, the recommendations received in the Community Services and Facilities Master Plan should be prioritized towards youth and seniors.
	4C	The Municipality could consider developing and implementing a Parks and Trails Master Plan based on growing community needs and expectations. The Master Plan could focus on walking trails (operations and capital), volunteerism, and citizen engagement for support and promotion. An annual progress report on the Parks and Trails Master Plan should be prepared for Council.

	4D	The municipality could create a playroom and youth centre in the urban centres of Dorchester and Thorndale.
Economic Development		
	5A	The Municipality could consider financial incentives to retain and attract local businesses into the local community, for greater accessibility of stores to seniors, employment for youth, and general amenities (groceries, restaurants, household goods) for the general population.
	5B	Partner with the County of Middlesex to create an Economic Development Strategy focused on Thames Centre, supporting the retention and attraction of local businesses. This could involve leveraging Middlesex County in allocating dedicating resources for Thames Centre.
	5C	Work with local farmers on bringing their harvest to local residents with “food to table” programs, such as sponsored farmer’s markets, fall fair, and “buy local” campaigns. This could be facilitated by creating a “Agricultural Advisory Committee” reporting and advising to Council, and/or, partnering with the Middlesex Federation of Agriculture.
	5E	The Municipality could consider funding grants for eligible farmers to establish road-side fruit and vegetable stands, as an enhancement of “food to table” marketing and programming.
	5F	The Municipality could consider a welcoming display greeting drivers along Highway 401 to visit and enjoy Thames Centre’s agriculturally based tourism.
	5G	The Municipality should develop an Economic Development Committee of Council to organize, structure and prioritize their strategy. This could involve operating a Community Grant working group to manage funding requests from local community groups.
	5H	The Municipality could develop and implement a Tourism Master Plan focused on hosting sporting events (such as hockey and baseball tournaments), arts and culture events (such as fiddle, dance and music festivals), and additional opportunities for the Dorchester Fair (such as tractor pull and race derby).
Municipal Services		
	6A	The Municipality should develop a Community Risk Profile and a Master Fire Plan as required in provincial legislation. This will provide the Fire Chief and Council with information when determining the level of effort in regards to fire and emergency services.

	6B	The Municipality should develop an updated Water and Wastewater Master Plan to address future needs and planning initiatives. The Municipality could also explore uploading water and waste water services to the upper-tier municipality, such as the delivery model operating in neighbouring Oxford County.
	6C	The Municipality could address constraints and opportunities involving bylaw enforcement services. This could involve a divisional review of all bylaws, policies, and standard operating procedures.
	6D	The Municipality should initiate a Performance Measurement project, which would establish key performance indicators (KPIs) for all municipal services to determine baseline performance levels. The KPIs could then be publicly reported and utilized in annual budget planning.
	6E	The Municipality could partner with London Health Sciences in the generation and promotion of additional medical services in Thames centre (such as family doctor recruitment and health care teams and clinics).

Community Profile

Slogan, Mission and Vision

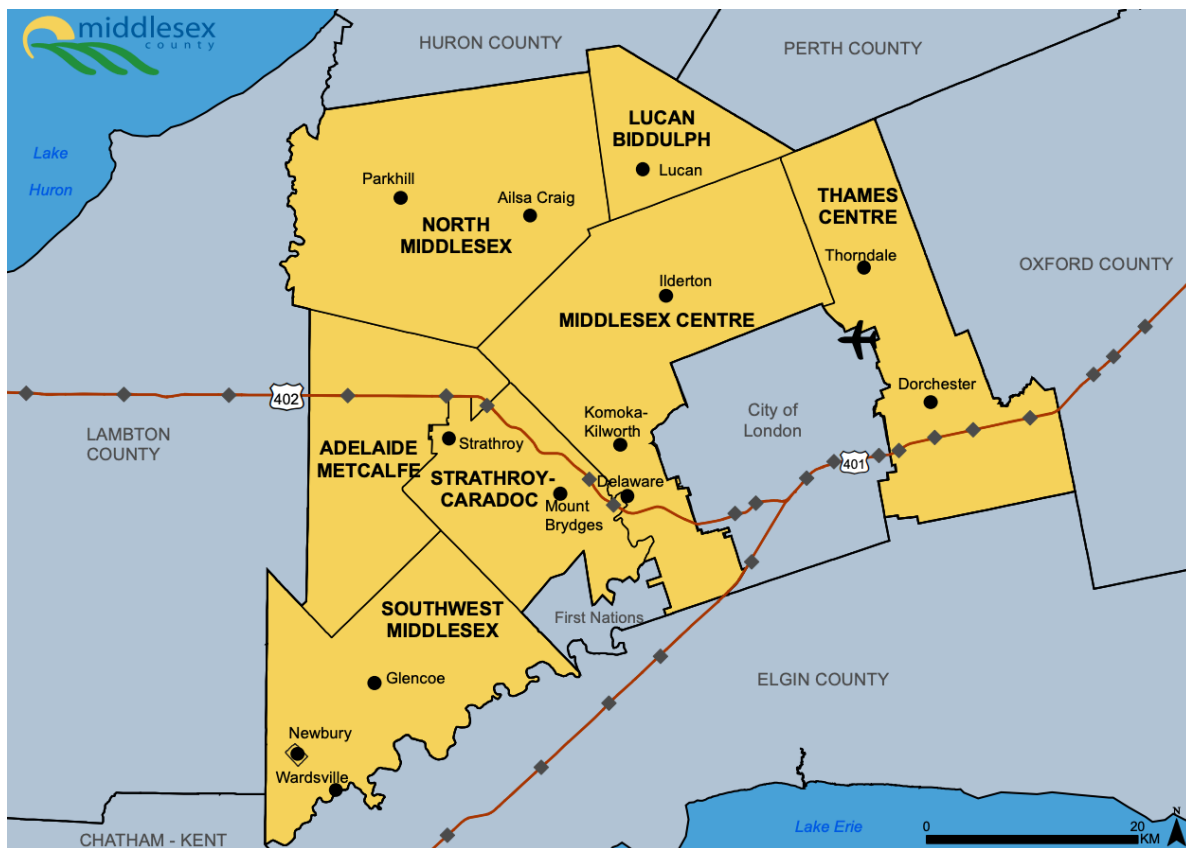
Slogan: Together We Grow

Mission: Working together to sustain and grow our community through quality services and responsible leadership.

Vision: Thames Centre is a vibrant, safe community combining innovations and tradition for all stages of your life.

Location

The Municipality of Thames Centre is located in Southwestern Ontario, immediately adjacent to the west with the City of London. Highway 401 transects the southern portion of Thames Centre.



Demographics:

According to the 2021 Census¹, the population was 13,980 in 2021, a 6% increase from the 2016 Census. The average age of the population is 42.7 years old.

The distribution of the population by age is as follows:

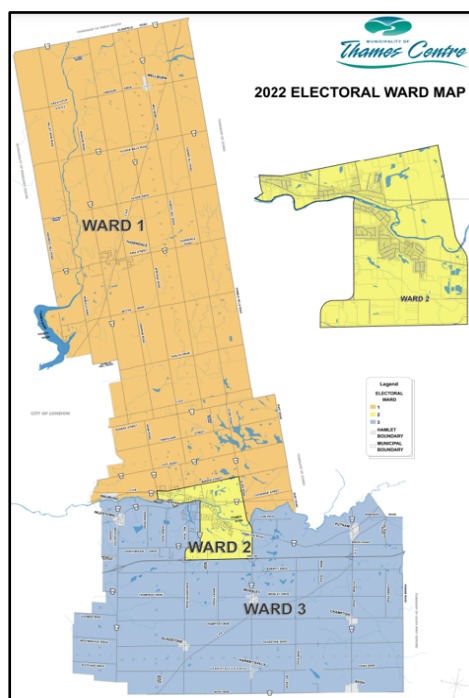
Age Group	Male	Female	Total
0 to 14 Years	1,225	1,180	2,405
15 to 29 Years	1,155	1,060	2,215
30 to 44 years	1,145	1,175	2,320
45 to 59 Years	1,590	1,610	3,200
60 to 74 Years	1,420	1,340	2,760
75 to 89 Years	480	510	990
90 years +	30	50	80

89% of the population resides in single detached homes, with the remainder 11% living in apartments, townhouses, and moveable dwellings.

The urban population reside in two locations: Dorchester and Thorndale. The remainder of the population is considered rural, located in hamlets and agricultural lands.

The average total income per household in 2020 was \$127,200.

For employed persons, 4,390 commute to work, with 22% commuting within Thames Centre and 78% commuting outside the municipality.



Governance

Significant municipal restructuring occurred in 1999, where the Township of North Dorchester and the Township of West Nissouri were amalgamated by Ministerial Order to form the Municipality of Thames Centre. The amalgamated Municipality of Thames Centre became one of eight local municipalities that form the County of Middlesex.

¹ Statistics Canada. 2023. (table). Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. Ottawa. Released March 29, 2023.

<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>

Under the Municipal Act, there are provisions that identify “spheres of jurisdiction”, which define the responsibilities of each tier of municipal government in the delivery of municipal services. In this two-tier municipal model, specific services are delivered by the “upper-tier” municipality (County of Middlesex) and the eight “local” municipalities (such as the Municipality of Thames Centre).

For municipal services delegated to the Municipality of Thames Centre as the “local municipality”, the Municipal Council consists of a Mayor and Deputy Mayor (elected at large), and three Municipal Councillors elected by wards.

Mayor	Sharon McMillan
Deputy Mayor	Michele Smibert
Ward 1 Councillor	Tom Heeman
Ward 2 Councillor	Danielle Lockie
Ward 3 Councillor	Chantel Crockett

Both the Mayor and Deputy Mayor also serve as County Councillors within the County of Middlesex. The County Council consists of representatives from seven of the eight local municipalities², where:

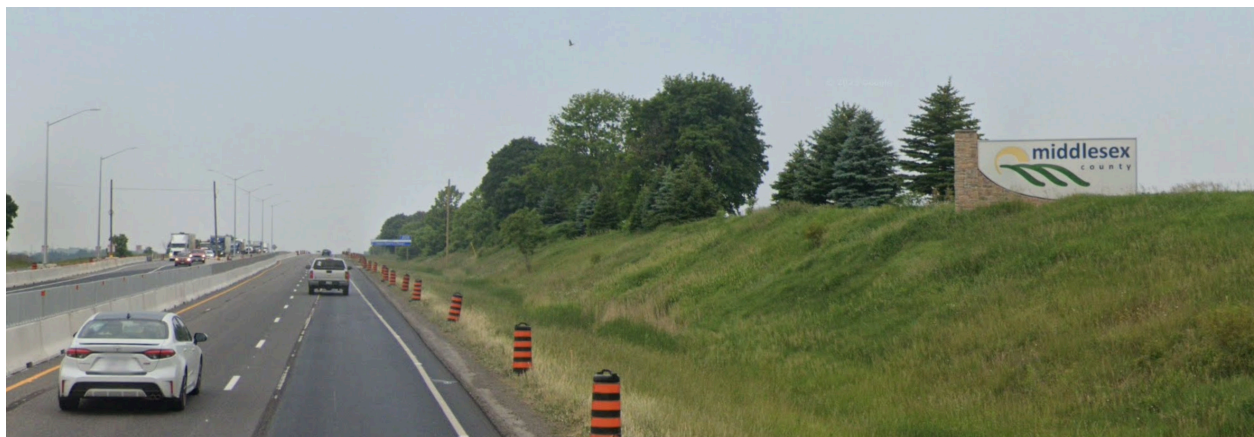
- Each Mayor of the eight local municipalities serve on County Council; and
- If a local municipality has over 5,000 electors, then the Deputy Mayor of the municipality also serves on County Council.
- In the County of Middlesex, the composition of County Council equates to ten Councillors.
- Amongst the 10 County Councillors, they select a Warden and Deputy Warden to lead the Council.

Municipality	Elected Official	Local Municipality Role	County Council Role
Lucan Biddulph	Cathy Burghardt-Jesson	Mayor	Warden
North Middlesex	Brian Ropp	Mayor	Councillor
Southwest Middlesex	Allan Mayhew	Mayor	Councillor
Adelaide Metcalfe	Susan Clarke	Mayor	Councillor
Middlesex Centre	Aina DeViet	Mayor	Deputy Warden
	John Brennan	Deputy Mayor	Councillor
Strathroy-Caradoc	Colin Grantham	Mayor	Councillor
	Mike McGuire	Deputy Mayor	Councillor
Thames Centre	Sharon McMillan	Mayor	Councillor
	Michelle Smibert	Deputy Mayor	Councillor

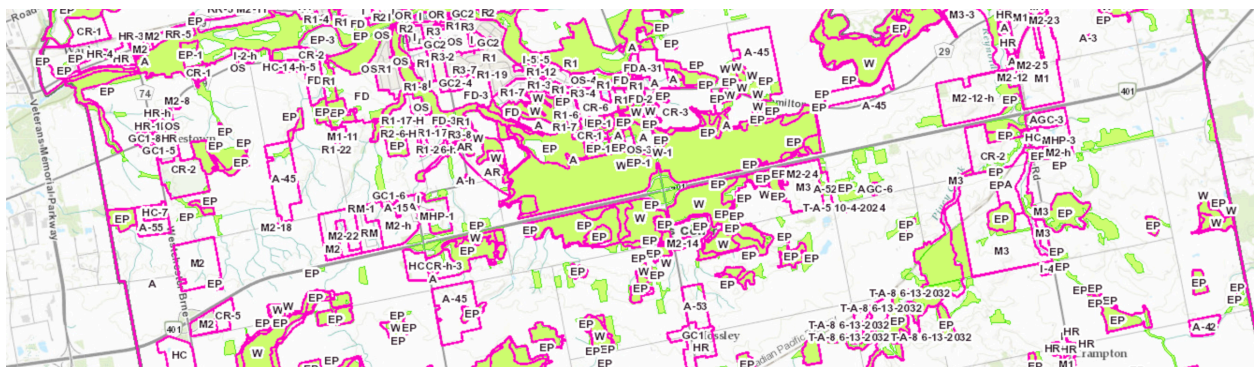
² The Village of Newbury (an incorporated village) receives municipal services from the County of Middlesex, however does not have representation on County Council.

Economic Development

King's Highway 401 transects the southern portion of the municipality, just south of Dorchester. In addition, there are several railways crossing the municipality, such as the Goderich-Exeter Railway (freight and passenger), Canadian Pacific Railway (freight), the Canadian National Railway (freight and passenger) and the Ontario Southland Railway (freight).



These primary transportation routes provides economic opportunities for Thames Centre. In this regard, enhanced welcoming signs could be installed to greet drivers entering Thames Centre and promoting agriculturally based tourism. In addition, there are re-zoning opportunities for employment lands along the Highway 401 corridor (that are outside environmentally protected areas) to increase property tax base and local job opportunities.



The municipality is primarily rural, hosting a significant agricultural sector. There are 382 farms throughout the municipality, representing a 5% increase from 2016 Census.

Overall, there are 74,962 acres of farm land, generating \$158.2 million in gross revenues.

Types of Farms in Thames Centre:

Type of Farms	Percentage of Farm Type
Oilseed and Grain Farming	47.0 %
Vegetable and Melon Farming	14.1 %
Other Crop Farming	05.8 %
Cattle Ranching and Farming	15.0 %
Hog and Pig Farming	03.4 %
Poultry and Egg Production	04.1 %
Sheep and Goat Farming	01.6 %
Other Animal Production	09.0 %

Methodology

Documentation Review

The project team commenced the Strategic Plan process by reviewing specific strategic documents, such as, but not limited to:

- Provincial Policy Statement
- County of Middlesex Official Plan
- Municipality of Thames Centre Official Plan
- Thames Centre Strategic Plan (2020 – 2024)
- Community Services & Facilities Master Plan (September 2023)
- Water and Wastewater Master Plan Update (September 2019)
- Trails & Cycling Master Plan (October 2015)
- Thorndale Community Centre and Park - Venue Master Plan and Feasibility Business Plan (March 2015)
- 2022-2023 Capital Projects
- 2023 Operating Budget
- Thames Centre Community Improvement Plan (CIP) – Background Report (October 2023)

On-Line Surveys

Three primary on-line surveys were developed: Community Survey, Senior Management Team Survey, and a Council Survey.

The estimated completion rates for the surveys were as follows:

Survey	Estimated Completion Rate	Estimated Time to Complete
Community Survey	80%	7 Minutes
SMT Survey	80%	13 Minutes
Council Survey	80%	11 Minutes

For the SMT and Council surveys, a specific invitational link and QR code was emailed directly to each member.

For the Community Survey, the survey was marketed via a variety of modes:

- An invitation postcard was sent via Canada Post to residential homes, apartments, businesses and farms;
- Google and Facebook advertisements were placed; and
- The municipality placed advertisements on their social media pages.

The community survey was designed to not retrieve any personal information of the respondents. Other design features included the inability to complete the survey multiple times from a single device, non-residents (except business owners) were excluded, and abnormalities with IP addresses (locations) were monitored and filtered when required.

Interviews

Upon completion of the on-line survey, one-on-one interviews were offered and conducted with members of Council and the Senior Management Team (SMT).

Open Houses

Two open houses were conducted in Dorchester and Thorndale. The open houses consisted of display posters designed with input and data from the on-line survey and interviews.

With each poster, QR codes were incorporated to seek additional community feedback on the survey's preliminary observations and findings.

Draft and Final Report

A draft report from the on-line surveys, interviews and open houses was prepared and presented to SMT and Council for review. Corrections and omissions were requested prior to the completion of the Final Report.

The Final Report was then presented to Council for their review, deliberations and approval.

Analysis

To understand the mood of the community, survey participants were asked to describe the Municipality of Thames Centre with a single word. Of the responses, 76.1% submitted a positive adjective (such as “good”, “great” and “excellent”), 18.6% utilized a negative description (such as “expensive” and “disappointing”) and 5.3% offered a neutral word (such as “average” and “changing”).

The results were organized into a word cloud, as illustrated below:



Community On-Line Survey

The community survey was made available on-line for all residents and businesses (including farms) in the Municipality of Thames Centre. The survey was promoted via a direct Canada Post mailing (post card invitation) and on-line social media advertising (Google and Facebook). The community survey was also advertised on the municipality’s social media sites.

The community survey surpassed expectations. Based on the 2021 Canada Census population of 13,980 people, the survey received an 85% completion rate (where all questions were answered) and took on average 9 minutes and 15 seconds to complete.

Overall, the survey results achieved a 95% confidence level, with a margin of error of +/- 4%.

Demographics

Community respondents were asked to identify if they were either a resident, business owner, both resident and business owner, or worked in the municipality. The following was identified:

Category	Percentage of Respondents
Resident	86.10
Business Owner	0.98
Both Resident and Business Owner	11.22
Worked in the Municipality	1.22
None of the Above*	0.48
Total	100.00

*Responses removed from Analysis

Respondents were also asked where in the community they resided or operated their business:

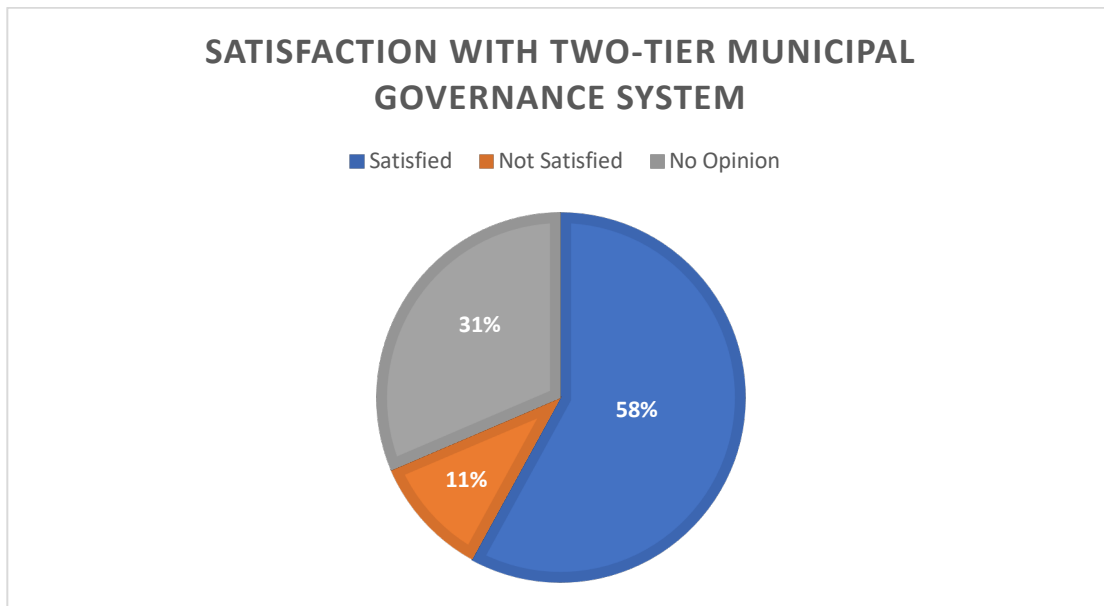
Location	Percentage of Respondents	Urban versus Rural %
Dorchester	50.26	84.36%
Thorndale	34.10	
Mossley	4.36	15.64%
Crampton	1.54	
Evelyn	1.54	
Nilestown	0.77	
Putnam	0.77	
Derwent	0.77	
Three Bridges	0.77	
Wellburn	0.51	
Cobble Hill	0.51	
Fanshawe Lake	0.51	
Gladstone	0.26	
Harrietsville	0.26	
Avon	0.26	
Cherry Grove	0.26	
Devizes	0.26	
Friendly Corners	0.26	
Kelly Station	0.26	
Other	1.54	

If describing the communities of Dorchester and Thorndale as “urban centres” and the remainder as “rural”, then 84.36% of survey respondents live or operate a business in urban areas of the municipality, and 15.64% are from rural areas of the municipality.

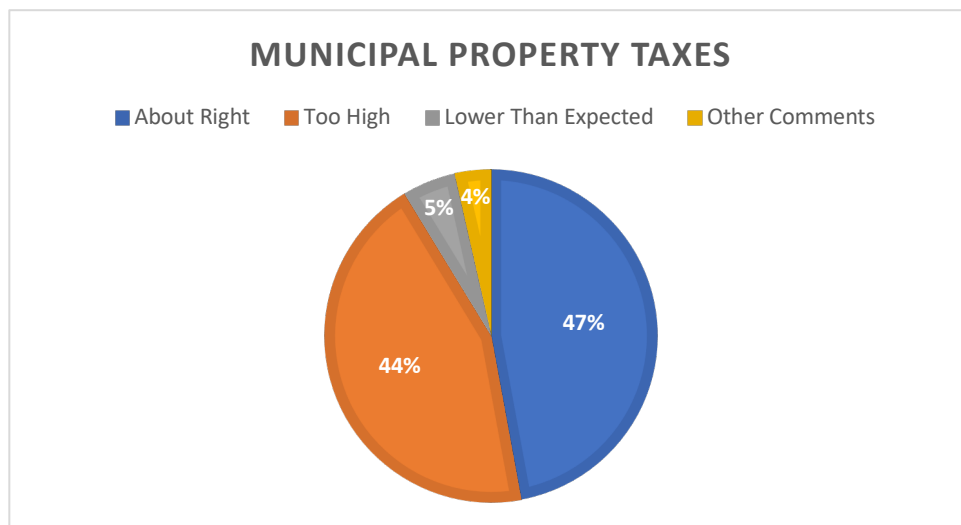
Government and Taxes

Community members responded to questions regarding governance and taxes.

On the question of governance, 57.97% were satisfied with the two-tier municipal government system where specific services are offered by either Middlesex County or Thames Centre. Only 10.63% were not satisfied, and 31.40% did not have an opinion.

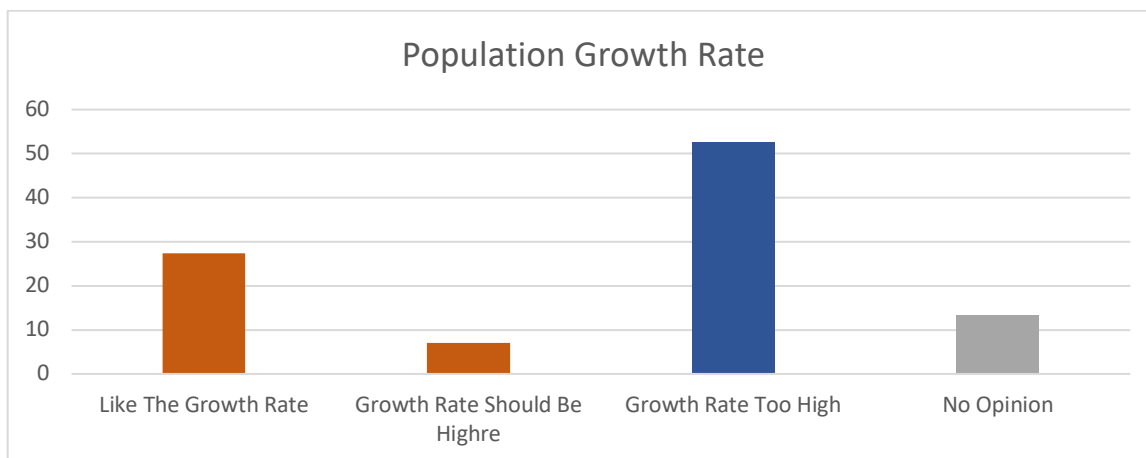


In terms of municipal property taxes, and the stated 2022 increases, 47.11% stated the taxes were about right, 44.21% responded that taxes were too high, and 5.26% indicated taxes were lower than expected. A total of 3.42% provided commentary, which primarily included that taxes in rural areas were too high compared to the services received.

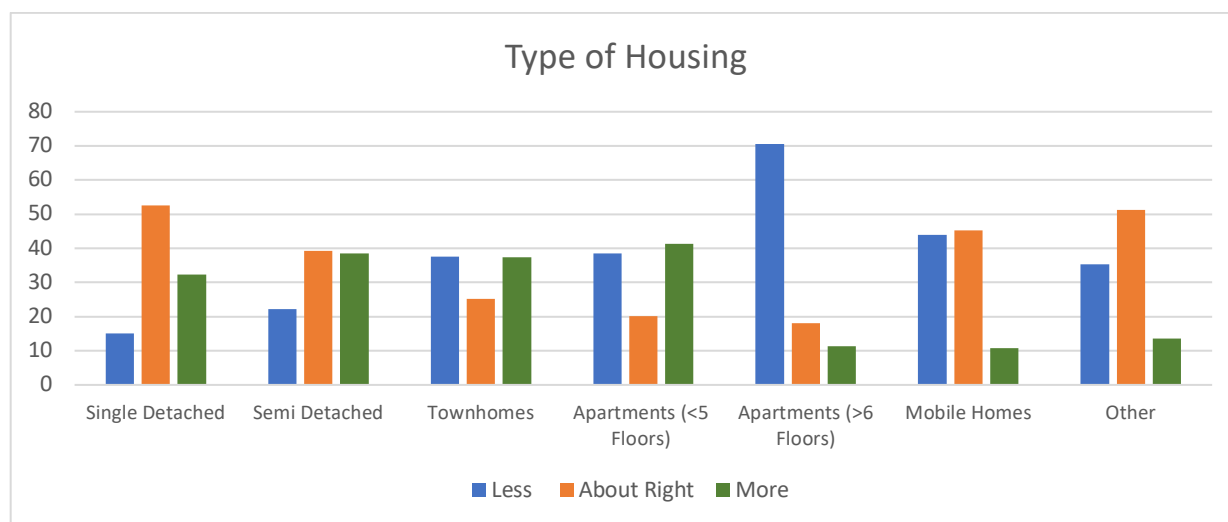


Growth and Development

As per the 2021 Canada Census, the population of Thames Centre increased 6% from 2016 to 2021. Community members were asked to respond to the growth rate and 52.45% indicated the growth rate was too high, 34.37% indicated they either liked the growth rate or that it should be higher, and 13.18% did not offer an opinion.



Regarding housing affordability, 85.19% responded the cost of housing was high in the municipality. A significant number of respondents also commented that future residential developments should focus on young families purchasing their first home, and, housing options to allow seniors live in the municipality longer. These comments were supported when the community was asked what type of housing should be a priority.



As noticeable in the diagram above, diverse housing options (such as mid-rise apartments of 5 floors or less, townhouses, and semi-detached homes) were preferred over high-rise apartments.

Municipal Services

Although not all municipal services were listed, community members were asked to list the importance of specific services. (Note: Municipal services delivered by the Middlesex County were excluded).

As evident in the chart below, the highest priority was given to a variety of services, such as recreation services, parks and trails, fire services, police services, roads, water services and waste collection. At the other end of the spectrum, business licences bylaw services and cemeteries received the least priority rankings.

Service	Not Necessary	Low Importance	Moderately Important	High Importance	Essential
Recreation	1.61%	7.51 %	18.50 %	42.63 %	29.76 %
Parks & Trails	0.80	4.55	20.59	40.91	33.16
Cemeteries	11.89	27.30	33.78	15.68	11.35
Planning	4.59	13.24	33.78	28.92	20.54
Fire Services	0.53	1.07	8.53	19.20	70.67
Police Services	0.27	2.43	8.92	24.86	63.51
Bylaw Services	5.88	15.78	35.83	22.26	19.25
Roads	0.00	0.80	8.82	32.62	57.91
Waste Collection	0.27	0.54	10.99	30.29	58.41
Water Services	3.22	5.36	14.48	22.79	54.16
Council Info	1.34	7.22	31.55	33.42	26.47
Business Licences	9.97	25.07	38.27	18.60	8.09

Continuing with municipal services, survey participants were also asked to rate the associated services being delivered by the local municipality.

Service	Failing	Below Expectations	Average	Above Expectations	Excellent
Recreation	4.38 %	9.59 %	46.58 %	27.67 %	11.78 %
Parks & Trails	4.10	15.30	51.09	22.95	6.56
Cemeteries	1.94	3.60	71.47	15.79	7.20
Planning	9.59	18.63	64.11	6.03	1.64
Fire Services	0.82	2.99	40.76	31.79	23.64
Police Services	9.54	17.98	50.41	12.26	9.81
Bylaw Services	10.28	15.83	64.72	6.94	2.22
Roads	5.46	9.84	51.09	23.77	9.84
Waste Collection	3.27	8.17	44.96	25.07	18.53
Water Services	4.78	9.83	63.48	13.76	8.15
Council Info	8.77	22.74	58.36	8.77	1.37
Business Licences	2.24	4.76	82.63	8.40	1.96

According to the respondents, specific services received higher ratings of “above expectations” or excellent. These were fire services, garbage collection and recreations services. In contrast,

services that received a “failing” or “below expectations” ranking, were bylaw services, planning, and council information.

Community Comments

The survey provided the opportunity for participants to comment on the best features of living and doing business in Thames Centre. The top five common themes were:

✓ Small Town Feel of the Community	26.9 %
✓ A Sense of Community	12.3 %
✓ Quiet Nature	11.6 %
✓ The Proximity of Living Close to London	7.6 %
✓ The Green Space	5.0 %
✓ Not a City	4.0 %

Alternatively, members of the community were asked what could Council do to make Thames Centre a better place to live and work. Based on the comments, four themes emerged as top priority parameters:



Smart Planning

A prioritized community goal to make smart planning decisions to grow the community, while maintaining a “hometown feel”. Smart planning also includes diversifying residential housing, providing affordability for young families the capacity to purchase their first home, and, providing the opportunity seniors to stay within the community.

Community Communications & Engagement

A prioritized goal to increase communications between the municipality (Council and Staff) and the community, for greater transparency in decision-making on budgets, planning and infrastructure. Also a goal to better communicate annual community events.

Recreation

A prioritized goal to increase the accessibility and programming of recreational services, especially to community youth and seniors.

Economic Development

A prioritized goal to retain and attract businesses into the community to enhance availability of local amenities, and, accessible by active transportation (such as walking and biking).

Senior Management Team Feedback

Given their leadership roles and responsibilities of delivering municipal services, the Senior Management Team was asked for their input into the Strategic Plan.

There was common agreement amongst the department leaders, that as the population increases, there will be greater community expectations and demand on local municipal services. There was unanimous consent that public works (such as roads, fleet, water and wastewater services) would experience the greatest impact. Other departments that will yield significant impacts included recreational services, and, planning and development services.

In regards to possible private-public partnerships, were the municipality contracts out some the municipal services, grass cutting and sidewalk snow removal was primarily referenced. Contracting out would allow existing staff to focus on other priority services being provided by public works.

The County of Middlesex currently provides support services to Thames Centre, such as information technology, legal services, and planning services. There was consistency amongst the departmental leaders that timeliness of IT and legal services could be improved, or, better managed at the local level. Further, in regard to planning issues, the County is the approval authority for draft plans of subdivision and official plan amendments. There may be greater efficiencies if this delegated authority was delivered at the local municipal level.

Based on performance, the management group was consistent in their ratings, where municipal recreational services was providing services as excellent or above expectations. However, commentary existed that with increases population, there will be greater demands for these services. On the other hand, planning, police and bylaw enforcement received average performance scores.

Council Feedback

Based on Council feedback derived from survey responses, the majority of Councillors commented on the need to develop an economic development committee to address business constraints and opportunities, in addition to, creating a mechanism to manage funding requests from local community groups.

All Council members agreed the housing affordability issue being experienced throughout Canada, is also present in Thames Centre. In regard to housing stock, Council is aligned and in agreement with the community feedback, that there is a need to diversify housing options with increased semi-detached, townhouses, and low-rise apartments (5 floors or less).

Consistently, although not a prioritized service, Council was aligned with the community in expressing a “fail” or “below expectations” ranking related to bylaw services.

According to comments provided, Council described the best features of Thames Centre as:

“Natural amenities and agriculture”

“Quality and way of life”

“Location to the 401 corridor and London”

“Familiarity”

Finally, Familiarity when Council members were asked what could they offer as a collective of elected representatives, the individual responses focused on:

Community Communications & Engagement	Financial	Smart Planning	Active Living	Economic Development
<i>better communications</i>	<i>affordability</i>	<i>diversified housing options</i>	<i>more trails</i>	<i>retention and attracting businesses</i>
<i>open houses</i>	<i>long range financial plan</i>	<i>sustainable municipality</i>	<i>better walking and biking connectivity</i>	<i>accelerate industrial and commercial development</i>
	<i>low taxes</i>			

Observations and Recommendations

The Strategic Plan Project focused on consultation with the community, key stakeholders, senior staff, and the Council. Based on the consultations, the following observations and recommendations are presented for consideration and implementation:

Recommendation 1: Strategic Priorities

The Strategic Plan consultation produced commentary, that when analyzed, emerged into common themes. These themes should be the foundational priorities for Council to incorporate into their budget deliberations, policy making, and staff reports.

1A	Council adopt the Strategic Pillars of Smart Planning, Community Communications & Engagement, Active Living, and Economic Development as key community priorities.
1B	Council incorporate the strategic priorities into: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Budgets – To prioritize the allocations of financial resources; ▪ Policies – When reviewing, updating or developing new policies, incorporate strategic priorities into the “purpose” of the specific policy and ▪ Staff Reports – Continue with identifying how report relates to a Strategic Community Priority.
1C	The Municipality should identify and promote the strategic priorities on the Municipality’s web site, publications, and future marketing campaigns.

Recommendation 2: Smart Planning

There was overwhelming community feedback that the Municipality maintain a “small town feel” within the communities of Dorchester and Thorndale. While most understand the national market demand is causing municipalities to grow, many community members would like the local growth to be sustainable and carefully planned to reflect existing neighbourhoods.

In addition, some planning functions for Thames Centre are being administered by municipal staff working for the County of Middlesex.

2A	The Municipality should reassess the administration of certain planning functions by the upper-tier municipality. Although this may create a “two-step” process for planning applications (such as amendment to the Official Plans), the community can have confidence that local planning decisions are being made by local elected officials.
2B	Thames Centre Council should consider creating a standing committee of Council entitled “Planning and Development Committee”, where all planning

	matters are discussed in a dedicated meeting, and thereafter, planning recommendations are forwarded to Council for adoption with the associated bylaw.
2C	When approving new residential sub-divisions, Council should adopt policies (and zoning bylaws) that promote greater diversity in housing stock, such as increased number of apartments, townhouses, and semi-detached homes for young families and seniors.
2D	When approving site plans, Council should adopt policies that promote “small town” features, such as themed street light poles and lighting, sidewalks, signage, building facades, parks and trails.
2E	The Municipality should partner with the County of Middlesex to develop a Transportation Master Plan specific to the Thames Centre community.
2F	The Municipality could implement a “Community Improvement Plan” as recommended in the recent Stantec report completed in October 2023.

Recommendation 3: Community Communications & Engagement

As evident in previous strategic plans, concerns between communications between the Municipality and the Community continue. To address these concerns, the Municipality has improved specific parameters of their communication strategy, such as:

- Improving and updating the Municipality web site;
- Publishing “Council Highlights”;
- Hosting a Council meeting in Thorndale;
- Offering a number of on-line surveys to engage the public (for example: budget survey, recreation master plan survey, and strategic plan survey); and
- Creating a “Communications Coordinator” full-time position, reporting directly to the Chief Administrative Officer.

There are some additional improvements that can be implemented to improve communications:

3A	The three Ward Councillors could conduct annual “town hall” meetings in their respective wards to update their constituents on Council decisions, budgets, policies, and in turn, receive citizen feedback on ward and municipal issues.
3B	The Mayor and Deputy Mayor could attend the ward annual Town Hall meetings (as recommended in 3A) to update the community on decisions and issues that impact Thames Centre from the County level. This could include “guests” from the County (such as public health, land ambulance, community services) who can provide updates, in addition to, updates from police service management.
3C	The Mayor can conduct an annual “Business Breakfast” event, focused on the business community, but welcoming the general public. The event can provide

	Business Awards for a variety of business categories (such as best small business, best produce, best store front, etc.) and best local winery.
3D	Live streaming of Council meeting can be improved by implementing additional camera views to showcase delegations, and Council members, when speaking.
3E	The municipality could fund the initial establishment of the Thames Centre Chamber of Commerce, in addition to, funding for community groups and local arts and culture initiatives.

Recommendation 4: Active Living

When identifying priority municipal services, in addition to the necessities public safety and utility services (police, fire, water and waste management), the delivery of recreation, parks, and trails was also rated with prioritized importance. These “active living” services (recreation, parks and trails) are in high demand, and the expectations of availability of these services will grow as the population increases.

The Community Services and Facilities Master Plan, which received community feedback in its development, was recently adopted by Council in September 2023. The Master Plan contains 77 recommendations related to recreation, parks and trails.

4A	As recommended within the Community Services and Facilities Master Plan, the plan should be reviewed annually as part of the Municipality’s budget cycle.
4B	Based on the community feedback received in the Strategic Plan process, the recommendations received in the Community Services and Facilities Master Plan should be prioritized towards youth and seniors.
4C	The Municipality could consider developing and implementing a Parks and Trails Master Plan based on growing community needs and expectations. The Master Plan could focus on walking trails (operations and capital), volunteerism, and citizen engagement for support and promotion. An annual progress report on the Parks and Trails Master Plan should be prepared for Council.
4D	The municipality could create a playroom and youth centre in the urban centres of Dorchester and Thorndale.

Recommendation 5: Economic Development

There was consistent feedback in the community survey on the need of greater amenities in the communities of Dorchester and Thorndale. Although there was commentary that “live” in Thames Centre but go “shopping” in London, there was considerable requests for greater local businesses to locate in these urban centres.

Further, the municipality has received a recent report by Stantec entitled “Thames Centre Community Improvement Plan (CIP) – Background Report (October 2023)”, which provided recommendations on possible grant incentives that are permissible under the *Municipal Act*.

5A	The Municipality could consider financial incentives to retain and attract local businesses into the local community, for greater accessibility of stores to seniors, employment for youth, and general amenities (groceries, restaurants, household goods) for the general population.
5B	Partner with the County of Middlesex to create an Economic Development Strategy focused on Thames Centre, supporting the retention and attraction of local businesses. This could involve leveraging Middlesex County in allocating dedicating resources for Thames Centre.
5C	Work with local farmers on bringing their harvest to local residents with “food to table” programs, such as sponsored farmer’s markets, fall fair, and “buy local” campaigns. This could be facilitated by creating a “Agricultural Advisory Committee” reporting and advising to Council, and/or, partnering with the Middlesex Federation of Agriculture.
5E	The Municipality could consider funding grants for eligible farmers to establish road-side fruit and vegetable stands, as an enhancement of “food to table” marketing and programming.
5F	The Municipality could consider a welcoming display greeting drivers along Highway 401 to visit and enjoy Thames Centre’s agriculturally based tourism.
5G	The Municipality should develop an Economic Development Committee of Council to organize, structure and prioritize their strategy. This could involve operating a Community Grant working group to manage funding requests from local community groups.
5H	The Municipality could develop and implement a Tourism Master Plan focused on hosting sporting events (such as hockey and baseball tournaments), arts and culture events (such as fiddle, dance and music festivals), and additional opportunities for the Dorchester Fair (such as tractor pull and race derby).

Recommendation 6: Municipal Services

The issues involving recreation services, parks and trails have been addressed in Recommendation 4 above, and, the associated 77 recommendations identified in the Community Services and Facilities Master Plan.

Based on the feedback received from the community, stakeholders, staff and Council, additional recommendations are provided in relation to the other municipal services.

6A	The Municipality should develop a Community Risk Profile and a Master Fire Plan as required in provincial legislation. This will provide the Fire Chief and
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	Council with information when determining the level of effort in regards to fire and emergency services.
6B	The Municipality should develop an updated Water and Wastewater Master Plan to address future needs and planning initiatives. The Municipality could also explore uploading water and waste water services to the upper-tier municipality, such as the delivery model operating in neighbouring Oxford County.
6C	The Municipality could address constraints and opportunities involving bylaw enforcement services. This could involve a divisional review of all bylaws, policies, and standard operating procedures.
6D	The Municipality should initiate a Performance Measurement project, which would establish key performance indicators (KPIs) for all municipal services to determine baseline performance levels. The KPIs could then be publicly reported and utilized in annual budget planning.
6E	The Municipality could partner with London Health Sciences in the generation and promotion of additional medical services in Thames centre (such as family doctor recruitment and health care teams and clinics).

