



# MUNICIPALITY OF ARRAN-ELDERSLIE

## Economic Development Strategic Plan



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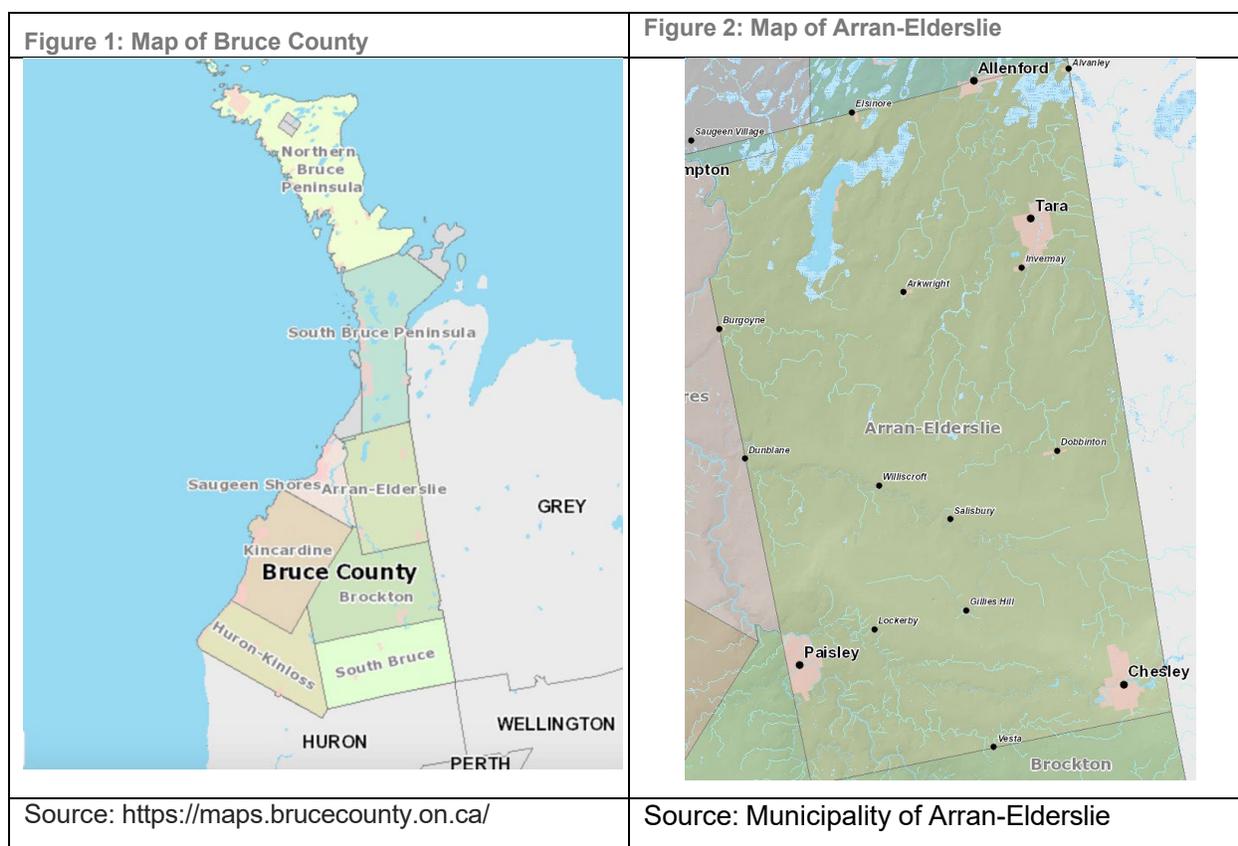
# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 A New Chapter

The Municipality of Arran-Elderslie, with a population of 7,173, is located in central Bruce County. The Municipality includes three small urban centres, Tara, Paisley and Chesley, small settlements and a large rural area.

Arran-Elderslie is one of eight municipalities and one of three in-land municipalities in Bruce County.

Arran-Elderslie is recognized for its natural beauty and active agricultural community. Arran Lake is located in the northwest corner of the Municipality and the Saugeen and Teeswater Rivers intersect in the community of Paisley. Lake Huron is to the west and Georgian Bay is to the east of the Municipality.



While there is no one accepted definition of economic development, it is typically described in terms of objectives. Economic development is focused on creating an environment that supports existing business, encourages new business creation, attracts new investment and improves residents' quality of life.

The Municipality hired its first Community Development Coordinator in 2019. The Municipality commissioned the development of its first Economic Development Strategic Plan in 2020. This plan will provide the framework for Arran-Elderslie's economic development efforts.



This strategic plan is expected to guide the Municipality for the next five years. It is intended to set clear and attainable economic development goals based on the economic opportunities, needs and constraints of the Municipality. The plan will balance the economic development goals with local resources. It will also incorporate metrics that can be used to measure progress towards the Strategic Plan goals.

### 1.2 The Strategic Planning Process

The strategic planning process was divided into three phases: research and analysis, consultation and strategy development. A steering committee including elected officials, business representatives and staff provided oversight and direction to the development of the Strategic Plan.

Figure 3: The Strategic Planning Process



The Economic Development Findings and Issues Report completed in October 2020 provided a thorough analysis of economic and demographic trends, literature, by-law and policy review along with a summary of the resident and stakeholder consultation. The Findings and Issues Report identified the issues, opportunities and considerations that framed the discussions of the strategic planning steering committee as they established the economic development strategic priorities. The five strategic priorities identified by the Steering Committee are the foundation of this Strategic Plan.



## 2 Strategic Priorities

Strategic Priorities are those areas of focus that matter most to Arran Elderslie’s economic development success over the next few years. These strategic priorities provide the bases for the goals, objectives and actions outlined in this strategy.

	<p><b>Increase capacity to compete</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring Arran-Elderslie is investment ready</li> <li>• Addressing business needs and make the case to invest in Arran-Elderslie</li> <li>• Branding and creating awareness of Arran-Elderslie and its communities</li> <li>• Incorporating Arran-Elderslie’s needs in the updated Bruce County and Arran-Elderslie’s Official Plans</li> <li>• Identifying opportunities for businesses and residents to fill the Municipality’s needs</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Prepare for Population Growth</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing the supply and diversity of residential dwellings</li> <li>• Resident attraction/workforce development</li> <li>• Identifying gaps in local economy for targeting attraction</li> <li>• Ensuring that the development of parks, trails, and recreation amenities keeps pace with population growth and contributes to an attractive environment for new residents and developers.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Support Business Attraction and Retention</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focusing on small business</li> <li>• Attracting new entrepreneurs</li> <li>• Leveraging Bruce Nuclear refurbishment opportunity</li> <li>• Exploring opportunities to engage and support agricultural sector</li> <li>• Promoting the high-speed internet and natural gas as differentiators</li> <li>• Tourism development tied to quaint downtowns, unique businesses</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Make Effective Use of Resources</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting collaboration and cooperation between community organizations and businesses</li> <li>• Leveraging Bruce County programs and regional organizations RTO7, OFA</li> <li>• Working with neighbouring communities</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Create Vibrant Downtowns</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Filling vacancies, and supporting downtown businesses.</li> <li>• Improving the appearance of the downtowns,</li> <li>• Implementing the CIP program</li> <li>• Developing measures to offset the impacts of the Paisley Teeswater Bridge construction</li> </ul>



### 3 Vision and Mission

The Vision Statement is a short phrase describing the desired economic development future that Arran-Elderslie is ultimately working towards. The Mission Statement is a one-sentence statement of what Arran-Elderslie does and why. Together the Vision and Mission statement provide a picture of the Municipality's economic development aspirations and the efforts to get to this desired state.

#### 3.1 Economic Development Vision



Arran-Elderslie is a distinct community with vibrant and attractive downtowns and a thriving agricultural economy. The Municipality provides real opportunity for entrepreneurs and a superior quality of life for residents.

##### **Why distinct community?**

Arran-Elderslie is distinct from most of its neighbours in terms of its geography, economy and population distribution. Further while there are population concentrations in Chesley, Paisley and Tara, the vision is that these areas and the rural population are one, cohesive and coordinated municipality.

##### **Why opportunity for entrepreneurs identified specifically in the vision?**

Arran-Elderslie will need to attract entrepreneurs in the coming years to replace those who are retiring and to fill gaps in the local area.

##### **Why is superior quality of life identified specifically in the vision?**

The Municipality faces significant competition in its efforts to attract new population. It needs to differentiate itself from its neighbours by the type and availability of housing, access to amenities, infrastructure (broadband, natural gas, etc.), activities/outdoor recreation, etc.

#### 3.2 Economic Development Mission



To attract, retain and expand Arran-Elderslie's population, businesses and services with a focus on building local economic development capacity, collaboration and supporting the Municipality's needs.

##### **Why do we need to expand the population?**

A large share of Arran-Elderslie's population is over the age of 55 and the relatively small share is under the age of 2. If Arran-Elderslie's population remains the same or declines slightly over the next decade, it will mean a sharp decline in the size of the workforce with a considerable number of older entrepreneurs and farmers exiting their businesses. The Municipality must grow at least modestly over the next decade, primarily by attracting younger workers and entrepreneurs/farmers, to ensure a strong economy. Population growth will also result in a larger tax base which will help support the various municipal amenities and services for residents.



### Why do we want to expand services?

We want to have as many services available locally as the market will support in order to help attract and retain population and help build thriving downtowns.

### Why do we focus on capacity and collaboration?

Arran-Elderslie is a small municipality. Its economic development potential is strengthened by building local capacity to support economic opportunities and population attraction and by engaging in partnerships where there we can identify mutually beneficial outcomes. Bruce County, RTO7, real estate agents and developers, agricultural groups, Chambers, and others can help Arran-Elderslie to expand its influence and mobilize their efforts to address its economic development goals.

## 4 Goals and Objectives

Goals, objectives and actions all play a specific role in the economic development strategic plan.

**Goals** are the broad end-state we want to achieve. They provide the direction for the strategy.

**Objectives** are the desired outcome that we want to achieve as a result of the goal. **Actions** are the specific, measurable steps required to achieve the goals and objectives. Together the goals, objectives and actions provide the detailed outline of what we want, what it will achieve and the specific steps to get there. The following section provides a summary of the goals and related objectives followed by the rationale and detailed actions.

		Goal	Objective
	1	<b>Build Capacity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access the resources to effectively engage in economic development activity.</li> <li>• Provide an attractive alternative to other jurisdictions.</li> <li>• Develop the tools and resources needed to effectively attract and retain investment and demonstrate a compelling value proposition.</li> </ul>
	2	<b>Population growth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand the local workforce to meet business needs.</li> <li>• Create market for local businesses.</li> <li>• Address the growing demand for residential development in the region.</li> <li>• Develop parks, trails, and recreation amenities to attract developers</li> </ul>
	3	<b>Business attraction and expansion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address retail and service gaps.</li> <li>• Leverage Bruce Power refurbishment activity.</li> <li>• Build on strengths of agriculture sector.</li> </ul>
	4	<b>Effective use of resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster greater collaboration with businesses, business associations and neighbouring municipalities.</li> <li>• Leverage regional programs and resources.</li> </ul>
	5	<b>Vibrant Downtowns</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve appearance of downtowns.</li> <li>• Provide incentives for investment in the downtowns.</li> <li>• Lessen the economic impact of the Paisley Teeswater Bridge Construction project.</li> </ul>



## 5 Action Plan

	<b>Goal 1: Build Capacity</b>
	<b>Strategic Objective:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop the tools and resources needed to effectively attract and retain investment and demonstrate the Municipality’s value proposition.</li> </ul>

Building economic development capacity for the Municipality starts with providing sufficient resources to implement the plan. Creating the Community Development Coordinator position was an important step for the Municipality. The economic development role will require financial support, ideally through a combination of municipal budget and economic development funding from economic development partners and other levels of government.

Providing economic development training and resources for staff, Council, community leaders and other interested stakeholders will help to establish a shared understanding of economic development fundamentals and programming to support the implantation of the strategic plan. The Municipality should begin by accessing the many resources and training programs available through Economic Developers Association of Canada (EDAC), the Economic Developers Council of Ontario (EDCO) and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA).

The supplementary document, Small Town Economic Development Resources provides a number of materials and checklists to assist Arran-Elderslie in compiling the data and tools typically used by economic development offices. The Investment Readiness Checklist provides an outline of the elements that Arran-Elderslie should assemble to ensure it is ready and able to meet the needs of existing businesses and prospective investors and effectively compete for businesses and residents. A list of the International Economic Development Council’s critical economic development data is also included in the document. Compiling and maintaining this data is an important component in ensuring Arran-Elderslie remains investment ready.

Online data searches are the primary source of information for many existing businesses and prospective investors. It is therefore critical that this information is available online and shared with key influencers such as Bruce County and the Bruce Nuclear Economic Opportunity Community.

It will be equally important to address the Municipality’s regulatory framework. It will be critical to ensure that Arran-Elderslie’s economic development vision and future growth needs are reflected in the Bruce County and Arran-Elderslie Official Plan updates.

A committee that combines Council and staff, local business and community leaders can play an active role in the implementation of the economic development strategic plan. The committee should work to proactively identify business needs, define business opportunities, make the case to invest in Arran-Elderslie and attracting people based on these opportunities. They will be important advocates for the strategic plan and can act as ambassadors for investment, providing their insights and first hand-experiences with prospective investors.

Arran-Elderslie has typically held a lower profile than the population centres of Paisley, Chesley and Tara. Future branding and marketing efforts should expand awareness of the Municipality of Arran-



Elderslie and position it as the home to these communities. Arran-Elderslie's marketing efforts should build on the many positive selling features identified during the stakeholder engagement efforts: the small, quaint and attractive towns and rural lifestyle, the 60 bridges that throughout the Municipality, the trail system and recreational opportunities, the affordable housing options and its proximity to major employers, waterfront communities and larger centres for major shopping and services. Marketing efforts should highlight new investment, enhancements in any of the investment-ready criteria and other economic development news to reinforce these positive messages.

Arran-Elderslie's rural inland setting offers an alternative to the waterfront activities in neighbouring communities and there is potential to expand the tourism product offerings building upon its small town, rural appeal.

### **Actions:**

- 1) Provide sufficient funds to implement the economic development strategic plan. Seek out opportunities to access additional funding sources to augment the economic development efforts.
- 2) Expand the economic development section of the Arran-Elderslie website to include IEDC's critical economic development data<sup>1</sup>.
- 3) Create and maintain a detailed online directory of available land and buildings including size, site servicing, zoning, ownership, pricing, transportation access, etc.
- 4) Compile a directory of funding and related support programs for prospective investors and existing businesses.
- 5) Establish an economic development committee to support the implementation of the economic development strategic plan.
- 6) Provide economic development training and resources for staff, Council, committee members, community leaders and associations.
- 7) Host a regular economic development forum for local and regional economic development partners, local business, elected officials, residents and other to discuss economic development initiatives.
- 8) Build Arran-Elderslie's municipal brand.
  - a) Position Arran-Elderslie as the home of Paisley, Chesley, Tara, the various hamlets and surrounding areas.
  - b) Establish the value propositions for retail and services, agriculture-related businesses, residential development and living in Arran-Elderslie. Develop an economic development marketing plan to showcase the downtowns and other assets.
  - c) Establish supporting community brands for Chesley and Tara.
- 9) Advocate for Arran-Elderslie's share of future residential and commercial development and supporting economic development policy framework as part of the Bruce County Official Plan.

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<sup>1</sup> A list of critical economic development data and a list of recommended website content are included in a supplementary report, "Small Town Economic Development Resources".



	<b>Goal 2: Population growth</b>
	<b>Strategic Objectives:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Address the growing demand for residential development in the region.</li><li>• Expand the local workforce to meet business needs</li></ul>

As of the 2016 Census, over 40 percent of the workforce in Arran-Elderslie were over the age of 55. That is likely closer to 45 percent as of 2020. Another fairly unique attribute of the workforce living in Arran-Elderslie is that a majority (excluding farmers) commutes out of the municipality each day to work in places like Owen Sound, Kincardine and Saugeen Shores. As a result, local businesses and farms in the municipality are competing with employers in a wider region even as the workforce is rapidly aging. Finally, a key objective in this strategy is the attraction of entrepreneurs to fill the demand for local services. It will be important to ensure there is a workforce living in the municipality to work for these new businesses.

The good news is the municipality has partners in the addressing of this objective. The Four County Labour Market Planning Board (FCLMPB) is an important source of regional workforce data and has a number of programs and services to address workforce needs in the wider region that apply to employers in Arran-Elderslie. The Municipality should work with the FCLMPB to access Arran-Elderslie specific and Bruce County data.

Bruce County recently launched a new workforce development and attraction strategy that outlines a series of specific actions to attract workers and population. The Jobs In Bruce initiative lists jobs available across the County.

Over the past three years, 2016 to 2019, the population of Arran-Elderslie increased by nearly five percent. Moving forward the municipality will need to grow at least at a moderate rate if it wants to ensure local businesses have the workers they need and to ensure new entrepreneurs are taking advantage of business opportunities in the region. The municipality is also a great place to retire, offering reasonable housing costs and access to a mix of services and amenities.

But there are challenges. Real estate developers can focus elsewhere as perceived margins are higher. It can be challenging to attract the construction workforce needed to work on new residential development areas. It will take a deliberate focus by the municipality working with partners to ensure there is an expansion of residential housing activity across Arran-Elderslie.

#### **Actions:**

1. Access and connect local businesses with the Four County Labour Market Planning Board (FCLMPB) programs and services to monitor and address workforce needs in Arran-Elderslie.
2. Use FCLMPB data or survey local businesses to review job postings data, access other sources of population and labour market information and remain current on trends in the Municipality.
3. Work with Bruce County to ensure Arran-Elderslie workforce needs are integrated into the workforce development and attraction strategy.
4. Develop the 'case' (value proposition) for living in Arran-Elderslie.



5. Promote the case for living in Arran-Elderslie through the Municipality’s website and other partner organizations.
6. Work with Bruce County to ensure Arran-Elderslie is well represented in its population attraction efforts.
7. Establish a local committee of real estate agents, construction firms and other interested parties to develop a plan to increase residential housing development in the Municipality.
8. Link job and employment websites with local residential listings services.
9. Develop a Trails Master Plan to guide future connectivity, recreation, and amenities as the Municipality expands. Set priority links between neighborhoods, parks, downtowns, schools, and natural areas; outline integrated trail and park design; and inform developers of infrastructure needs.

	<b>Goal 3: Business expansion and attraction</b>
	<b>Strategic Objectives:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address retail and service gaps.</li> <li>Leverage Bruce Power refurbishment activity.</li> <li>Build on the strengths of agriculture sector.</li> </ul>

Arran-Elderslie has three small but important commercial centres/downtowns. The vision focuses on ensuring these downtowns are home to the services that local residents need.

There is potential to attract entrepreneurs to fill gaps in local demand for goods and services. This will be an especially important objective moving forward as more and more small business owners retire. This entrepreneur attraction effort is not restricted to retail and personal services. If the Municipality needs entrepreneurs in construction/home renovation, transportation, and other sectors those should be part of the effort. Arran-Elderslie can work closely with the County to leverage the Business to Bruce program which is focused on attracting entrepreneurs to the region.

Bruce Power and its supply chain is and will continue to be one of the most important economic drivers across the region. Hundreds of Arran-Elderslie residents work at the plant in Kincardine and there are also suppliers to Bruce Power located in the Municipality. The Municipality should continue to participate in Bruce Power’s Economic Opportunity Committee and ensure committee members and other key influencers are regularly updated on Arran-Elderslie’s offerings.

Arran-Elderslie is home to a large farming sector. There are over 160 cattle ranching farms, over 110 crop farms, and a number of other farms with a mix of activities. In total there were more than 200 farms in the municipality with at least \$30,000 in annual revenue in 2019. Like most of Ontario there are a lot of smaller farms but Arran-Elderslie has a higher share of larger farms with over 560 acres compared to the province overall.

Like elsewhere, the farming sector is facing headwinds. The majority of farmers are over the age of 55 and most do not have a succession plan in place. The Municipality needs to determine if there is any role it can play to ensure the farming sector and agriculture processing remains a thriving part of the municipality’s economy in the years ahead.

There may also be opportunities to connect farmers with local residents and visitors through a farmers’ market or expanded agri-tourism activities. The Municipality should consult with local farmers, the Middlesex Federation of Agriculture and RTO7 to assess the potential for these and other efforts.



**Actions:**

1. Survey residents to determine what services they access outside the Municipality and what services they would like to access in their Municipality.
2. Support and participate in Bruce County’s entrepreneur attraction effort with opportunity identification and matching.
3. Establish a business visitation program, tracking trends and reporting on the issues and opportunities in Arran-Elderslie.
4. Identify a list of key economic development influencers and provide them with regular economic development updates including new properties, residential development, new investment in the Municipality, and servicing enhancements.
5. Continue to participate in the Bruce Power Economic Development and Innovation Initiative. Identify opportunities to expand this participation and explore more opportunities for Arran-Elderslie.
6. Engage with the Bruce County Federation of Agriculture to discuss opportunities to integrate the agriculture sector into its people and business attraction efforts and assess the feasibility of a municipal farmers’ market.
7. Work with RTO7 to identify and foster tourism product development opportunities in agri-tourism and the downtowns.

	<b>Goal 4: Effective use of resources</b>
	<p><b>Strategic Objectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster greater collaboration with businesses, business association and neighbouring municipalities.</li> <li>• Leverage regional programs and resources.</li> </ul>

Collaboration and cooperation are important contributors to successful economic development programs. They are particularly important in smaller communities such as Arran-Elderslie where there is are limited staff, budget and partners.

The Municipality should serve as the resource centre for local economic development efforts. It should provide regular updates to Council, businesses and other stakeholders on the economic development initiatives of Arran-Elderslie and its partners.

The two Chambers of Commerce, a downtown Improvement Association, the Paisley Artscape committee, a Spruce the Bruce Committee are just some of the organizations working on economic development related efforts. Arran-Elderslie should convene meetings with these organizations on a semi-annually basis to discuss matters of common interest and to identify opportunities to collaborate on shared services and joint marketing efforts. The Municipality should also work with these organizations to host municipal-wide networking, training, promotions and other activities to encourage greater business to business collaboration across the Municipality.



Bruce County has developed a suite of economic development programs and activities including the Spruce the Bruce and Business to Bruce programs. It will be important for Arran-Elderslie to work co-operatively with the County, to leverage the existing programs and to participate in the County’s updated economic development planning to ensure that all Arran-Elderslie businesses can benefit from existing and future County economic development programming.

The Municipality should also seek out opportunities to leverage regional and provincial organizations and programs. The Bruce Grey Simcoe Regional Tourism Organization (RTO7) provides programs and funding to support tourism product development, strategy, training, data analysis and marketing. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture has dedicated economic development staff and is an important source of information and advice on engaging, supporting expanding the local agricultural sector.

The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs is an essential partner in economic development in rural communities. The local representative can provide a variety of supports including downtown revitalization programming, facilitation and strategy development, business consultation and data analysis.

Arran-Elderslie should also continue to share best practices and identify areas for sharing resources, aligning economic development efforts and partnering on economic development programs and activities with neighbouring municipalities.

**Actions:**

1. Build and maintain collaborative relationships with:
  - a) Community based organizations (Chambers, DIA, Artscape etc.)
  - b) Bruce County’s economic development and planning departments
  - c) Four Counties Workforce Planning Board
  - d) Neighbouring economic development staff and committees.
2. Utilize OMAFRA’s rural economic development, demographic and economic data and downtown revitalization programs.
3. Leverage RTO7 product development and marketing programs and offerings to support tourism activity in Arran-Elderslie
4. Work with the Bruce County Federation of Agriculture to understand and address the issues and opportunities facing the Municipality’s agriculture sector.

	<p><b>Goal 5: Vibrant Downtowns</b></p> <p>Strategic Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the downtown occupancy rates</li> <li>• Support building and public space improvements and investment</li> <li>• Lessen the impact of the Paisley-Teeswater Bridge Construction Project</li> </ul>
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Arran-Elderslie has three distinct downtowns, in Paisley, Chesley and Tara, each with its own character and business mix. The list of available properties is typically one of the most frequently visited sections of an economic development website. The Municipality should work with local



realtors and property owners to assemble a comprehensive inventory of available buildings with detailed information on the property and real estate agent or owner contact information to support the buildings' sale or lease.

Inviting residents and local businesses to tour the vacant buildings will engage building owners and operators and encourage them to prepare their buildings for public viewing. The tour provides an opportunity to engage community leaders and residents in a discussion about the potential uses of the various buildings and create greater awareness of the opportunities in the Municipality.

A downtown revitalization forum would also put a focus on the potential for the downtowns function and business activity. The forum would provide an opportunity to learn about the communities' visions for their downtowns, to learn about the programs and supports available from OMAFRA and Bruce County, discuss best practices in small town economic development and identify programs to animate and increase the economic activity in the downtowns.

Providing pop-up business space in a vacant downtown property can bring greater awareness of the potential of an individual building and also provide a platform for a fledgling business to test their idea while minimizing their start up costs and risk.

Downtowns are undergoing fundamental shifts in their function and these changes are expected to continue as a result of COVID-19's economic impacts. Arran-Elderslie will want to ensure that the new Official Plan provides the maximum flexibility to support a variety of commercial, retail, institutional and residential uses including mixed-use development to support a vibrant downtown business and residential mix.

The Municipality's Community Improvement Plan (CIP) provides the framework for incentives to encourage façade improvements, sign improvements, building restoration and accessibility. These will be important tools in encouraging private investment in the downtowns. The Municipality should provide the funding to put this tool into place. It will also be important to provide funding to create the supporting materials to promote the program and provide the program criteria and supporting materials.

Establishing Urban Design Guidelines will assist potential CIP participants by establishing design expectations and ensure applications are reviewed efficiently and consistently.

The construction of the Paisley Teeswater bridge is expected to create business disruption and significantly impact traffic patterns for an extended period of time. Arran-Elderslie should prepare an assessment of the scale and scope of the impact of the construction project to inform decision makers and advocate for supports to mitigate the economic impacts and business disruption during the construction. It should establish a marketing and communications and wayfinding strategy in consultation with the Paisley residents and business owners and Bruce County staff to support the businesses and services that will be impacted. Arran-Elderslie can learn from the experiences of communities like the City of Kawartha Lakes, Municipality of Chatham-Kent and Municipality of Centre Wellington to support the continued business activity during the construction.

#### **Actions:**

1. Provide an inventory of available properties and buildings on the municipal website including information on property size, building size, on-site parking, applicable zoning and annual municipal taxes. (see Goal 1, Action 3)



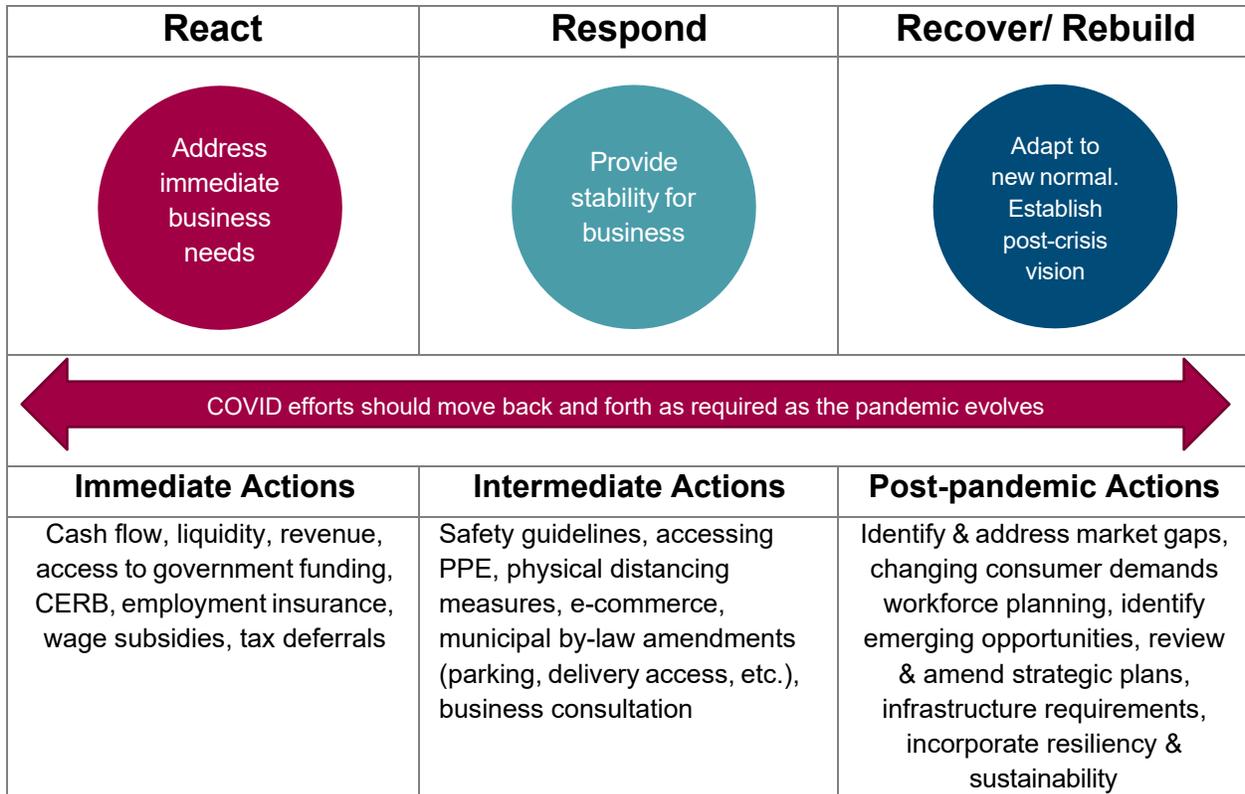
2. Organize a tour of empty buildings in the downtowns to bring attention to the opportunities and options available in the downtowns.
3. Explore the potential to host pop-up business space in vacant properties in the downtowns.
4. Collaborate with Bruce County planning staff during the update of the County's Official Plan to create a policy framework that provides maximum flexibility for use of existing buildings for a variety of commercial, retail, institutional and residential uses including mixed-use development. (see Goal 2, Action 6)
5. Provide consistent annual funding for the Community Improvement Plan's financial incentive programs with initial emphasis on the facade improvement, sign improvement and building restoration and accessibility enhancements programs. (see Goal 1, Action 1)
6. Prepare urban design guidelines to establish the design expectations for the downtowns and assist in administering the incentives program in an effective and consistent manner.
7. Develop a marketing, communications and wayfinding strategy in response to the Paisley Teeswater Bridge construction in collaboration with Paisley residents and business owners and Bruce County staff.



## 6 COVID-19 Considerations

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global health crisis. It has also caused significant disruptions and challenges for businesses in Arran-Elderslie. This section provides an outline of business needs and the role of the Municipality in supporting the business community to react, respond and recover from the economic impact.

Figure 4: The Economic Recovery Continuum<sup>2</sup>



### React

#### Reliable Information

In the immediate and intermediate phases of an economic crisis, businesses need to ensure their survival. The Municipality can play an important role providing accurate and timely information to help businesses navigate the overwhelming volume of material aimed at them.

Businesses are seeking reliable and up to date information on:

- Regulations affecting their operations
- Financial programs including grants, loans as well as tax and utility deferrals
- Measures to protect staff and customers by industry

<sup>2</sup> The Recovery Continuum is adapted from the Community Toolkit for Economic Recovery and Resiliency from the



- Business continuity assistance (e.g. e-commerce and digital marketing, delivery programs, patio programs)

## Respond

### Shop Local

Small businesses in particular are facing unprecedented challenges due to COVID-19. Jurisdictions are supporting shop local programs through a variety of tactics including facilitating shared sales platforms and marketing campaigns.

Tourism efforts have also shifted to shop local programs in response to current travel restrictions. RTO7 has assisted local tourism businesses by offsetting the costs of personal protective equipment (PPE) and physical distancing requirements. Arran-Elderslie can support local tourism-related businesses by ensuring they are aware of these programs.

### Digital Literacy

Programs such as Digital Main Streets are helping small downtown businesses across Ontario to adapt digital platforms and e-commerce systems to sustain their businesses. It is widely expected that consumer behaviour will change as a result of the pandemic and these businesses must be prepared to incorporate digital practices beyond the pandemic.

### Business Retention and Expansion

Business retention and expansion efforts will be important to assess the status of local businesses and track their evolving needs. Downtowns are expected to struggle as long as physical distancing is necessary. Efforts to revitalize and reanimate the downtowns will be critical elements of recovery of downtown businesses. Many jurisdictions have modified their existing CIP programs to ensure downtown businesses remain viable during the pandemic.

## Recover

### Business Gaps and Workforce Development

In the medium to longer term there will be a need to identify gaps in local business services, address emerging workforce development needs and assist businesses to adapt to changes in consumer behaviour and demand. Supporting and attracting entrepreneurs and small businesses will help to fill the business gaps. Supporting small business resiliency will help businesses to prepare for the new and emerging business conditions.

The Municipality's role in all of these areas should be as a conduit to information; tracking changes to local businesses, identifying business needs, advocating for the appropriate services and programs and informing local businesses of the variety of programs and initiatives that can help to recover and rebuild post COVID-19.

### Infrastructure Investment

Senior levels of government are expected to provide infrastructure funding to support economic renewal. For example, in November 2020 the federal government announced plans to extend high-speed internet to 98% of Canadians by 2026. Also in November 2020, Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology (SWIFT) network announced \$16 million in funding for broadband upgrades in Bruce County, including Arran-Elderslie, with federal and provincial government support.



Funding for infrastructure projects such as water and waste water expansions, roadwork and recreation facilities are also common tactics used by the federal and provincial governments to restart economic activity in response to an economic recession and the Municipality should consider and prioritize potential infrastructure projects that will support its economic recovery efforts.

### **Resident and Entrepreneur Attraction**

COVID-19 resulted in a surge in remote workers. This shift to remote work and a desire by some individuals to leave more densely populated areas in the GTA and surrounding areas has already resulted in increased demand for housing throughout Bruce County. This increased demand presents a real opportunity to grow the population and expand Arran-Elderslie's market if there is sufficient housing to accommodate the demand. Addressing the need for additional residential development will be an important factor in achieving the Municipality's population growth goals.

The resident attraction efforts can also be tied with the efforts to fill business gaps through entrepreneur attraction.