



# **Middlesex County Plan for COVID-19 Economic Resiliency**

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected economies across the world. No local community or key sector has avoided impact. While new programs continue to be introduced and implemented across all levels of government, businesses throughout Middlesex County are attempting to understand these supports and best manage in the short-term, while evaluating the long-term impacts resulting from the pandemic.

The Plan for Economic Resiliency has been developed by the Middlesex County Economic Resiliency Task Force (MEDTF). Lead by the Director of Economic Development, Middlesex County will be responsible for the implementation of the plan with support from, and in partnership with, Task Force members and leaders representing key sectors and business support organizations across the region.

The following outlines the collaborative activities that will be undertaken by the County to help the local business community adjust, rebuild, and re-energize the regional economy. As this economic crisis is unprecedented, the plan will act as an evolving road map for responding and adapting as circumstances change.

This Economic Resiliency Plan will further serve to inform Middlesex County's Economic Development Strategic Plan, which will be updated in the fall of 2020.

# Phase 1: Immediate Response

In concert with the Province of Ontario, Phase One of the Economic Resiliency Plan is focused on protecting the community and informing local business. Concentration will be on the health and well-being of our community by committing to follow the recommendations of public health officials.

Furthermore, this Phase will help identify the immediate needs, threats and opportunities of local business, in order to identify ways to support them through this closure period so that they may reopen when it is appropriate to do so. Phase One will therefore, remain in effect until the Declaration of Emergency has been lifted.

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## Action: Create and Continually Update Repository of Business Supports

Status: Ongoing

A repository of business supports offered by all levels of government will be created immediately following the Declaration of Emergency. This repository will be updated, for the benefit of the local business community, as often as new program information becomes available.

Link to [Middlesex County COVID-19 Business Resources & Supports](#)

## Action: Launch a Collective COVID-19 Website

Status: Complete

A comprehensive website offering information related to lower tier municipal supports, community services, business resources, and health updates during the COVID-19 pandemic will be established to act as a collective resource for Middlesex County residents and investors.

Link to the [Middlesex County COVID-19 Webpage](#)

## Action: Formation of Middlesex County Economic Resiliency Task Force

Status: Completed

Lead by the Director of Economic Development and presiding Warden, a task force of members representing key sectors and organizations supporting business in the County, will be formed as a response to the pandemic. The Task Force will remain in place throughout the phases of this plan.

Link to the [Middlesex County Economic Resiliency Task Force Terms of Reference](#) unanimously approved by County Council on April 14, 2020.

## **Action: Create and Promote Business Support Campaigns**

**Status: Ongoing**

Acting as the both the Destination Marketing Organization and the Department of Economic Development for the region, Middlesex County under it's Visit Middlesex and Invest in Middlesex brands will create and invest in local campaigns and contests including #Middlesex Strong, #VisitList, and Dine Local to encourage local buying during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Link to [Visit Middlesex](#) and [Invest in Middlesex](#) social media campaigns and [Dine Local Map](#).

## **Action: Survey Local Businesses Across All Sectors and Municipalities**

**Status: Completed**

In order to identify challenges and opportunities to support local business, COVID-19 Business Impact Surveys will be disseminated by the Middlesex County Department of Economic Development.

To this end, a Phase One Survey was launched in March 2020. A Phase Two Survey was launched one month later, concluding on May 1, 2020.

## **Action: Report Challenges and Opportunities to all Levels of Government**

**Status: Completed**

Results of the Middlesex County Phase One and Phase Two COVID-19 Business Impact Surveys will be compiled and presented as Summary Reports and disseminated to all respondents, Middlesex County Council, as well as all local Members of Provincial and Federal Parliament.

In addition, local survey results will be combined with those of other municipalities in Western Ontario and disseminated by way of a collective report on Business Impacts throughout the region.

Link to [Phase One Middlesex County COVID-19 Business Impact Results Summary Report](#).

Link to [Phase Two Middlesex County COVID-19 Business Impact Results Summary Report](#).

Link to [Phase One Western Ontario Warden's Caucus COVID-19 Business Impact Summary Report](#).

## **Action: Participate in Regular Calls/Initiatives with Key Industry Associations**

**Status: Ongoing**

Co-Chairs and members of the MERTF will participate in regular calls and initiatives with key industry associations and political leaders to collect up-to-date information to share with local industry and to elevate local concerns to champion efforts aimed at creating meaningful recovery support programs.

## **Action: Support Workforce Development**

### **Status: Ongoing**

The MEDTF will continue to monitor, inform and support the efforts of the Middlesex Workforce Development Partnership in implementing its Strategic Plan for 2020 in the wake of COVID-19.

Link to the [Middlesex Workforce Development Partnership Strategic Implementation Plan for 2020](#)

## **Action: Research & Study Recovery Response Plans; Identify Best Practices**

### **Status: Ongoing**

Members of the MEDTF will seek out best practices garnered from similar disasters experienced around the world. The goal of this action is to identify transferable practices that can inform plans for supporting the resiliency of the Middlesex County economy.

## **Action: Local Media and Public Communications**

### **Status: Ongoing**

Co-Chairs of the MEDTF will maintain communication with local media and utilize the expertise of Middlesex County's communications team to deliver clear and consistent messaging to, and in support of, area businesses.

## **Action: Work with Local and Regional Partners to Host and Share Online Networking Opportunities and Webinars on Topics Relevant to Managing COVID-19**

### **Status: Ongoing**

Working together with local and regional business organizations, the MEDTF will promote and/or host online networking sessions and webinars on topics relevant to managing COVID-19 with input from the business community.

Link to upcoming [webinars](#)

## Phase 2: Re-opening and Retention

Phase Two of the Economic Resiliency Plan focuses on a watchful and staggered approach to Ontario relaxing its emergency measures and reopening the economy. In this phase, public health and workplace safety will remain a top priority, while balancing the needs of our business community.

The key business focus will be on stabilizing the local economy through retention – putting effort towards supporting local businesses as they re-open, and maintain operations during this time.

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### **Action: Share Re-opening Guidelines and Protocols for Business Permitted to Re-open**

**Status: In Progress**

Share re-opening guidelines, programs and protocols, as they are announced, with local businesses through the Department of Economic Development's established communication channels.

Link to [Invest in Middlesex Newsfeed](#) for the latest in re-opening announcements.

### **Action: Develop and Share Sector Specific Best Practices**

**Status: Ongoing**

Serving as the Destination Marketing Organization for Middlesex County, develop and disseminate Experiential Tourism in a virtual format to showcase industry best practices and encourage niche tourism opportunities.

Identify and include protocols and plans used by industry for working through and/or reopening following the pandemic.

Access to the Middlesex Experiential Tourism Toolkit can be requested at [info@visitmiddlesex.ca](mailto:info@visitmiddlesex.ca)

Identified best practices and protocols linked to [Middlesex County Business Resources and Supports](#).

### **Action: Update All Government Levels on Continued Activities of the Economic Resiliency Task Force**

**Status: Ongoing**

The Middlesex County Economic Resiliency Task Force meets on a regular basis in order to report on and share the impacts that COVID-19 is having on local business. Minutes of these minutes are being shared publicly and directly with Middlesex County Council, and Members of both Provincial and Federal Parliament, upon approval by the Members of the Task Force.

## **Action: Work with Sector Partners to Understand and Address Local Workforce Impacts**

**Status: Ongoing**

Middlesex County will consult, support and work together with employment service providers and key stakeholders to identify and create programming that respond directly to local workforce impacts.

Link to the [Elgin Middlesex Oxford Workforce Development Board Report on Worker Impacts](#)

## **Action: Work with Local and Regional Stakeholders to Champion and Support Internet Infrastructure Installations and Enhancements**

**Progress: Ongoing**

Middlesex County will continue to identify and champion high-speed internet installations and enhancements where needed. Furthermore, Middlesex County will consult, support and work together with internet service providers and key sector stakeholders to secure funding and agreements to see these projects take place.

## **Action: Identify Necessary Adjustments to Economic Development Strategic Plan and Reallocate Resources to Implement Changes**

**Status: Pending (Fall 2020)**

As part of the Economic Development Strategic Plan process scheduled for Fall 2020, review, design and implement programs that will provide valuable insight into the County's business community following COVID-19 including:

- an inventory of businesses
- up-to-date workforce data
- the stability of key sectors
- the entrepreneurial appetite of business owners in Middlesex County
- available properties and opportunities for existing businesses to relocate and/or expand
- communication channels to best share information with local businesses
- opportunities for new investment

Link to the [2014-2019 Middlesex County Economic Development Strategic Plan Summary](#)

# Phase 3: Rebuilding

Following Provincial health guidelines, Phase Three will be focused on the rebuilding and long term sustainability of the Middlesex County economy. In this phase, emphasis will shift from economic stabilization to implementation of the newly developed Middlesex Economic Development Strategic Plan as a means to encourage investment, job creation and enhanced economic sustainability through innovation and diversification.

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## **Task Force and Local Businesses to Provide Input on How To Build Business Resiliency Against Future Crises Through Mitigations Including, But Not Limited to, the Following Examples:**

### **Action: Remote Working Strategies**

**Status: Pending**

Advocate for continued installations to support remote work strategies in Middlesex County. Create a campaign to promote well-serviced settlement areas of the County as hubs for remote workers.

### **Action: Local Business Collaboration**

**Status: Pending**

Find ways to encourage collaboration among businesses in Middlesex County in order to strengthen partnerships and strengthen regional supply chains.

### **Action: Local Business Diversification**

**Status: Pending**

Provide data to encourage diversification and improved sales strategies in order to increase chances for the long-term sustainability of Middlesex based businesses.

### **Action: Investment Attraction**

**Status: Ongoing**

Create and implement digital and targeted lead generation campaigns that encourage investment in sector development and fill gaps in the existing business mix.