



## Administrative Report

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

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

**Date:** Wednesday, December 3, 2025

**Subject:** County of Essex 2026 Advocacy Priorities

**Report #:** 2025-1203-CAO-R12-SZ

---

### Purpose

The purpose of this Administrative Report is to assist County Council in identifying advocacy priorities for 2026 that align with the County of Essex Strategic Plan (2024–2027) and coincide with 2026 budget deliberations. These priorities will guide coordinated advocacy efforts at the provincial and federal levels and through municipal partnerships, ensuring that the County advances issues critical to regional growth, sustainability, and service delivery.

### Background

The County's Strategic Plan emphasizes "Strong Advocacy" and "Meaningful Partnerships" as central to achieving fair and valuable regional programs and services. Advocacy priorities should reflect shared municipal interests, emerging challenges, and opportunities for funding and legislative support.

Historically, advocacy has focused on election cycles and delegation opportunities at AMO and ROMA conferences. While these efforts have raised awareness, a formalized process for setting annual priorities will strengthen alignment with budget planning and resource allocation.

The recommendation from Report [#2025-1105-LLS-R56-DM](#) directed Administration to provide Council with a report on potential advocacy priorities for 2026 during budget deliberations. This approach ensures that advocacy priorities are synchronized with financial planning and resource commitments.

## **Discussion**

Essex County continues to experience significant growth, infrastructure pressures, and evolving social and environmental challenges. Advocacy priorities for 2026 have been identified through:

- Consultation with local municipal CAOs
- Review of the Strategic Plan
- Consideration of provincial and federal policy directions
- Lessons learned from previous advocacy efforts

These priorities represent issues where external funding or legislative action is critical to achieving regional goals. They also position the County to leverage opportunities at AMO, ROMA, WOWC Queen's Park Day, and other forums, while strengthening partnerships with local municipalities and senior levels of government.

### **Proposed 2026 Advocacy Priorities for Council Consideration**

---

Based on issue identification principles and alignment with the Strategic Plan, Administration recommends Council consider the following advocacy priorities:

#### **1. Improving Mobility and Roadway Capacity**

**Rationale:** Historic growth in Essex County is resulting in traffic congestion and safety issues. Generational investments in our region are only adding to the limitations of our road network. The County's long-standing commitment to prudent financial management in support of its assets will not be sufficient to address the reality of the increased costs associated with grade separated intersections. A municipal and provincial partnership approach is needed to fully unlock the economic and housing potential of our region.

**Desired Outcome:** Provincial commitment to partner in funding the design and construction of certain interchange and corridor improvements that are of regional and provincial significance.

#### **2. Ensuring Safe, Affordable Homes as a Foundation for Sustainable Community Growth**

**Rationale:** Housing affordability remains a critical issue across Essex County. Municipalities require provincial and federal investment to expand housing stock and related infrastructure. A large, urban, one-size fits all model will not address the unique housing and accessibility challenges in rural communities. Adding to the housing challenge are the environmental

impacts of severe storms and flooding that are characteristic along our expansive shoreline. With the recent completion of our Regional Affordable Housing Strategy, the County of Essex is set to take the next step towards implementation. The property tax base alone will be insufficient to support the revitalization and much needed expansion of social housing and critical social service supports – keys to addressing the affordable housing gap.

***Desired Outcome:*** Provincial and federal commitments to increased funding for affordable and supportive housing developments.

### **3. Improving Access to Health Care and Paramedic Services Modernization**

***Rationale:*** Essex County's extreme southwestern geography presents real barriers to attracting and retaining healthcare professionals. As a result, residents experience constraints accessing primary and urgent care services. Additionally, emergency paramedicine, a key service delivery function for the County, is equally challenged by a limited talent pool and increasing demand. Optimizing the deployment of EMS resources is a key component of an effective and efficient service. Operational changes to the Central Ambulance Communications Centre and funding for expanded team-based clinics will improve health outcomes.

***Desired Outcome:*** Provincial support for team-based care models and modernization of EMS dispatch systems.

### **4. Advancing Environmental Stewardship**

***Rationale:*** Essex County sits within the Great Lakes Basin, where groundwater and surface water systems are highly interconnected. Contaminants entering the water table can impact tributaries and nearshore ecosystems. The known and unknown existence of legacy oil and gas wells threatens the safety of our environment and our residents. Shoreline erosion and water quality are also threats facing Essex County. Continued funding is needed for remediation and emergency preparedness as well as shoreline stabilization and clean water initiatives.

***Desired Outcome:*** Extension of provincial grant programs and technical support for municipalities to support emergency preparedness and shoreline protection.

## 5. Economic Development and Trade Stability

**Rationale:** Essex County's manufacturing and agri-food sectors face competitive challenges and tariff threats. Strategic investments in advanced manufacturing, agri-food innovation and green technologies will drive growth and innovation and mitigate the impacts of cross-border trade challenges.

**Desired Outcome:** Federal and provincial programs to support advanced manufacturing, green technologies, and trade advocacy.

**Note:** Council should select **two to six priorities** for focused advocacy efforts. Limiting the number of priorities ensures resources are used effectively and avoids diluting the impact of individual initiatives.

### Advocacy Opportunities

---

- ROMA Conference – January 2026
- WOWC Queen's Park Day – April 2026
- AMO Conference – August 2026
- Ongoing meetings with MPs and MPPs
- Public engagement through social media and County website

### Next Steps

---

Administration will finalize advocacy materials and key messages for each priority and prepare delegation requests for the ROMA and AMO conferences that align with approved priorities. Staff will confirm participation in WOWC Queen's Park Day and coordinate logistics for travel and booth setup. Administration will also schedule meetings with local MPs and MPPs to share the County's priorities and work with Communications to amplify these priorities through the County's website, social media channels, and media outreach throughout the year.

### Financial Implications

Participation in advocacy events will require modest financial resources for travel, accommodation, and materials. Estimated costs are as follows:

- ROMA Conference (January): \$3,000–\$4,000 (registration, travel, hotel for Warden and CAO)
- WOWC Queen's Park Day (April): \$2,500–\$3,500 (travel, hotel, booth materials, optional promotional items)
- AMO Conference (August): \$4,000–\$5,000 (registration, travel, hotel for Warden and CAO)

These costs can be funded within the existing Council and Administration budget allocations for conferences and advocacy initiatives.

## Consultations

In preparing this report, Administration consulted with the Chief Administrative Officers of the County’s seven local municipalities to identify shared priorities and ensure alignment with regional needs. Input was also gathered from the Senior Leadership Team.

Administration reviewed advocacy priorities identified by the Western Ontario Wardens’ Caucus (WOWC). This collaborative approach ensures that the proposed priorities reflect both local and regional interests and position Essex County to leverage collective advocacy opportunities throughout 2026.

## 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><input type="checkbox"/> Scaling Sustainable Services through Innovation</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Focusing “Team Essex County” for Results</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Advocating for Essex County’s Fair Share</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Being an Employer with Impact</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A Government Working for the People</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Promoting Transparency and Awareness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Providing Reliable Infrastructure for Partners</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporting Dynamic and Thriving Communities Across the County</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Harmonizing Action for Growth</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Advancing Truth and Reconciliation</li> </ul>

### **Recommendation**

That Essex County Council receive report number 2025-1203-CAO-R12-SZ, County of Essex 2026 Advocacy Priorities as information and direct Administration to integrate the endorsed priorities into the County's Advocacy Strategy and 2026 Advocacy Calendar.

### **Approvals**

Respectfully Submitted,

*Sandra Zwiers*

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

<b>Appendix</b>	<b>Title</b>
N/A	N/A