



## Administrative Report

**To:** Warden MacDonald and Members of Essex County Council

**From:** Sandra Zwiers, MAcc, CPA, CA, Chief Administrative Officer

**Date:** Wednesday, March 5, 2025

**Subject:** Strategic Plan Implementation Update

**Report #:** 2025-0319-CAO-R03-SZ

---

### Purpose

This report provides Essex County Council with an update on the progress of Strategic Plan implementation. This annual report will highlight key achievements and highlight priorities for the upcoming year.

### Background

On February 10, 2023, following a competitive RFP process, the County engaged StrategyCorp Inc. to lead the development of the County's first ever Strategic Plan. Through extensive consultation with Council members, staff, local municipal partners and community stakeholders, the process culminated in the approval of the 2024-2027 Strategic Plan on December 20, 2023.

The Strategic Plan is founded on three strategic goals:

- **Working as Team Essex County**
  - Scaling Sustainable Services through Innovation
  - Focusing "Team Essex County" for Results
  - Advocating for Essex County's Fair Share
- **Growing as Leaders in Public Service Excellence**
  - Being an Employer with Impact
  - A Government Working for the People
  - Promoting Transparency and Awareness

- **Building a Regional Powerhouse**

- Providing Reliable Infrastructure for Partners – Maintaining and expanding critical economic and community infrastructure
- Supporting Dynamic and Thriving Communities Across the County – Ensuring community development initiatives meet evolving needs
- Harmonizing Action for Growth
- Advancing Truth and Reconciliation

In February, 2024, Administration met internally with the assistance of StrategyCorp Inc. to launch the implementation phase. Leaders developed an extensive list of initiatives aimed at actioning the goals and directions of the Strategic Plan. A series of meetings were held to refine the action item list and the Warden was invited to review and comment on the Implementation Roadmap prior to its finalization.

The County of Essex Strategic Plan (2024-2027) serves as a guidepost for Council and staff, supporting decision-making, service delivery, and organizational priorities. The Implementation Roadmap and associated action items provide Administration with specific tasks that will move the County towards fulfilling its vision and mission.

## **Discussion**

One year into implementation, significant progress has been made in integrating the Strategic Plan into daily operations. The Implementation Roadmap establishes clear priorities, accountability, and realistic timelines for Administration. To align efforts across the organization, all directors held rollout meetings with their teams, integrating the Strategic Plan into their own departmental objectives. Project tracking software has also been implemented to support real-time updating of action item progress, collaboration and communication among team members and a framework for public reporting.

## **Team Member Response to the Strategic Plan**

---

In 2023, the County conducted an Employee Engagement Survey to gather workforce insights. Areas requiring the most room for improvement related to teamwork, innovation, and senior leadership skill in communicating a clear vision and values for the County.

The Strategic Plan has been a valuable catalyst in providing not only a framework to tackle the engagement survey feedback but also a springboard to deeper conversations with team members about how each of us fit in to

the bigger County of Essex service delivery picture. As an example, a meeting of Sun Parlor Home leaders was recently held to raise awareness of the Strategic Plan and seek team member input on how we can increase SPH's profile in the Implementation Roadmap and action items. The team's level of engagement and quality of idea generation was inspiring. While we have much still to do, team members across the County have expressed positive feedback about the Strategic Plan and their ability to individually and collectively contribute to the County's success.

## **2024 Lessons Learned**

---

The first year of implementation coincided with significant turnover in senior leadership. The volume of action items initiated and achieved is commendable given many leaders were working to overcome learning curves at the same time they were advancing strategic priorities with their teams.

Managing progress quickly became a challenge during the year. Some initiatives relied on collaboration across multiple departments and involved many team members. Leveraging excel and email to manage action items was cumbersome and time consuming. With the help of IT, project tracking software was sourced and implemented. The Executive Assistant to the CAO populated the software with the complete list of action items and created key performance indicator fields to support metric tracking and reporting. Working closely with the Communications team, templates were developed for annual public reporting to Council.

Keeping the Strategic Plan top of mind was also part of the learning experience in the first year of implementation. From County Council, to the Senior Leadership Team, and through to our front-line teams, we learned we must be intentional about tying our efforts back to the Strategic Plan. Carving out time each week to maintain our tracking software has been a key takeaway. Monthly one on one meetings between the CAO and Directors now include dedicated time to address challenging action items to ensure monitoring is ongoing and momentum is maintained.

In January 2025, a dedicated Strategic Planning meeting was held with the Senior Leadership Team. The meeting provided an opportunity to debrief the past year's efforts, highlight team successes and realistically plan ahead for the coming year.

## **2024 Strategic Plan Accomplishments**

---

**Appendix A** to this report highlights the action item accomplishments for 2024. Also included in the appendix are action items that were commenced in 2024 and will carry forward into 2025. An estimate of the percentage of

completion is also listed. For initiatives that will be ongoing for the duration of the term of council, the percentage of completion has been set at 50% to indicate we are halfway through the term at the time of this report.

Overall, Administration is currently tracking 70 tasks, with a status breakdown of:

- 19 completed;
- 42 in progress; and
- 9 ongoing.

## **2024 Highlights**

---

Each of the three Strategic Plan Goals witnessed achievements in 2024. Noteworthy accomplishments include:

### **Goal 1: Working as Team Essex County**

Master plans and strategic plans are pivotal to focusing us for results. A severely challenged healthcare system combined with extreme growth pressures required EWEMS to reassess their long-term strategies. A Master Plan update was completed in 2024 and presented to Council in early 2025. The Essex County Library also undertook a strategic planning exercise in 2024. The ECL Board approved the plan in the fall and ECL leadership and team members are well underway with implementation and public rollout.

Advocating for Essex County's fair share was also the focus of several action items in 2024. County Council and members of the Senior Leadership Team engaged in a number of advocacy opportunities during the year. Through participation at regional subject matter expert tables, agency/board/commission meetings and provincial delegations, Essex County's voice was heard on matters related to healthcare, housing, infrastructure and emergency response.

### **Goal 2: Growing as Leaders in Public Service Excellence**

Our greatest asset is our team members. Responding in a meaningful and productive way to the Employee Engagement Survey feedback was critical during 2024 to moving the Essex County culture needle. Compensation concerns were addressed through market surveys and collective agreement bargaining to advance wages to the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile. This work will continue in 2025.

The Employee Engagement Committee, with the support of the Communications Division, created multiple opportunities for team members to interact, be recognized and build cross-departmental relationships.

Empowering leaders to be more accessible to team members and addressing role and responsibility clarity issues were also priorities during the year.

Efforts were made to improve the County's transparency and public awareness through: modifications to the Administrative Building access to improve public accessibility to County Council Meetings; initiation of a comprehensive policy review to tackle outdated corporate and administrative policies; a review and update of the Procedure Bylaw to incorporate County Council feedback; initiation of a consolidated delegation of authority bylaw review and continuation of records and information management program work.

### **Goal 3: Building a Regional Powerhouse**

As the region continues to grow, establishing a strong financial and capital foundation will be key to the County's future success. The development of a comprehensive Long-Term Capital Expansion Program accompanied by a formal Reserve & Reserve Fund Policy in 2024, sets the stage for a major infrastructure response from the County. The completion of the County Road 42/43 roundabout is a prime example of the County's ability to deliver critical infrastructure to support the movement of people and goods to the benefit of the entire region.

A resilient regional economy is also underpinned by sound land use planning and the County Official Plan update, completed in 2024, provides the framework to support both housing and commercial expansion while maintaining respect for our environment. A development charges background study was also initiated during the year and will be presented to County Council and the public for consideration in 2025.

Advancing Truth and Reconciliation and growing relationships with our First Nations partners made progress in 2024. Through innovative work in the Communications Division, an on-demand Truth and Reconciliation education program was rolled out to all staff. Senior leadership team members engaged with Caldwell First Nation executives to establish a service delivery agreement for emergency medical services and Council members and staff attended a number of workshops and conferences to expand our awareness and understanding of First Nation culture.

### **Looking Ahead to 2025**

---

Recent political events both at home and abroad create uncertainty for Essex County. The Strategic Plan will undoubtedly serve to focus our attention and keep us moving forward in a positive direction.

Leaders across the organization will be encouraged to continue to champion the vision, mission and values set out in our Strategic Plan and empower their teams to achieve completion of prioritized action items.

Through front-line feedback and pulse checks with County Council, Administration will ensure the Implementation Roadmap remains relevant and achievable.

### **Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications associated with this staff report.

### **Consultations**

Senior Leadership Team

### **Strategic Plan Alignment**

<b>Working as Team Essex County</b>	<b>Growing as Leaders in Public Service Excellence</b>	<b>Building a Regional Powerhouse</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☒ Scaling Sustainable Services through Innovation</li> <li>☒ Focusing “Team Essex County” for Results</li> <li>☒ Advocating for Essex County’s Fair Share</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☒ Being an Employer with Impact</li> <li>☒ A Government Working for the People</li> <li>☒ Promoting Transparency and Awareness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☒ Providing Reliable Infrastructure for Partners</li> <li>☒ Supporting Dynamic and Thriving Communities Across the County</li> <li>☒ Harmonizing Action for Growth</li> <li>☒ Advancing Truth and Reconciliation</li> </ul>

### **Recommendation**

That Essex County Council receive report number 2023-0305-CAO-R02-SZ, Strategic Plan Implementation Update as information.

## Approvals

Respectfully Submitted,

*Sandra Zwiers*

Sandra Zwiers, MAcc, CPA, CA, Chief Administrative Officer

<b>Appendix</b>	<b>Title</b>
A	Strategic Plan Implementation 2024 Status Update
B	Strategic Plan Slide Deck Presentation