



## **City of Sarnia Corporate Strategic Plan 2017 - 2020**

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## **Introduction:**

Planning is an important step in building a more vibrant and healthy community. The Strategic Plan sets the overall direction for the City.

This planning process was our chance to look at the City through a magnifying glass and ask our citizens and employees what they want from their municipal government.

This plan outlines those desires and the direction of Council and City staff for the remaining term of this Council with overlap into the next term.

This plan will shape the actions for the City of Sarnia to make it stronger and a better place to live for all residents and visitors to our City. We learned that Sarnia City Council, employees and citizens all have the same goal: to create a City that is a vibrant, healthy and connected community. A City where people want to live and visit. This strategic plan is our next step in becoming ***Sarnia, the place you want to be!***

## **Setting the Stage:**

Key to strategic planning is the conversation about where to focus future directions and priorities and how to allocate limited resources. Like most municipalities across the province, the City of Sarnia faces challenges such as: unfunded service downloads and increasing regulation imposed by senior governments and a growing need to deal with aging infrastructure, service expectations, and an uncertain tax revenue base.

We heard that our challenges will not be solved with the thinking of the past. Expectations are bolder, with a call to action for creative, dynamic, optimistic and strategic thinking.

The good news is that many people believe Sarnia is a good place to live, raise a family and retire. Sarnia residents identify our top five attributes as our parks and trails, the waterfront, caring and friendly people, affordability and safety. There is confidence in our location, industrial base, skilled workforce and access to local and regional healthcare.

"The significant challenges we face today cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them."  
Albert Einstein

On the other hand, people feel that this quality of life is compromised by the state of our infrastructure and recreational facilities, lack of growth and opportunities for young people, lack of amenities in our downtown and concerns about service delivery.

This plan is a call to action – a process that sets the stage to build on our strengths and address identified needs. Council, staff and community must come together to advance our opportunities and deal with our challenges as we move towards the new City Vision of **Sarnia, the place you want to be!**

“Every organization has its unique set of irrational and different constraints, yet some make a leap while others facing the same environmental challenges do not.”

Jim Collins, Good to Great

This Strategic Corporate Plan is the City's design for its future. It is just one of many strategic plans presenting 'big picture' thinking for the

whole community. Many key organizations in our municipality have gone through similar exercises to express their aspirations for the success of the groups they serve. This Plan can work in concert with these organizations. We invite such opportunities and indeed, have made it our mission: ***Strength Through Collaborative Leadership.***

### **How We Got Here:**

We started this planning process with a review of previous strategic plans. Our facilitator conducted one on one meetings with the Mayor and each Councillor and facilitated three workshop style meetings with Council to gain insights into their outlook and situational analysis. Senior management staff attended the workshops and assisted in drafting the Corporate Strategic Plan.

The draft plan was taken to the public for feedback and input through three consultation processes: a citizen survey, an employee survey and three community focus groups. Over the consultation period in March and April of 2016, we received 597 citizen surveys, 81 employee surveys and a total of over 30 people participated in focus groups led by our facilitator with an additional 10 people who responded to focus group questions on their own.

Going forward, the draft was revised and Council held one further planning and prioritizing session to consider the public input. This plan is the result of all these efforts. It is intended to serve as the guiding document for the remainder of this Council term with overlap into the next term until the future Council adopts its own plan.

## **Our Mission, Our Vision, Our Values:**

Mayor and Council are representatives of the citizens and champions for a better, sustainable community and economy. In this stewardship role, we have made a commitment to community service articulated in our mission, our vision and our values for Sarnia. These set the table for our strategic priorities and guide our policies, actions, services and programs.

### **Mission: Strength through collaborative leadership**

This means we will:

- achieve stronger results by working together
- bring the right people together in constructive ways to create our future
- work with neighbours, stakeholders, community and staff to address shared concerns.

### **Vision: Sarnia, the place you want to be!**

This means Sarnia:

- is a good place to live, work, learn, play and visit
- provides quality lifestyles and
- invites new residents and growth.

### **Core Values:**

1. Honesty – To have the courage to act and live by our values. We engage in honest discussions that maintain the dignity, respect and perspectives of others. We nurture a culture grounded in the principles of respect and service.
2. Continuous Improvement – To be the very best we can be. We seek to continuously improve in our delivery of quality services and we will commit to learning and finding ways to do things better.
3. Collaborative – To build relationships and work together to achieve common goals and resolve differences within and outside the corporation. We will build trust with our colleagues, partners, citizens and employees by honouring our commitments and decisions and being responsible and dependable.
4. Communicative – To be open and transparent, both internally and externally. We make every effort to provide timely information on programs and services to our citizens and maintain open lines of communication between Council, senior administration, employees and citizens.

- 5. Integrity & Accountability – To live within our means while providing quality service in a transparent and responsible manner. Every day, we strive to make wise decisions, help others and lead by example. We are motivated to make things happen and take ownership of our decisions and our work.
- 6. Innovative – To be resourceful and creative in order to succeed regardless of external pressures. We aspire to create a work environment that will help us generate new ideas, operating methods and ways of delivering services as well as promoting community growth and collaboration.
- 7. Sustainable – To act in a financially, environmentally and socially responsible manner. We will find ways to maximize resources, engage with citizens and employees, harness technology and take managed risks to make positive change. We will develop a positive climate where employees and the public feel supported and secure.

**What we heard:  
The Way We Need to Work Together**



## **Strategic Priorities**

The Strategic Plan outlines four strategic priorities that represent the 'how-to' strategies to help us achieve our vision. Listening to what we heard, these priorities focus on the need for growth, change, innovation and collaboration in the context of a caring City. Going forward, we commit to a brighter outlook and more optimistic future. These priorities are the roadmap to help us move to a more prosperous and healthy community.

### **Strategic Priority – Economic Innovation:**

#### **What did we hear**

The economy is very important to residents living in Sarnia. In fact, many felt that economic development is the most important priority and that it drives other priorities. Citizens expect bolder action in this area – a more innovative and creative approach, suggesting that the City looks to other jurisdictions that have had success for best practices and new ideas.

Infrastructure investments and improvements are needed to undergird economic development and growth. There is a feeling that the City is stuck in a paralysis paradigm and needs to shift its thinking to more innovative and creative strategies that will produce growth and a culture of entrepreneurship.

The top 5 expectations of citizen respondents relate to improving our infrastructure, business retention and expansion, job creation, growth - particularly of youth and young families - and revitalization of downtown.

Specific priorities are to:

- Retain and attract youth and young families
- Fix our infrastructure, particularly roads, sewers, water, parks and recreational facilities
- Attract and retain businesses and create a culture of entrepreneurship
- Figure out who is doing what in economic development and reduce duplication of effort
- Support cultural/creative organizations
- Showcase our achievements in business
- Provide seamless and inviting customer service and business attraction initiatives
- Consider City involvement in a business incubator plan
- Look for ways to fill vacant buildings by offering greater incentives
- Support downtown revitalization efforts
- Do a better job of marketing the City and its great amenities.

**What we are doing now**

The City is a key player in the Sarnia-Lambton Economic Partnership (SLEP), along with all of the agencies listed above. An assessment of the role of the City's economic development function and those of SLEP was last undertaken in 2011. Many of the key priorities listed above are within SLEP's mandate and are defined in the current SLEP strategic plan. These include existing business support and new business attraction, promotion and marketing, encouraging entrepreneurial activity, new resident/immigrant attraction and cultivating the creative/cultural economy. Similarly, the City is also involved in the existing support incubator, the Bioindustrial Innovation Canada (BIC) at the Western Research Park, a partnership venture of the University of Western Ontario and the County. BIC has a specific focus of growing and developing bio-sector companies and has successfully provided support through investment and financing.

The City has an Asset Management Plan (AMP) for linear physical assets (roads, water and sewers), and a 10-year capital plan which are used to fund pay-as-you-go infrastructure renewal as well as to leverage funds from senior government grants and programs like Gas Tax. As the City's debt is retired, debt payment funds are shifted into the City's capital renewal program. City staff are currently extending the AMP to include other City-owned assets like parks and recreation facilities for better asset management and to prepare for senior government infrastructure programs.

**Goal Statement:** Support revitalization and growth.

<b>Strategies/Initiatives</b>	<b>Priority Actions</b>
<b>1. Invest in infrastructure needed to revitalize the City and support growth.</b>	<p>Complete the City's Asset Management Plan by 2022 to include all City-owned assets and update the 10-year capital plan</p> <p>Apply to senior government infrastructure programs</p> <p>Undertake capital infrastructure projects</p>
<b>2. Create a business-friendly environment</b>	<p>Provide up-to-date information on-line for potential investors</p> <p>Develop and maintain a coordinated and inviting on-line and in-person customer service</p> <p>Develop a focused marketing plan and program that promotes the City</p>

Strategies/Initiatives	Priority Actions
	<p>Maintain competitive tax rates relative to comparable jurisdictions</p> <p>Develop more effective and efficient land use and permit approvals and licensing processes</p> <p>Establish fees and permits that are competitive with comparable jurisdictions</p> <p>Advocate for all Sarnia programs and services to survey participant satisfaction of their respective programs and services through the City's Age Friendly planning initiative</p>
<p><b><i>3. Collaborate with stakeholder networks to attract and retain new business, industry and institutional services</i></b></p>	<p>Continue to actively partner with SLEP and other agencies to attract new business and create an entrepreneurial culture in the community</p> <p>Define the City's economic development role and reduce duplication of efforts.</p>
<p><b><i>4. Collaborate with stakeholders to encourage land development</i></b></p>	<p>Collaborate with stakeholders to find innovative ways to re-use and/or re-develop vacant city-owned and other properties within the City</p>

Success Indicators
<p>(#,%) Tax and fee rate comparisons to similar municipalities</p> <p>(\$) Building permit values</p> <p>(#) Building permits (residential and non-residential)</p> <p>(%) Perceptions of customer service and business-friendly environment</p> <p>(\$, #) Capital projects commenced and completed</p> <p>(\$) Senior Government Funding</p> <p>Progress on Asset Management Plan</p>



## **Strategic Priority – High Quality of Life and Caring for All Citizens:**

### **What did we hear**

Generally, citizens believe Sarnia is a great place to live and work and retire. There are many positive attributes about the community that are deeply appreciated. However, there is also the sense that we are at a time when the municipality needs to be more proactive in protecting and advancing quality of life considerations. Specific areas of improvement are to:

- Be a healthy and attractive community by fixing and building bike paths and nature trails, amenities for youth, gardens and by continuing to support communities in bloom
- The quality of our infrastructure counts – while everyone agrees that there is a high need for roads, sewers and water this must be balanced with upgrades to parks and recreation and cultural facilities.
- Create a positive community brand. Let's get away from the negative brands of the past.
- Attract groups of all ages to move to Sarnia, especially young people and families.
- Strive to be an accommodating and inclusive community for all ages and abilities
- Build the relationship between Sarnia and the Aamjiwnaang First Nation.
- Improve customer service efficiency and effectiveness and be more inviting.

### **What we are doing now**

Currently, the City is completing an 'age-friendly' planning exercise with the goal of accommodating the needs of all citizens as they age. While this work focuses on our older residents, infrastructure accommodations and universal design for all ages benefits everyone. Also as previously indicated, efforts to broaden the scope of the City's asset management plan are underway in order to address infrastructure renewal beyond roads, water and sewers.

With the assistance of a Federation of Canadian Municipalities program and facilitators, the City and the Aamjiwnaang First Nation have recently completed a review and renewal of service agreements for water and wastewater services and have developed a new cooperation protocol to help build our relationship.

**Goal Statement:** Be a safe, healthy and accessible community.

<b>Strategies/Initiatives</b>	<b>Priority Actions</b>
<p><b><i>1. Promote safe and affordable housing initiatives</i></b></p>	<p>Develop a policy framework for affordable housing that meets the needs of citizens and their circumstances</p> <p>Collaborate with stakeholders to find innovative ways to re-use and/or re-develop vacant city-owned and other properties within the City</p> <p>Support the County of Lambton’s 10 year housing and Homelessness Plan</p>
<p><b><i>2. Improve quality of life assets and amenities</i></b></p>	<p>Conduct a coordinated review of existing corporate facilities, amenities, programs and services</p> <p>Complete the City’s Asset Management Plan by 2022 to include all City-owned assets and update the 10-year capital plan</p> <p>Complete and implement the City’s Age Friendly planning initiative</p> <p>Position Sarnia as an environmentally responsible and friendly community</p> <p>Attract new sponsorship and marketing opportunities for recreation and cultural amenities and support major festivals and events</p> <p>Initiate master planning for parks, recreation and cultural facilities and amenities</p>
<p><b><i>3. Continue on the path to accessibility</i></b></p>	<p>Continue to meet the City’s obligations and commitments under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act by developing a coordinated approach to improve the accessibility of city properties and amenities</p> <p>Support and resource programs for volunteers to be more involved in City events, programs and projects</p>

Strategies/Initiatives	Priority Actions
<b>4. Continue to build our relationship with the Aamjiwnaang First Nation</b>	Explore additional opportunities with the Aamjiwnaang First Nation for services and programs of mutual benefit

Success Indicators
(%) Perceptions of customer service and business-friendly environment (#) Community volunteer hours (#) Use of recreation facilities and programming (#) Accessibility projects completed  New service agreements with the Aamjiwnaang First Nation community

**Strategic Priority – Responsible Financial Management:**

**What did we hear**

While the community expects responsible financial management from its government, there are questions about what that means. Maintaining reasonable tax rates is an expectation. But, what does reasonable tax rates actually mean? Does it relate to the citizens’ ability to pay? Is it really cheaper or affordable to live in Sarnia? Citizens cite a need for greater accountability. Is the City getting the biggest bang for the buck? How do we measure or compare with other cities? Benchmarking across comparator cities is recommended to measure our financial management and community-based metrics like affordability.

Citizen response regarding source of funds for City services indicate half would support charging user fees to maintain or increase service quality and a third would support tax increases for this purpose. A bolder suggestion is to leverage the amenities that exist within the City by either selling off or investing in land and building assets or partnering to leverage value. This suggestion extends to under-utilized open spaces and parks where it is suggested that another goal around affordable housing could also be achieved.

The theme of fixing infrastructure is strongly supported. Citizens question whether we are stuck in a paradigm of lowering our debt first at all costs and regardless of the condition of our infrastructure? It is suggested that the City take advantage of current low interest rates and senior government focus on infrastructure redevelopment to improve roads, sewers, water and parks and recreation facilities. Regarding improvements to city infrastructure, 72% of citizen respondents would support an increase in taxes to improve city infrastructure through capital projects.

When asked what assets should get more tax dollars and where the corporation should focus future priorities, street and sidewalk repairs and maintenance, parks, open spaces, recreation facilities and storm water drainage topped the list.

### **What we do now**

In 2015 as part of the annual budget process, the City initiated benchmarking and reporting out on comparisons with other municipalities that offer similar services. Annually for a number of years, we prepare mandatory Financial Information Return statements that include benchmarking measures submitted to the Province of Ontario and also participate in a syndicated benchmarking exercise as one of many municipalities across Ontario.

The City's completion of the Asset Management Plan (AMP) is underway in order to extend its scope beyond linear assets (roads, water and sewers). It will provide the basis for further analysis regarding condition and life cycle of assets and assist with qualifying for senior government infrastructure funding. An inventory of land and buildings is also underway with analysis to evaluate surplus assets eligible for divestiture.

The City's current Financial Management Policy provides that new debt will not be utilized except for capital projects that are related to new services for residents. The City moved to a pay-as-you-go approach. Other aspects of the Fiscal Fitness Plan include the need to increase Reserve Funds, Maintain Affordable Service Levels, and Renew Infrastructure while balancing these aspects with the goal of maintaining Reasonable Tax Rates.

**Goal Statement:** Align City services and capital investment with citizen expectations and ability to pay.

<b>Strategies/Initiatives</b>	<b>Priority Actions</b>
<b>1. <i>Maintain reasonable tax rates</i></b>	Benchmark service levels and targets compared with similar municipalities using key performance indicators
<b>2. <i>Aggressively manage our assets</i></b>	<p>Complete the City's Asset Management Plan by 2022 to include all City-owned assets and update the 10-year capital plan</p> <p>Apply to senior government infrastructure programs</p> <p>Undertake capital infrastructure projects</p> <p>Evaluate options for leveraging city-owned land and building assets</p>
<b>3. <i>Foster Financial Sustainability</i></b>	<p>Review the City's Financial Management Policy</p> <p>Improve internal business processes across all departments</p> <p>Develop a Reserve and Reserve Fund Policy</p> <p>Build an Operating Contingency Reserve</p>
<b>4. <i>Grow and Diversify Revenues</i></b>	<p>Identify and actively pursue revenue, funding, sponsorship, user pay and other opportunities</p> <p>Develop a comprehensive Investment Policy</p>

<b>Success Indicators</b>
<p>(%) Municipal property tax per capita and per household</p> <p>(%) Property tax as a percentage of total revenues</p> <p>(%) Debt payment as a percentage of tax-based revenues</p> <p>(%) Reserve fund targets</p> <p>Annual reporting of grant funding</p> <p>Progress on Asset Management Plan</p> <p>Completion of financial policy reviews</p>

## **Strategic Priority – Corporate Excellence and Leadership:**

### **What did we hear**

While the citizen survey indicated that people are largely satisfied with City governance and services, they also identified several areas for improvement. Common themes include the following:

- Address customer service efficiency and effectiveness and find ways to motivate staff to achieve greater levels of customer satisfaction
- Reduce the silo mentality and enhance a more trusting and team approach within the administration and with Council
- Operate within the roles, responsibilities and governance processes assigned to each area of leadership and within existing policies
- Hold each other accountable in order to be more productive and show signs of continuous progress
- Council must be made aware of the need for change and in the manner in which it needs to be operating.

Employees expressed a need for more teambuilding activities, staff training and development opportunities, better internal communications and use of cross-functional and management-labour teams to achieve results. They are open to employee satisfaction surveys, customer satisfaction surveys and better on-line tools to assist in informing the corporation on areas for improvement in both employee and citizen engagement.

Citizens were also asked how they currently learn about City business and how they would like to learn. The 5 most common ways that citizens learn municipal news include radio and television, newspapers, word of mouth, social media and the city website. When asked how they would *like* to learn, they responded with on-line options, newspaper, radio and municipal publications. Citizens specifically want the City's information technology to be modernized and enhanced for better communication within and outside of Sarnia.

### **What we do now**

The Senior Management Team has initiated teambuilding activities and the corporation supports employee wellness activities through a core committee. The use of cross-functional teams is increasing and a labour/management working group has been formed for information sharing and feedback purposes. The One Team Sarnia initiative has been launched with formal and informal employee recognition, wellness initiatives, front-line customer service training and mid-level management training underway. Customer Service staff are working with employees to develop a Customer Service standard operating procedure to provide more consistent service delivery

across the organization. A refresh of the 1996 Employee Code of Conduct is underway.

Several upgrades to the City’s information technology infrastructure and operations stemming from the 2015 Information Technology Service Review are underway. Work has also commenced on the development of a corporate communications and engagement strategy to enhance the City’s communications both internally and externally.

**Goal Statements:** Focus on open and transparent government.  
Develop employees. Deliver service excellence.

<b>Strategies/Initiatives</b>	<b>Priority Actions</b>
<b>1. <i>Improve both internal and external communications</i></b>	<p>Develop a comprehensive corporate Communication and Engagement Strategy</p> <p>Provide more opportunities for citizen interaction and engagement</p>
<b>2. <i>Improve service delivery effectiveness and efficiency</i></b>	<p>Develop and implement a corporate customer service standard</p> <p>Implement the 2015 Information Technology Service Review</p> <p>Increase on-line service access and business process</p>
<b>3. <i>Focus on people and culture</i></b>	<p>Proactively promote the One Team Sarnia Culture across the organization</p> <p>Develop and deliver leadership, management and employee training programs</p> <p>Develop and implement a labour relations strategy</p> <p>Enhance employee health &amp; safety programming</p>
<b>4. <i>Establish a culture of continuous improvement</i></b>	<p>Conduct a review of human resources organization and function</p> <p>Engage employees to identify and define continuous improvement in service delivery</p> <p>Identify opportunities to implement energy efficient technology and practices in City buildings, transportation and operations</p>

<b>Success Indicators</b>
(%) Perceptions of customer service and business-friendly environment (#) Communications and engagement tools (%) Employee satisfaction and engagement  Complete corporate Communication and Engagement Strategy Progress on energy efficiency initiatives

## **Implementation, Monitoring & Reporting:**

### **Bringing the Plan to Action**

The Strategic Plan provides a framework for other City plans and initiatives and guides Council and staff in setting priorities, allocating resources and delivering results. This holistic approach is designed to ensure that over time, public funds in trust to the City are invested in a manner consistent with the vision and priorities established during a strategic planning process.

### **What did we hear**

During our consultations, we received good advice on how to implement the plan:

- Do at least one new technology initiative per year
- Create a list of potential projects that can be achieved over the next 5 to 10 years
- Collaborate with others to achieve goals

Building on this good advice, a series of processes will be developed for plan delivery, including tools to support implementation, communication, monitoring, review and reporting out.

### **Communication**

Communication is key to the success of strategic plan implementation. The plan will be shared with the community, staff, community partners and stakeholders. Communication will be an ongoing effort, with progress shared on a regular basis. Communication of the plan priorities and core values will assist staff in drawing clear connections to their role in the wellbeing and future of the community.



## **Progress Monitoring & Reporting**

An important element of the strategic planning process is measuring progress. We have proposed a number of success indicators to measure performance and allow Council and staff to evaluate and measure achievement.

Annual reports to Council will assist with resource allocation and inform the public of our progress. Cycling through implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting will provide Council with the opportunity to refine goals and priorities.