
HALDIMAND COUNTY

Report CAO-01-2025 Haldimand County Strategic Plan

For Consideration by Council in Committee on February 25, 2025



OBJECTIVE:

Council review and adoption of the Haldimand County Strategic Plan 2025-2045 and implementation process.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT Report CAO-01-2025 Haldimand County Strategic Plan be received;
2. AND THAT Council adopts the Haldimand County Strategic Plan 2025-2045;
3. AND THAT staff be directed to implement and provide training on the Plan across the organization.

Approved & Respectfully submitted: Cathy Case, Chief Administrative Officer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Haldimand County Strategic Plan 2025-2045 establishes a long-term vision and guiding principles for our organization while identifying key priorities under five core themes. The plan provides a framework for decision-making, resource allocation and service delivery, ensuring that the municipality remains future-ready and responsive to community needs. If approved, the plan will be introduced to all municipal staff over the course of 2025, with action items phased in over three distinct timeframes: immediate (2025-2026), mid-term (2027-2030), and long-term (2031-2045).

BACKGROUND:

Shortly after the creation of the Corporation of Haldimand County in 2001, the organization undertook a comprehensive Strategic Plan project led by an external consultant and established the vision and mission statements that still exist today, 24 years later. Between approximately 2008-2010, the plan was modified by the CAO at the time, to create three Strategic Pillars and standards for the County's way of work. The vision and mission statements remained the same.

15 years later, the County has evolved immensely, and even more so since its inception in 2001. In order for a municipal organization to ensure it is responsive to changing circumstances, keeps pace with community expectations and is prepared for emerging challenges, it is necessary to update the County's Strategic Plan and set Haldimand in motion for the next decade and beyond.

Some of the key drivers of the new Strategic Plan include:

- Since its inception in 2001, Haldimand County has experienced significant population growth, demographic shifts, economic changes, and evolving resident expectations. Updating the strategic plan ensures that municipal priorities align with the current and future needs of the community.

- Advancements in technology, infrastructure, and environmental sustainability impact how municipalities operate. Updating the plan allows the organization to integrate new innovations, such as digital service delivery and climate resilience strategies.
- Federal and provincial priorities, policies and legislation change over time, affecting how municipalities function. A periodic update ensures the plan complies with new regulations, funding opportunities, and policy frameworks that influence municipal decision-making.
- Economic conditions, including inflation, and revenue sources, evolve over time. Updating the plan allows the municipality to reassess financial strategies, prioritize investments, and ensure long-term financial sustainability without overburdening taxpayers.
- Residents and stakeholders expect transparent and accountable governance. Regular updates allow the municipality to engage the community, seek feedback, and build trust by demonstrating a commitment to continuous improvement.
- Over time, municipalities face increasing demands for public services. Updating the strategic plan ensures that long-term infrastructure projects align with current and projected growth patterns.
- Municipal operations evolve with best practices in governance, service delivery and efficiency improvements. Updating the strategic plan allows municipalities to integrate new techniques, workforce development strategies and operational efficiencies.
- Issues such as climate change, housing affordability, social equity, accessibility & inclusion and digital transformation are becoming increasingly important. Updating the plan ensures the municipality is proactive in addressing emerging challenges and opportunities.

The process to refresh and redevelop Haldimand's Strategic Plan began in the CAO's office. Led by the CAO, consultation with various leadership groups within the organization was conducted across the spring and the fall of 2024 where the leadership teams worked together to revise the County's vision and develop updated guiding principles to lead our way of work. In the fall of 2024 the senior management team held a workshop where the strategic themes and priorities were reviewed, analyzed and improved. Most recently all staff were consulted through an online communication and feedback form. Excellent feedback was received and incorporated into the plan you see before you in this report.

Early stages of the plan's development also took into consideration feedback from multiple other public information sessions and open houses on various municipal projects. Often these open houses generate comments and feedback related to the broader concerns or future of our communities. It is important feedback to take into consideration for a plan of this magnitude. Additionally, past and most recent Resident Satisfaction Survey results along with input from the extensive consultation for the Community & Recreation Facilities Strategy were considered.

Significant research into strategic planning processes and other municipal strategic plans from across North America and Australia were reviewed for best practice, commonalities, etc. and, where appropriate, information was incorporated into the Haldimand plan.

In early Fall 2025, the CAO met with each member of Council to discuss the Strategic Plan framework, priorities and themes and incorporate feedback into the draft plan to be publicly released.

Two public consultation sessions took place on January 28, 2025 in Cayuga. A total of 15 members of the public were present to review the plan and provide feedback. The Strategic Plan open houses and direct links to the online information and feedback forms were ambitiously posted to the County's social media outlets on numerous occasions.

Updating a municipality's strategic plan is not just a procedural exercise—it is an essential practice to keep the organization forward-thinking and community-focused. A home-grown strategic plan is a powerful tool that helps municipalities proactively shape their future, engage the community, and

deliver effective services. By developing a plan that is locally driven, Haldimand can ensure that its vision and actions are aligned with the needs and aspirations of the people they serve. It is also not a static plan or one-time exercise – the Strategic Plan is a living document that will be reviewed and refreshed in regular and predictable frequencies as we move forward.

ANALYSIS:

The Strategic Plan is made up of the following components:

- Vision Statement
- Guiding Values
- 5 Strategic Themes
- 19 Strategic Priorities – each with an overarching goal.
- Action Items to achieve the goal for each Priority (to be developed and refined over the course of the plan.)

The Vision:

Haldimand is unique in that it did not begin as one large urban centre. There were several small communities with distinct histories, culture, social, recreational and geographical attributes. At the onset of Haldimand County, there was a desire to bring together these multiple, distinct communities within the overall geographic boundary, with the intent to harmonize them and create one uniform community. Although there has been some success in harmonization, it has proved challenging overall, as identities largely remain connected to individual communities. The success that has been realized over the past two decades is related to the consolidation of several zoning bylaws into one, establishing County-wide land use goals and objectives in the Official Plan, establishing County wide bylaws, municipal wide financing and taxation policy, all necessary to efficiently manage one municipal corporation. But from a community perspective, the distinction between communities is important and should not be ignored.

The Strategic Plan introduces a new vision statement, recognizing the differences between various communities in Haldimand and encouraging future leveraging of these differences for a better Haldimand. For example, Caledonia is a gateway community to key transportation corridors (highway and air). Focus on economic development in this area is key to diversifying our Haldimand tax base and providing that growing community with employment opportunities. Whereas Dunnville's growth is expected at a much slower pace, due to its proximity to floodplain, and limited areas for development. That said, it's natural attributes makes the area burst with potential. The Dunnville community is situated perfectly where the historic Grand River meets one of Canada's Great Lakes, setting the foundation for great tourism and recreation opportunities.

Throughout the themes and priorities described in this report, you will notice the term "communities" is plural. This is intentional to recognize that Haldimand is a community of communities and embracing each community's differences can be leveraged to create a thriving and vibrant municipality. While these differences should be explored, invested in and promoted, the vision also sees the importance of maintaining connected communities through technology and services, trail networks and community collaboration.

Lastly, the vision aims to clearly demonstrate the desire to advance and continue evolving – through technology, embracing and learning from diversity, growth in amenities, opportunities and development, while balancing that growth with our natural surroundings, generally sustaining our rural way of life. In consideration of the above, Haldimand's new Vision was developed.

Haldimand County Vision:

Distinct, yet connected communities where growth and innovation harmonize with rural life, creating a vibrant and sustainable future for all.

The Guiding Values:

Guiding values are the foundation of effective, ethical, and community-centered municipal governance. They are fundamental principles that shape how municipal staff are expected to operate, make decisions and serve Haldimand's communities. They define a municipality and what it stands for. They help create a strong sense of purpose for employees, elected officials and community members, fostering trust, confidence and consistency in governance.

It is critical that employees and representatives of the municipality understand and apply the core values of the organization into their daily work. When employees and leaders share a common set of values, it fosters teamwork, motivation, and pride in serving the public. As mentioned above, the guiding values were developed by staff through two separate sets of independent surveys citing 40-50 values. Both sets of surveys yielded the same top values demonstrating a high likelihood of buy-in from the organization as a whole. These results form the Haldimand County Guiding Values further described below.

Haldimand County Guiding Values:

These values guide how we work and interact with each other and the community, ensuring a positive and effective organizational culture.

Respect	We conduct ourselves with courtesy, inclusivity and fairness in all interactions, ensuring that co-workers, elected officials, and residents are treated with dignity, professionalism and open-mindedness. By conducting ourselves with respect, we strengthen trust, civic engagement and a positive working environment.
Accountability	We take responsibility for our actions and decisions, delivering on our commitments and being answerable to the public and each other for our conduct and performance.
Transparency	We operate openly, ensuring that our processes and decisions are clear and understandable. We maintain high ethical standards, building trust through honesty and fairness.
Collaboration & Teamwork	We work together effectively, valuing teamwork and cooperation. We seek to build strong partnerships both within our organization and with external stakeholders to achieve common goals.
Integrity	We commit to maintain consistency between our guiding values and our actions, following through on commitments and conducting our work with good intent.
Professionalism	We conduct ourselves with a high degree of expertise, tact and diligence. We commit to being mindful of our conduct, reflecting the integrity and respect that our role as a public official demands.

The Themes, Priorities and Goals:

The strategic plan is structured around five core themes, each containing priorities that will guide Council and staff in achieving the County's vision. The themes and priorities within the plan will be the focus of our future planning and efforts, and the foundation of our organization's annual and multi-year work plans, budgets and policies.

Each of the high level themes below are augmented by supporting strategic documents or policies, many of which are recently completed or in progress and have been recently presented to Council. A sampling of these will be listed at the end of each section. It is reasonable to expect that these strategic documents may apply to more than one theme. The long term goal is to have most of the supporting strategic documents better complement one another, allowing for an overarching coordinated set of action items across all departments, that cohesively achieve the County's vision.

Within each theme are a set of strategic priorities representing social, economic, environmental and organizational factors that are specific to Haldimand County. Some of these priorities represent areas where Haldimand has already demonstrated success to a degree, but wants to continue focusing on for the benefit of our communities and the municipal corporation, such as Financial Sustainability, Community Safety and Operational Excellence. While other priorities represent challenging areas where more concerted attention is needed such as Continuous Improvement, Innovation, Environmental Stewardship, Communication and Citizen Engagement. The list of 5 themes and 19 priorities is comprehensive and positions the County well to meet community expectations and demands into the foreseeable future.

1. Future Ready

Prepare for and adapt to anticipated future challenges and opportunities to ensure Haldimand can thrive in the face of evolving economic, environmental, technological and social conditions.

- **Infrastructure Reliability** – Investment in sustainable and resilient municipal infrastructure.
- **Innovation** – Leverage technology and modern practices to enhance service delivery.
- **Financial Sustainability** – Responsible fiscal planning to support long-term municipal viability.
- **Environmental Stewardship** – Commit to sustainability and climate resilience for the well-being of current and future generations.
- **Growth Management** – Coordinated strategic planning to accommodate future population and economic growth

Supporting Strategic Documents:

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| • The Haldimand County Official Plan | • Forestry Strategy & Management Plan |
| • Natural Heritage Systems Strategy | • Corporate Digital Innovation Strategy |
| • The Haldimand County Comprehensive Zoning Bylaw | • Community & Recreation Facilities Strategy |
| • Master Servicing Plans for each community | • Fire Master Plan |
| • Asset Management Plan | • Trails Master Plan |
| • Public Works Facility Optimization Review | • Archaeological Management Plan |
| • Energy Conservation & Demand Management Plan | • Comprehensive Financial Strategy – <i>beginning in 2025</i> |

2. Exceptional Service

Deliver quality public services that meet the day-to-day community expectations reliably and affordably, ultimately enhancing the quality of life for all residents.

- **Citizen-Centred Service** – Enhance accessibility and responsiveness to residents.
- **Operational Excellence** – Streamline processes for improved efficiency and effectiveness to deliver quality services our residents expect.
- **Continuous Improvement** – Regularly assess and refine services to ensure best practices, with a view to reduce unnecessary spending.
- **Communication** – Strengthen transparency and the sharing of information with the public.

Supporting Strategic Documents:

- Customer Service Strategy & Standards
- Drinking Water Quality Management Standards
- Corporate Digital Innovation Strategy

3. Economic Vitality

Be a location of choice for business growth and sustainable investment, promoting a vibrant, diversified economy while having regard for our agricultural community, small business and industry.

- **Business Pathways** – Reduce barriers and creating opportunities for local businesses.
- **Employment Opportunity** – Support workforce development and job creation.
- **Tourism** – Enhance attractions and services to promote sustainable tourism growth, promoting our community strengths such as our natural environment and our agri-tourism potential.

Supporting Strategic Documents:

- The Haldimand County Official Plan
- Economic Development & Tourism Strategy
- The North Caledonia Business Park Feasibility Study
- The Lower Grand River Visitor Strategy
- The Public Art & Culture Strategy
- Community Improvement Plan – *update (to broaden scope) beginning in 2025*

4. Healthy Communities

Investing in quality programs and services that promote the safety and well-being of communities and residents.

- **Community Safety** – Invest in emergency services and proactive safety measures.
- **Healthy Lifestyle Opportunities** – Provide excellent cultural, recreational and wellness programs and amenities.
- **Diversity, Equity & Inclusion** – Ensure municipal policies and services are inclusive and foster a welcoming community.

Supporting Strategic Documents:

- The Public Art & Culture Strategy
- Archaeological Management Plan
- The Fire Master Plan
- The Traffic Management Strategy
- Haldimand County Public Library Strategic Plan
- Trails Master Plan
- Grandview Lodge Strategic Plan
- Haldimand County Accessibility Plan 2023-2027
- Physician Recruitment Strategy
- Community & Recreation Facilities Strategy
- Emergency Management & Emergency Response Plan

5. Good Governance

Foster an efficient, effective and accountable municipal government that prioritizes the well-being of its citizens and staff.

- **Effective Government** – Strengthen policies and decision-making processes, guiding the organization with long term goals and objectives.
- **Citizen Engagement** – Encourage and offer active public participation opportunities in municipal affairs.
- **Staff Investment** – Provide training and competitive resources to support, attract and retain municipal employees.
- **Partnerships & Collaboration** - Build and nurture partnerships across Haldimand, provincially and regionally to leverage diverse resources, foster innovation and create stronger, more resilient communities.

Supporting Strategic Documents:

- Net Better Off Leadership Model (Recruitment and Retention Strategy)
- Council Code of Conduct
- Employee Code of Conduct
- Respectful Conduct Policy
- Procedure Bylaw
- Ward Boundary Review
- Procurement Policy
- Health & Safety Policy

The strategic plan will be implemented in three phases:

- **Immediate (2025-2026):**
 - Foundational projects, quick wins and staff engagement initiatives.
 - Completion of the remainder of 2022-2026 Term of Council & Corporate Priorities
 - Completion of 2025 and 2026 Departmental Work Plans
 - Active progression of Capital Budget projects
- **Mid-Term (2027-2030):**
 - Expansion of key programs and long-term investments in services and infrastructure.
 - Implementation of various master planning and strategy documents
 - Implementation of the 2026-2030 Term of Council & Corporate Priorities
- **Long-Term (2031-2045):**
 - Sustainable growth initiatives, major infrastructure projects, major economic development initiatives and long-range policy outcomes.
 - Continued implementation of various master planning and long term strategy documents
 - Implementation of future Terms of Council Priorities

To ensure successful implementation, staff, in alignment with Council direction, will develop action items that align with the achievement of the goal outlined for each strategic priority, incorporating performance metrics and public reporting mechanisms. Regular progress updates will be provided to Council and the community.

As the plan is built out further with each priority containing a list of corresponding action items to achieve the respective goals, updates will be provided to Council. Action items for the immediate term are reflected in term of Council priority updates. The complete list of mid and long term action items will continue to be a work in progress, engaging with Council, staff and the public through regular channels, to inform the living document. Mid-term and longer term actions are in the development stages with senior staff and managers and are based on annual work plan objectives. Mid-term action items will be further refined following the next municipal election when Council has their priority setting workshop. Longer term goals and corresponding action items will be iterative with regular reviews and revisions as necessary over the years that span the plan.

The overall intent is that all major policy decisions, project submissions, resource requests and allocations (staff, budget, technology, etc.), will align with one or more priorities in the Strategic Plan. This ensures the long term vision of the County remains achievable as time passes.

Upon Council approval, the following will be undertaken:

1. **Finalization of Digital Strategic Plan Document:** The document will include the following components:
 - Land Acknowledgement
 - Strategic Planning Process
 - Vision Statement
 - Haldimand's Guiding Values
 - Themes
 - Priorities and corresponding goals
 - Supporting Strategic Documents
 - Actions for each Priority/Goal
 - Haldimand County at a Glance

2. **Staff Rollout:** Training and information sessions to inform employees and align their work with strategic priorities and goals.
3. **Public Communication:** Notification to inform residents and stakeholders of the final plan.
4. **Performance Tracking:** Establish reporting mechanisms to monitor progress and outcomes, pending technology improvements and adequate staffing resources.

The Municipal Strategic Plan 2025-2045 provides a clear and forward-thinking roadmap for our municipality's growth and development. Through this plan, we aim to strengthen service delivery, support a thriving economy, build inclusive, safe and healthy communities and ensure effective governance. It is recommended that Council approve the plan and direct staff to proceed with its implementation.

FINANCIAL/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

There were no unbudgeted financial implications with the development of the plan. The plan did not involve outside consultants as a "home-grown" approach was considered more appropriate for a long term, strategic vision and prioritization exercise.

Moving forward, there may be some incremental costs in developing the final digital document to be posted to the County's website and rolling out internal training on the plan as well as promotion of the guiding values. The cost of these items is unknown at this time but is expected to be minimal. The cost may be able to be absorbed within the Tax Supported Operating Budget, however if sufficient funding is not available, it is recommended that Council authorize this expenditure to an upset limit of \$6,000 that would form part of the overall operating surplus/deficit for 2025.

STAKEHOLDER IMPACTS:

The Haldimand County Strategic Plan 2025-2045 is a strategy to guide the next 20 years of the municipal organization in improving the quality of life of its residents, while balancing growth and advancement with our rural way of life. In this regard, the plan impacts all residents, employees, business owners and visitors who live, work or play within Haldimand County.

REPORT IMPACTS:

Agreement: No

By-law: No

Budget Amendment: No

Policy: No

REFERENCES:

None.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Presentation for Council in Committee