

An aerial photograph of Guelph, Ontario, Canada, taken at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and dark blue. In the foreground, a modern transit line with a glass and metal structure runs across the frame. The city below is illuminated with streetlights and building lights, showing a mix of residential and commercial buildings. A large, modern high-rise building is prominent on the right side of the image.

# Economic Development and Tourism Strategy 2022-2026

Distinct, resilient, and  
bold, **Guelph** is a centre  
for innovation, creation,  
and community.



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# Introduction

At the City of Guelph, our employees are working to enhance the economic conditions in Guelph, support resilience, and bring about solutions to local business challenges. The **2022-2026 Economic Development and Tourism Strategy** will set the stage to direct the department's efforts over the next five years and support the functions of economic development, tourism and the Guelph Junction Railway (GJR). This plan aligns with Guelph's Community Plan and the City's Strategic Plan, particularly around the pillar of Powering our Future, and will guide and support COVID-19 economic recovery for the city.

Industry cluster development, visitor experience, workforce, and marketplace identity are key themes highlighted through the strategy and refreshed in 2023, along with a more robust review in 2025 to account for updated Census of Population information and ongoing pandemic recovery. The detailed research and analysis supporting reports for this strategy are found in the accompanying Community Competitive Assessment Report and the Industry Cluster Analysis Report.

Completion of the strategy is with great thanks and appreciation to the many partners, stakeholders, businesses, and community members who provided time and input into its creation. Significant research, analysis, and engagement activity work was conducted with the support of the Global Investment Attraction Group, Dr. Rebecca Sutherns of Sage Solutions, and Resonance Consultancy.

Distinct, resilient, and bold, Guelph is a centre for innovation, creation, and community.

Goal 1: Expand support for existing businesses			Goal 2: Attract targeted investment				Goal 3: Champion an innovative and entrepreneurial ecosystem			
<b>Priority 1.1</b> Implement a formalized business expansion and support program.	<b>Priority 1.2</b> Support industry-led tourism product development.	<b>Priority 1.3</b> Build awareness of industry cluster support in decision making.	<b>Priority 2.1</b> Proactively target lead generation activities.	<b>Priority 2.2</b> Strategically market Guelph's industry clusters.	<b>Priority 2.3</b> Leverage the Guelph Junction Railway infrastructure to grow City revenues.	<b>Priority 2.4</b> Develop a sport, group, and conference tourism plan.	<b>Priority 3.1</b> Partner to support the entrepreneurial ecosystem.	<b>Priority 3.2</b> Define an approach to guide private investment in the Guelph Innovation District.	<b>Priority 3.3</b> Grow a robust "Buy Local Guelph" initiative.	<b>Priority 3.4</b> Celebrate the success of diverse Guelph entrepreneurs.

## Measuring impact and achievement: key performance indicators

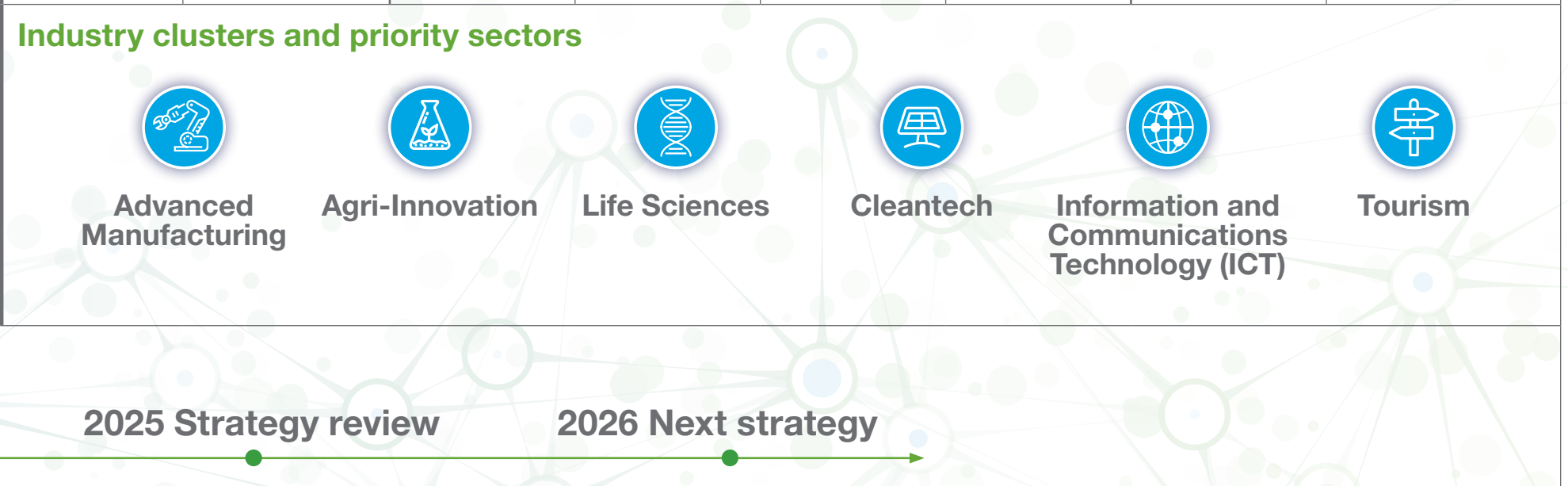
- **Business outreach** – the number of businesses pro-actively connected with to provide supports and service to meet business needs.
- **Business support and development** – measuring the programming, initiatives, activities and services provided to advance business growth.
- **Investment attraction** – determining the success of programming and services that attract new business interest and investment into the city.
- **Marketing and promotions** – measuring the various channels and means of connecting with target audiences.
- **Service excellence** – measuring the ability to deliver appropriate services that meet the needs of business in the most appropriate way.
- **Operational** – measuring how we utilize available internal networks and support other organizational departments.
- **Key projects** – measuring the special initiatives work that enhances and supports but is not part of the core division functions.

## Continued review and evaluation



# Tourism Strategy 2022-2026

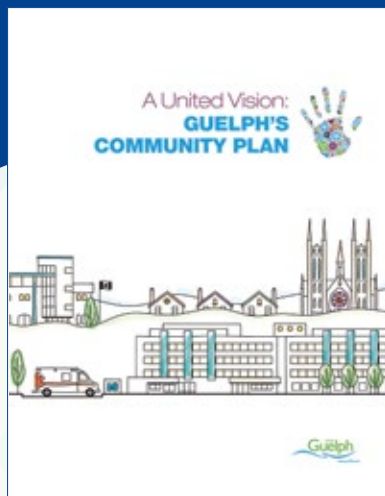
<b>Goal 4: Advance talent attraction and skill development</b>		<b>Goal 5: Build a must-see visitor destination in Ontario</b>				<b>Goal 6: Enhance Guelph's unique brand for business, talent, and visitors</b>	
<b>Priority 4.1</b> Unify and support workforce development organizations through Grow Guelph.	<b>Priority 4.2</b> Engage private sector, education, and workforce leaders to collaborate and address immediate and long-term workforce needs.	<b>Priority 5.1</b> Implement the Municipal Accommodation Tax.	<b>Priority 5.2</b> Curate destination experiences.	<b>Priority 5.3</b> Enhance placemaking throughout the city.	<b>Priority 5.4</b> Enhance wayfinding and visitor services assets.	<b>Priority 6.1</b> Create a marketing strategy that conveys the "Guelph experience" and value proposition.	<b>Priority 6.2</b> Develop a revised destination marketing plan in conjunction with partners.



# Guided by the community's vision

This strategy has been informed by [A United Vision: Guelph's Community Plan](#) which articulates the vision of the community, and [Guelph. Future Ready: City's Strategic Plan 2019-2023](#). The Economic Development and Tourism (EDT) Strategy is the result of this extensive community engagement, research, and plan scan work, as well as targeted engagement with Guelph's business community and support ecosystem. In addition to these two guiding documents Guelph has [27 plans](#) which deal with economic benefit and inform EDT's work. EDT has a role in informing other City work when it overlaps with developing the strong and diverse economy envisioned in Guelph's Community Plan.

## Guelph's Community Plan



**Guelph's Community Plan is built upon sustaining meaningful relationships and creating value for residents, businesses, and visitors by investing in a shared, overarching vision for Guelph.**



## City's Strategic Plan 2019-2023

The City's Strategic Plan, with a core vision that we will be Future Ready, is a far-reaching mandate that envisions an inclusive, connected, prosperous city where we look after each other and our environment. The directions are grounded by the core values that influence everything we do: integrity, service, inclusion, wellness and learning.





**Powering our future** – Contribute to a sustainable, creative and smart local economy that is connected to regional and global markets and supports shared prosperity for everyone. City of Guelph Strategic Plan

## 2022-2026 Economic Development and Tourism Strategy

Armed with clear and focused direction from the strategic work noted above, this strategy was further informed by respected, professional expertise in economic development and tourism; local, regional, and global best practices; input from several City of Guelph departments and input from courageous and bold community leaders.

### Additional EDT plans and reports that have informed this strategy include:

- DestinationGUELPH: A community-based tourism strategy, driving economic development (2016)
- Guelph Junction Railway (2017-2019 Strategic Plan)
- Guelph Junction Railway (By-Law No.1 – Organizational By-Law)
- Prosperity 2020 – Economic Development and Tourism Strategy (2010)
- Shareholder Declaration of the Corporation of the City of Guelph Regarding Guelph Junction Railway Limited (2015)
- The Corporation of the City of Guelph: GJR Railway Assessment – AECOM (2019)

### Informed by the work that came before us:

In November 2008, Guelph City Council committed to the development of a ten-year Economic Development and Tourism Strategy for Guelph — Prosperity 2020. At the time of its development, Prosperity 2020 supported the City of Guelph’s vision of being “the city that makes a difference”, and the strategic goal of having “a diverse and prosperous local economy.” This strategy led the delivery of the economic development and tourism services between 2010 and 2020 in a coordinated approach with our local business, government, and tourism support partners. Over the course of Prosperity 2020’s implementation, Guelph became a community recognized for its fast and diverse population growth, well performing labour force, and progressive business support networks. The ten-year implementation plan put in place a number of foundational tools and partnerships from which the 2022-2026 EDT Strategy continues to build on and enhance.

# Engagement

Stakeholder engagement activities to support the Economic Development and Tourism Strategy were completed in 2019 and early 2020, interrupted by the global COVID-19 pandemic and continued again in 2021. The engagement work was completed separately for economic development and tourism audiences to ensure key themes and opportunities raised were targeted and relevant to stakeholders. Participation and guidance was provided by the Guelph Economic Development Advisory Committee (GEDAC), and Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC).

Initial engagement work in 2019-2020 was completed by Global Investment Attraction Group and Sage Solutions consultants. Engagement was sought from community and business stakeholders, business support agencies and Council advisory committees; specific to Guelph's economic priorities, the business community's challenges, aspirations and opportunities.

## **Engagement activities undertaken between November 2019 and February 2020 included:**

- Three round table sessions for business stakeholders
- Online survey open to Guelph businesses
- 20 key business and community leader interviews
- Cross-departmental meetings with City staff
- Internal meetings with department staff
- Sessions with each the Downtown Advisory Committee and GEDAC

Modified engagement activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic were conducted by Resonance Consultancy in 2021, with tourism stakeholders, business service organization partners and Council advisory committees for economic development and tourism.

## **Engagement activities undertaken in July and September 2021:**

- One round table session with tourism industry stakeholders
- One presentation and engagement session for business service organizations
- Internal meetings with department staff
- Two presentation and engagement sessions with the GEDAC and the TAC

Input provided via the spectrum of stakeholder, business, partner, and Council committee engagement has informed the strategy and provided additional perspectives to the extensive year of listening the City conducted in completion of Guelph's Community Plan.

# Economic Development and Tourism department

## Divisions

The recently realigned department includes the functions of economic development, tourism, and the Guelph Junction Railway and provides a new opportunity to drive prosperity through united work for the city.



**Economic Development** – We make it easy to do business in Guelph. Whether it's choosing a site, finding local economic data, growing your business and entering new markets, or making connections, our expert team is ready to help. We provide a suite of programs and services to support business expansion and re-location, and are the resource for property development, business promotions, and partnerships.



**Guelph Junction Railway** – The City of Guelph has owned the railway since 1908 which operates 38.6 kilometres of track running from the Guelph Junction near Campbellville to Guelph's northeast industrial park, connecting with the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Canadian National Railway. This City asset directly supports over 20 businesses with transportation of goods and many more indirectly through transloading services.



**Tourism** – Stewarding the Guelph story for visitors and residents. Our expert team fosters a robust and well-connected stakeholder community through engagement, facilitation, and coordination. We provide destination development and marketing, tourism business support, and visitor services.

## Economic Development and Tourism's Advisory Committees of Council

The department has two advisory bodies that play an important role in the implementation of this strategy.

### Tourism Advisory Committee

This committee provides strategic input and advice to staff on matters pertaining to destination development and tourism service delivery. Made up of representatives of the accommodation, food and beverage, attractions, transportation, arts and culture, festivals and events, sports, retail, and conference services as well as the Downtown Guelph Business Association.

### Guelph Economic Development Advisory Committee

A refreshed terms of reference has been created for this committee that will provide the division with strategic guidance, support and input on economic development program development and effectiveness.

The roles of these two committees will also be reviewed in the 2023 strategy refresh to explore opportunities to better align the department's advisory services.

# What's ahead – trends and influences

International and national social, political, economic, and technological changes and trends will continue to impact the environment for the conduct of economic development, tourism, and railway operations in Guelph. This overview provides context for Guelph's new five-year economic development and tourism strategy. While we continue to feel the impacts of COVID-19 in our community and around the globe, recovery is on the horizon. This difficult time for communities for local entrepreneurs and businesses across all industry sectors will be with hope and resilience as we look to the future envisioned by Guelph's community.



## Economic growth

Especially in the current context of COVID-19, but also over the past decade, in the wake of the global recession, the levels of global economic growth have generally been lower. Growing nationalism and protectionist principles over international trade, investment and technology have raised concerns and are affecting the global climate for business. As an open, internationally oriented country with a relatively small population, these developments are of consequence to Canada. Local strategies must consider mitigating, countering, and adapting to these consequences.

## Innovation and entrepreneurship

Innovation and entrepreneurship have become a central economic development focus and a high priority for the federal and provincial governments. Most government funding is directed to collaborative regional initiatives, which are private sector led and driven. The federal government has launched multi-year innovation programs and strategies for artificial intelligence, Superclusters, Smart Cities, clean technology funding and procurement. Already benefiting from built connectivity to federal programming, Guelph should continue to build marketplace identity and relationships with other levels of governments to fuel innovation and business growth.



## Technology

Workplaces and the nature of work are being impacted by the pace and adoption of technological change — businesses are being disrupted, and new business models have emerged. Further, destinations must adjust as visitor expectations for technologically driven experiences have also explicitly grown regarding conferences and events. These tech trends were considerably accelerated as society and businesses adapted to the COVID-19 global pandemic. The impact on sectors has varied due in part to a sector's ability to adjust to public health orders and adopt technological solutions or leverage online opportunities; recovery will be different for each industry sector as some, like Information, Communications and Technology, lead the return to pre-pandemic economic activity levels while sectors like Tourism may take longer.



Guelph should continue to build marketplace identity and relationships with other levels of governments to fuel innovation and business growth.

### Workforce

Talent and workforce challenges are among the high priority areas for well-coordinated attention now that Canada has reached a point where more people are reaching the age of 65 than entering the workforce. This means that the workforce's growth will largely depend on immigration, though increased workforce participation by women, BIPOC, seniors, and persons with disabilities is also vital. Also, increased efforts to support businesses in dismantling systemic racism and other bias from the workplace to support full participation for BIPOC, women, LGBTQ2S+, and others are essential to ensuring “an economy that empowers us”.

### Climate change

Chief among today's societal challenges is climate change. Internationally and nationally, government and corporate climate change and environmental initiatives are moving towards greater sustainability, energy-efficient buildings, zero-emission targets, alternative energy sources, and carbon dioxide and pollution reductions. Environmental risks are of particular concern to governments and businesses. Guelph has established leadership credentials through its Community Energy Initiative and other notable energy and environmental initiatives.

### Collaboration

Guelph is associated with and continues to benefit from collaborations such as Next Generation Manufacturing Canada, Our Food Future, the Innovation Corridor, the Ontario Food Cluster, and the Municipal Innovation Exchange. Partnerships such as Grow Guelph are other platforms for supporting ecosystem collaboration amongst business service organizations and include the Business Centre of Guelph-Wellington, Downtown Guelph Business Association, Guelph Chamber of Commerce, and Innovation Guelph, as well as others.





## Placemaking

Placemaking brings together planning, urban design and asset management practices with the intention of creating public spaces that improve user experience and promotes well-being. Investment in placemaking assets can be a distinguishing factor to drive investment into our economy and attract talent and visitors. For Guelph, the transformation of the downtown is a fundamental component of Guelph's overall long-term sustainable city-building vision. Over the implementation of this strategy, the City will be making significant infrastructure investments in the Downtown, both to support anticipated new growth and to replace existing, aging infrastructure.



## Land development

Long-term planning and applying a strategic approach in Guelph's ability to appropriately match industry needs with available inventory will remain significant and critical to continue to attract investment. Guelph has had success with the first two phases of the Harlon Creek Business Park. The final phase being brought online within the course of this strategy will do much to address the intermediate demand within the area. Notably, over the next five years, there also exists unique land development opportunities as part of the Guelph Innovation District to align industry cluster-driven objectives. Guelph will need to be creative in leveraging this land asset as part of its value proposition and position within the Innovation Corridor.

# Guiding principles

Five guiding principles serve as a **framework** to structure the development and implementation of the strategy:



## **Cluster-focused**

Pursue opportunities that support industry cluster growth. Decades of economic research has demonstrated that industry clustering is a key component of innovation and economic growth. Strategic activities undertaken through this strategy should seek to identify emerging, and support established local industry clusters.



## **Opportunity for all**

Use an equity lens to guide economic development and tourism efforts. Cities and companies that are destinations for talent are welcoming to all — regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, or immigration status. Support should be considered for inclusive and accessible business programming and placemaking efforts that are reflective of Guelph's diversity.



## **Collaborative spirit**

Engage private and public partners to build Guelph's marketplace image and address obstacles. It's the role of City government and economic development officials to serve as the backbone organization for collaboration to tackle large picture economic challenges. Partnerships through this strategy should be aligned to ensure that the actions taken by individual actors serve the city's broader priorities.



## **Data-driven**

Effectively and consistently use data to help guide decision-making. Data should be used to measure Guelph's economy, but also drive innovation, predict, and prescribe for the future and define how we serve our visitors and businesses. The pursuit of good data and insights is invaluable in supporting our partners and measuring the effectiveness of our goals.



## **Continuous learning**

Encourage ongoing training and improvement among City leadership, staff, and partners. As conditions change, stakeholders will need to adapt. Guelph's economic development and tourism strategic actions are designed with continuous iteration and improvement in mind and should be seen to serve as stepping stones in our processes, policies, and people practices.

# Industry clusters and priority sectors

Guelph's industry cluster and sector-in-focus approach is centered on three existing industry clusters and three sectors of focus for targeted development of cluster strengths and a specific recovery lens in the case of tourism. Clusters and sectors benefit from:

- the presence of world-class academic and research centres
- a high-quality talent pool
- connective infrastructure and community
- accelerators and incubators
- access to capital
- quality of living

## What defines an industry cluster?

An industry cluster is a geographic concentration of interconnected businesses, supply chain linkages and associated ecosystem supports that can be measured and compared to other geographic areas. To be a defined industry cluster, the sector must reflect a comparative economic strength that is stronger than the national or regional average strength in that industry sector (measured by location quotient modelling).

## Guelph's established industry clusters — a snapshot

The following reflect three defined industry clusters in Guelph.

### Advanced Manufacturing

Guelph is home to Conestoga College's motive power trades campus which includes trade and skills training in automotive, truck and coach, heavy equipment, recreational vehicles and benefits from proximity to Next Generation Manufacturing Canada the Federal Supercluster for advanced manufacturing.

Guelph is home to 290 businesses in the advanced manufacturing cluster.

### Agri-Innovation

Guelph is home to national reaching accelerators driving innovation across the agri-tech and food industry such as Bioenterprise Canada. The University of Guelph, known as Canada's food university, is internationally recognized as the centre of excellence in agri-innovation, bio-science, nutritional science, and food science.

Guelph is home to 450 businesses in the agri-innovation cluster.





### **Life Sciences**

University of Guelph is also an internationally recognized centre of excellence in bio-science. This sector is supported by a strong supply chain in professional services.

Guelph is home to 40 businesses in the life sciences cluster.

## **Priority sectors**

While the following industry sectors are not yet defined industry clusters, they are demonstrating competitive advantages and rapid growth. In the case of tourism, they require specific support, which will drive economic opportunities for the city.



### **Cleantech**

Guelph is home to Alectra's Green Energy and Technology Centre, driving green technology innovations and solutions. Also driving work in this sector is Our Energy Guelph, a commitment to use and manage energy differently.

Guelph is home to 180 businesses in the clean technology sector.



### **Information and Communications Technology (ICT)**

With identified strengths in specialized talent, this sector is growing and taking advantage of the city's proximity within the Innovation Corridor.

Guelph is home to 160 businesses in the ICT sector.



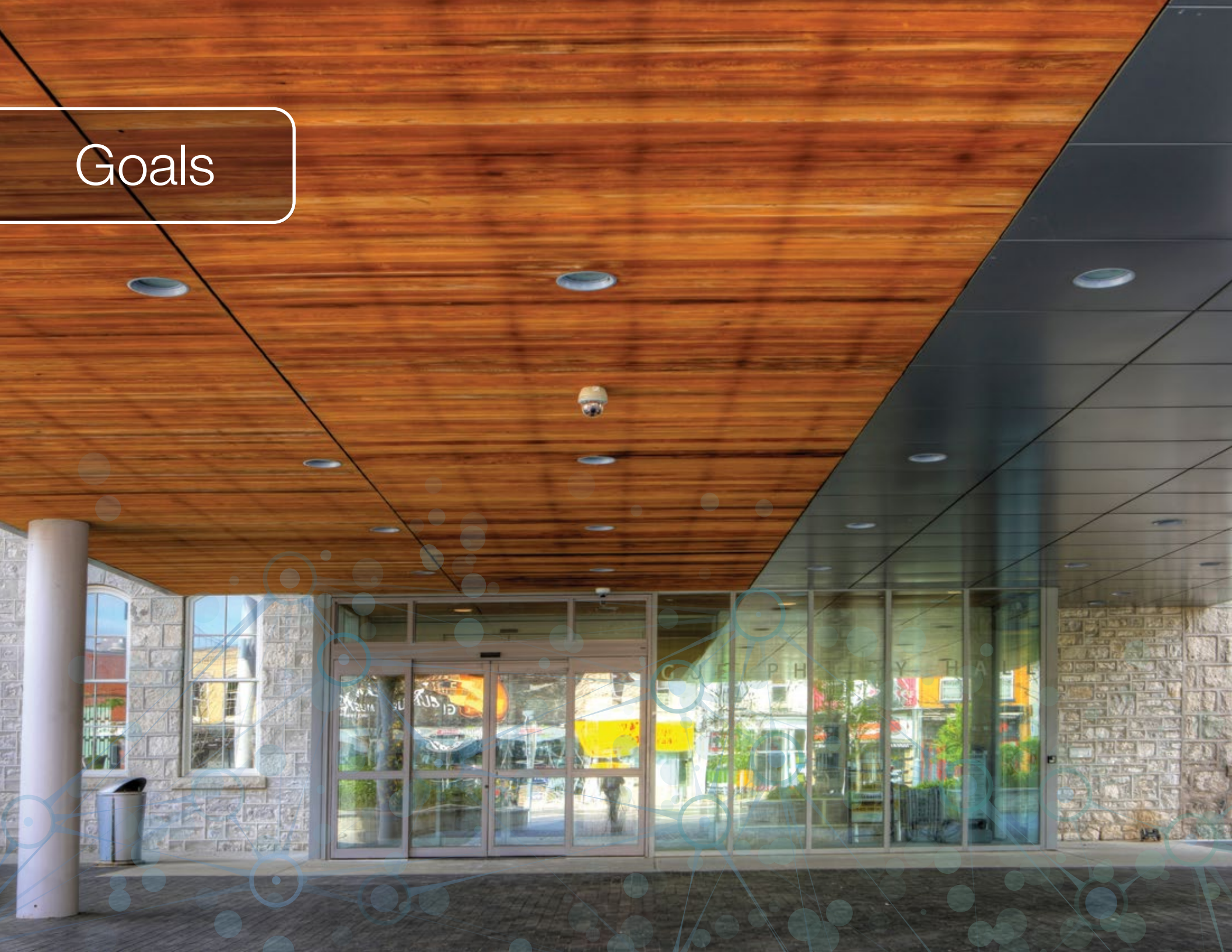
### **Tourism**

While all industry sectors and many businesses have experienced unprecedented revenue losses and interruptions due to COVID-19, the tourism sector businesses were particularly impacted and will require tailored programming support to guide recovery.

Guelph is home to 450 businesses in the tourism sector.

The strategy defines further programming, tactics and activities that will guide the advancement of these industries to support growth and investment. The data review projected for 2022 will enhance the foundational understanding of the above industries, the competitive advantages for each, and target opportunities for the city to leverage.

# Goals



# Goal 1: Expand support for existing businesses

Guelph can play off its identified strengths by supporting its large and many small businesses in established clusters and sectors of focus. Supporting these business strengths requires targeted programming to collect local business intelligence and track broader market and consumer trends and influences. The City must broaden, formalize, and measure business and partner engagement. Efforts will be needed to improve understanding of industry cluster assets to leverage federal and provincial programming and promotional opportunities.

## The evidence:

- Guelph has identified competitive advantages in advanced manufacturing, agri-innovation and life sciences.
- Guelph has priority sectors that are poised for growth including cleantech and information and communications technology.
- Guelph is further developing national expertise in emerging business models such as circular, social, and cooperative.

## Priority 1.1: Implement a formalized business expansion and support program.

Through further tailoring business retention and expansion activities, the City can support existing businesses while simultaneously demonstrating Guelph's economic competitiveness to attract new business and business growth opportunities.

### Actions:

- Partner to create industry cluster working groups to define cluster assets, performance, growth opportunities, and challenges (example: supply chain needs, emerging target markets, and marketing opportunities).

- Establish a business visitation program that identifies expansion opportunities, barriers to growth, workforce, supply chain needs, and connectivity opportunities to the Guelph Junction Railway (see priority 2.3).
- Establish an employment survey program to obtain vital business intelligence and analysis to identify potential industry trends and report key findings.
- Establish the City of Guelph as the backbone for administering the existing Grow Guelph program to coordinate and collaborate on-the-ground business support programming formally.

### Partner considerations:

Federal and provincial ministries and entities, Business Centre Guelph-Wellington, Guelph Chamber of Commerce, Innovation Guelph, 10C.

## **Priority 1.2: Support industry-led tourism product development.**

There is an opportunity to leverage local products within placemaking and destination marketing initiatives to enhance visitor expectations of Guelph and to provide a unique “Made in Guelph” experience. Guelph has already taken essential steps in this direction but can do more to highlight the products and services produced in the city.

### **Actions:**

- Establish a joint working group of the Tourism Advisory Committee and Guelph Economic Development Advisory Committee members to inform how to promote, expand, and support Guelph-to-Guelph tourism product and experience development (may include additional industry-specific representation).
- Increase awareness of and support for communities of practice that facilitate network connections and enhance Guelph’s visitor identity.
- With the implementation of the Municipal Accommodation Tax, amplify product development opportunities through financial support.

### **Partner considerations:**

Travel and Tourism Agencies Committee, Guelph Economic Development Advisory Committee, TAC, Business Centre Guelph-Wellington, Downtown Guelph Business Association, Guelph Chamber of Commerce, Regional Tourism Organization 4.

## **Priority 1.3: Build awareness of industry cluster support in decision making.**

The City must be targeted and deliberate in supporting industry cluster development projects through approval processes, policies, bylaw revisions and infrastructure projects.

### **Actions:**

- Establish regular learning opportunities to educate staff and Council on market trends and influences on Guelph’s economy.
- Increase economic development and tourism engagement in major infrastructure projects and policies directly or indirectly impacting local businesses.
- Establish formalized data-sharing opportunities between economic development and tourism, other departments and external stakeholders to better inform economic intelligence in policy, planning decisions and bylaw development.

### **Partner considerations:**

City staff, provincial ministries and agencies.

# Goal 2: Attract targeted investment

Guelph has a strong value proposition for business investment owing to its geographic location, vibrant downtown, access to talent, research expertise and daily rail service. Recent industry leading initiatives like Our Food Future has also led to new market interest for Guelph as a community that embraces and drives progressive social and circular business models. Guelph must be able to clearly articulate local investment opportunities and build relationships with targeted audiences in order to continue to attract investment that supports industry clusters.



## The evidence:

- Guelph is located along the Innovation Corridor, the largest tech cluster in North America, with more than 15,000 tech companies, including 5,000 plus startups, and nearly 300,000 employees in high-tech industries.
- The University of Guelph, Office of Research oversees over \$160 million research enterprise across seven colleges, with linkages to the regional campus at Ridgetown and 15 research centres.
- Guelph Junction Railway providing daily rail and transloading services is a unique offering for mid-sized Ontario communities and attractive to businesses that move and produce goods.
- The Our Food Future project positions Guelph and Wellington County as a place where people, ideas, and technology unite to build Canada's circular food economy. Initially funded through the \$10 million Infrastructure Canada's Smart City Challenge, the initiative provides a template for other sectors to follow in fields like cleantech and advanced manufacturing.

## **Priority 2.1: Proactively target lead generation activities.**

Increasing Guelph's ability to match industry needs and available land inventory appropriately will remain significant and critical to attracting investment. Relationship building with landowners and site selection contacts are an essential aspect of city-partner relations and must be understood as a high economic development priority.

### **Actions:**

- Establish an inventory of promotable land opportunities for investment, redevelopment, sale, and leasing for internal land-use planning and external promotional purposes.
- Proactively connect with landowners of investment-ready lands and commercial real estate firms to plan and promote development concepts that support industry cluster needs (see priority 1.1).
- Build a standalone investment attraction website that promotes real estate assets, data, and tools of interest to site selectors.

### **Partner considerations:**

Federal and provincial economic development ministries, Trade Commissioner Service, Federal Innovation Superclusters.

## **Priority 2.2: Strategically market Guelph's industry clusters.**

Guelph must understand and articulate industry cluster value propositions to promote cluster strengths and advantages and highlight investment opportunities that meet industry cluster needs. Promotional materials, online presence, and messaging should all reflect a consistent vision that appropriately reflects the unique investment opportunities in Guelph and supports the marketplace image.

### **Actions:**

- Communicate local industry cluster assets, performance, and growth opportunities (see priority 1.1) to update cluster industry marketing and investment materials annually. Profiles should be made available in print, presentation, and electronic format.
- Ensure industry cluster marketing materials are distributed to federal and provincial, and local partners on an annual basis.

### **Partner considerations:**

Federal Innovation Superclusters, Business Events Canada, Provincial economic development ministries, Grow Guelph partners, industry.

### **Priority 2.3: Leverage the Guelph Junction Railway infrastructure to grow City revenues.**

The Guelph Junction Railway (GJR) is a unique amenity that provides daily access to key Canadian and U.S. markets while increasing City revenues. Investment in rail improvements has increased safety and the scope of transportable goods. Directly servicing just over 20 customers close to the rail line, there is an opportunity to expand this customer base further through continued business outreach. There also exists opportunities for GJR to increase awareness of transloading (rail to transport truck) and car storage services more broadly throughout the region.

#### **Actions:**

- Ensure the business visitation program (see priority 1.1) reflects includes GJR customers.
- Create a marketing strategy that revisits the GJR brand image, value proposition, audiences, messaging, and collaterals (see priority 6.1).
- Establish regularly targeted business outreach to educate noncustomers within the region of the GJR value proposition (e.g. advanced manufacturing, trans-loading, agriculture, production sectors, etc.).

#### **Partner considerations:**

Guelph Junction Railway Board of Directors, local transloading services.

### **Priority 2.4: Develop a sport, group, and conference tourism plan.**

As public health restrictions continue to ease, sports and conference events offer substantial opportunities to increase visitation and stimulate the recovery of the local economy. With the anchors like the University of Guelph, City recreation assets, proximity to the Greater Toronto Area and accommodation amenities, Guelph can benefit from an increased market share through a sports, group, and conference plan.

#### **Actions:**

- Coordinate with regional municipalities, colleges, universities, and accommodation partners to identify sport, group, and conference assets.
- Establish a working group of the Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC) to identify shared goals for Guelph's sport, group, and conference efforts (may include additional industry-specific representation).
- With implementing the Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) and in partnership with TAC working group, develop and execute a targeted destination marketing plan including, promotions and visitor services that support increased sport, group, and conference tourism activity.

#### **Partner considerations:**

TAC, Business Events Canada, Guelph Chamber of Commerce, Regional Tourism Organization 4, tourism industry partners.

# Goal 3: Champion an innovative and entrepreneurial ecosystem

In parallel with efforts to build industry clusters, Guelph also needs to continue to support entrepreneurs and small businesses of all types (including home-based). The entrepreneurial ecosystem supports a significant portion of Guelph's employment base and can signal a competitive advantage in new and emerging consumer and visitor trends. Over the last five years, Guelph has demonstrated strengths in future-focused business models such as circular, social, and cooperative. Building and leading in this space is vital for the City to achieve its broader corporate goals for sustaining the natural environment, resilience, and placemaking through entrepreneurial innovation.



## The evidence:

- Slightly more than half of Guelph's businesses are micro-enterprises (one to four employees).
- Guelph has world recognized innovation networks, mentors, and advisors accessed through local partners such as the University of Guelph, Conestoga College, Innovation Guelph, Bioenterprise, 10C, and private entities such as the Linamar Innovation Centre and NSF.
- Located in Guelph and Wellington County, the Circular Opportunity Innovation Launchpad (COIL) is a local innovation platform and network supported through five million in federal funding to accelerate circular enterprises, launch innovative demonstration projects and help inspire new circular collaborations between 2021 and 2024.
- Guelph is a place where scientific and technical talent look for employment; the rate of employment for graduates of physical and life sciences and technologies instructional programs is 75 percent.
- Guelph's young, educated, and diverse labour force contributes to a natural environment for innovation and idea generation.
- The City has an existing secondary plan for the more than 436 hectare Guelph Innovation District supporting clean technology, life science and innovation sector jobs.



### **Priority 3.1: Partner to support the entrepreneurial ecosystem.**

Ecosystem-led efforts that support Guelph's innovative economy need to be scaled to increase their reach and impact. These efforts align with Guelph's target sectors, while recognizing the unique needs of, and systemic barriers facing, BIPOC, women, LGBTQ2S+, disabled and newcomer entrepreneurs.

#### **Actions:**

- Scale promotional efforts to support current Grow Guelph partner initiatives and programming serving entrepreneurs (including home-based businesses).
- Explore new best practices and pilot initiatives (such as newcomer entrepreneur soft landing services) for cluster-focused start up initiatives across Canada and the U.S.
- Build a relationship with university and college commercialization and tech-transfer officials to identify scalable enterprises and connect them with local resources.

#### **Partner considerations\*:**

Grow Guelph partners, Bioenterprise, COIL.

\* EDT is looking to broaden the reach of partnerships to support the unique needs of entrepreneurs from all equity seeking groups (including but not limited to BIPOC, LGBTQ2S+, and newcomers) — please connect with us.

### **Priority 3.2: Define an approach to guide private investment in the Guelph Innovation District.**

The plan calls for mixed use development as well as the adaptive reuse of historic buildings. The development of the Guelph Innovation District now needs to be fully integrated into the city's broader economic development and programming efforts through public-private collaboration and strategic planning.

#### **Actions:**

- Explore best practices in North America for innovation district development, focusing on targeted promotion and outreach (see priorities 2.1 and 6.1).
- Establish a joint working group of the Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC) and Guelph Economic Development Advisory Committee (GEDAC) members to inform how to promote, expand, and support Guelph Innovation District development projects (may include regional partners, entrepreneurs, and university officials).

#### **Partner considerations:**

Federal and provincial funded entities, Infrastructure Ontario, Trade Commissioner Services, Federal Superclusters, University of Guelph, Conestoga College, Innovation Guelph, Guelph Innovation District landowners, TAC, Guelph Economic Development Advisory Committee.

### **Priority 3.3: Grow a robust “Buy Local Guelph” initiative.**

Buy local campaigns are a best practice to support strategies that focus efforts on main street, tourism and placemaking. Guelph should build upon the internationally recognized “Guelph Shops” program through a citywide buy local initiative that implores residents to purchase local goods and services.

#### **Actions:**

- Evaluate buy local platforms to identify best practices for future website upgrades.
- Develop an annual promotion plan for Guelph Shops (see priorities 1.2 and 6.1) and seek sustainable funding to support the growth of the program.
- Explore options and local interest in a “Made in Guelph” branding initiative representing a diverse array of products and services to spotlight products made locally (see priority 1.2).

#### **Partner considerations:**

Tourism Advisory Committee, Guelph Economic Development Advisory Committee, University of Guelph, Business Centre Guelph-Wellington, Downtown Guelph Business Association, Guelph Chamber of Commerce, Regional Tourism Organization 4.

### **Priority 3.4: Celebrate the success of diverse Guelph entrepreneurs.**

Guelph should celebrate local entrepreneurs, at every stage of business growth, and their impact on the community. It is important to profile entrepreneurship in Guelph to highlight their accomplishments while demonstrating the positive impact of locally owned businesses in our community.

#### **Actions:**

- Support and partner on events that celebrate and promote Guelph entrepreneurs (such as Innovation Expo, Business After Five, etc.)
- Partner on an award for “Entrepreneur of the Year” to celebrate a significant and impactful business owner annually.
- Develop an annual promotion plan for Guelph start-up and entrepreneurial successes (see priority 6.1).

#### **Partner considerations:**

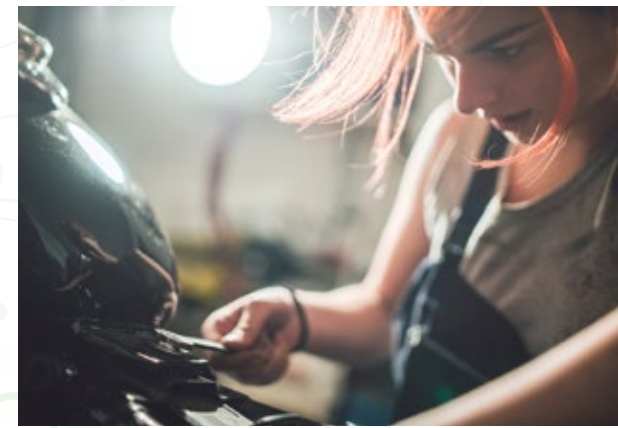
Business Centre Guelph-Wellington, Downtown Guelph Business Association, Guelph Chamber of Commerce, Innovation Guelph.

# Goal 4: Advance talent attraction and skill development

Talent is a vital community differentiator, and as demographics and work models continue to change rapidly, the ability for future growth relies more heavily on attracting and retaining newcomers and graduates. Continued development of relationships with post-secondary institutions, placemaking efforts and better business intelligence will continue to position Guelph successfully to attract global talent. Guelph will have a unified approach between community partners, placemakers, other levels of government and the private sector to continue to attract and train the kind of workers Guelph's local economy needs.

## The evidence:

- An attractive community for newcomers to Canada, Guelph is becoming more diverse with the immigrant population growing faster than most comparator communities and above national and provincial growth rates.
- Guelph has access to 3.5 million workers and six post-secondary institutions within a 90 minute commuting distance and continued improved rail access to the Greater Toronto Area.
- Guelph is attracting and retaining talent as indicated by the growth rate of the educated population; the population with a bachelor's degree or above grew by 33% in the last five years (compared with 27% for Ontario).
- The University of Guelph enrolls more than 29,000 students, and there are 23,000 Guelph residents between the ages of 25 and 34, representing 16 percent of the Guelph population.
- Conestoga College has eight campuses including their motive power trades campus in Guelph which includes trade and skills training in automotive, truck and coach, heavy equipment, recreational vehicles, and motorcycles.



## Priority 4.1: Unify and support workforce development organizations through Grow Guelph.



The ability to retain and attract talent will be essential to supporting business investment, growth, and innovation. Targeted promotion of Guelph's quality of place, unique career opportunities and workforce support programming will ensure Guelph remains a location of choice for talent.

### Actions:

- Promote and support the expansion of targeted talent development initiatives, programs, and networks (youth, 50+, BIPOC, LGBTQ2S+, and newcomers).
- Partner and grow the “Guelph Works” job fair matching local employers and talent (including specialized day of programming for students and recent graduates).
- Establish a talent attraction initiative to attract students, young professionals, and families with children to showcase Guelph's diverse professional community (see priority 2.2).
- Partner and support regional workforce initiatives to support and welcome international students and newcomers.
- Provide ongoing updates and resources to businesses about federal, provincial, and local workforce development support through Grow Guelph platform (see priority 1.1).
- Provide ongoing updates and resources to support employers in understanding and building capacity to meet labour force needs, changes, and trends in the local context.

### Partner considerations\*:

University of Guelph, Conestoga College, Business Centre Guelph-Wellington, Career Education Council, Guelph Chamber of Commerce, Local Immigration Partnership, Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin.

\* EDT is looking to broaden the reach of partnerships to support the unique needs of entrepreneurs from all equity seeking groups (including but not limited to BIPOC, LGBTQ2S+, and newcomers) — please connect with us.

## Priority 4.2: Engage private sector, education, and workforce leaders to collaborate and address immediate and long-term workforce needs.

Guelph's skills and training programs must align with its target clusters. The technical skills required by Guelph's industry clusters require close collaboration between the public sector and private sector partners to ensure workers are trained to match the needs of local companies successfully.

### Actions:

- Establish a working group of Grow Guelph partners to discuss and implement needed skill and training programs based on industry cluster and business needs (may include additional workforce development partners).
- Partner and grow participation in the EmployerOne Survey to inform understanding of Guelph's needed skills and training gaps; utilize findings to direct and expand new workforce programs.
- Continue to develop pathways and connections for education and industry to partner and collaborate on training pipelines and talent retention initiatives (such as the Guelph Arts Apprenticeship Program).

### Partner considerations\*:

University of Guelph, Conestoga College, Grow Guelph partners, Employment Ontario agencies, industry.

\* EDT is looking to broaden the reach of partnerships to support the unique needs of entrepreneurs from all equity seeking groups (including but not limited to BIPOC, LGBTQ2S+, and newcomers) – please connect with us.



# Goal 5: Build a must-see visitor destination in Ontario

Guelph is a unique and compelling city with sports facilities, a craft beer scene, independent eateries, sparkling rivers, picturesque views, historic buildings, landmarks, and signature cultural facilities. Tourism significantly impacts visitor spending on hotels, restaurants, and other businesses and introduces Guelph to prospective residents and entrepreneurs.

More investment into placemaking is needed to enhance the experience of Guelph for visitors and residents. Currently, visiting friends and relatives make up the majority of visitor spending in the city, but more curated experiences and visitor service infrastructure still need to be available. Guelph can leverage the downtown core, university and college students and campuses, and recreation assets to drive recovery and growth in this sector.



## The evidence:

- Funding sources from other levels of government continue to be on the horizon as tourism sector businesses slowly recover from the damaging impacts of the pandemic.
- Proven successes for recent COVID-19 support programming saw a 30 percent return on direct consumer spending
- Guelph is home to 450 businesses in the tourism cluster, employing 10 percent of Guelph's workforce.
- Guelph is an ideal location for meetings and conferences; less than one hour away from Toronto, and close to other major centres in Southwestern Ontario.
- Three international airports (Toronto, Hamilton, and Kitchener/Waterloo) within 45 minutes or less makes traveling to Guelph convenient.
- A busy events calendar with many seasonal events to explore: farmers markets, Guelph Multicultural Festival, Hillside Festival, Jazz Festival, and niche cultural fairs.

## Priority 5.1: Implement the Municipal Accommodation Tax.

The Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) will provide Guelph with a sustainable source of funds to support the development of its tourism industry. The tax, planning for which was paused during the pandemic, could generate one million dollars per year (prior to impacts of the pandemic). In addition, Guelph Tourism will work in partnership with local tourism entrepreneurs to further invest in impactful destination marketing and development.

### Actions:

- Re-engage, review, and revise MAT agreement, including division of roles and responsibilities.
- Seek approval from Council to implement the MAT and begin collection.
- Establish a destination marketing plan in conjunction with partners (see priority 6.2).

### Partner considerations:

Tourism Advisory Committee, Destination Ontario, Tourism Industry Association of Ontario, Guelph Chamber of Commerce, accommodation partners.

## Priority 5.2: Curate destination experiences.

Today's tourists want authentic, curated experiences. Guelph can drive tourism, economic development, and local investments in new restaurants, brewpubs, recreational activities, festivals, concerts, and more through focused support for the sector. Tourism services will need to work directly with stakeholders in the cultural and recreational sectors to identify experiences and local characters to highlight.

### Actions:

- With the implementation of the MAT and building upon existing asset mapping work, update the inventory of Guelph's destination assets: cultural and recreational amenities, music, art, food, breweries, etc.
- Evaluate current tourism marketing tactics to understand what is driving or deterring destination visitors.
- With the implementation of the MAT, enhance support and training for tourism-focused businesses to meet changing market trends.

### Partner considerations:

Tourism Advisory Committee, Business Centre Guelph-Wellington, Downtown Guelph Business Association, Guelph Chamber of Commerce, tourism operators.

### **Priority 5.3: Enhance placemaking throughout the city.**

In the downtown core and throughout the city, Guelph should build off the placemaking success that began as COVID-19 support efforts to enhance and drive investment and programming. Placemaking efforts will be rooted in the Guelph way of life, emphasizing sustainability, cultural assets, great food, and community togetherness.

#### **Actions:**

- Evaluate the effectiveness of placemaking initiatives deployed during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Developing a placemaking plan that includes visitor experience, infrastructure, and wayfinding enhancements that includes alignment to the Downtown Infrastructure Revitalization Project (Priority 5.4).
- In addition to the MAT implementation, seek provincial and independent funding to support placemaking efforts.

#### **Partner considerations:**

Tourism Advisory Committee, Business Centre Guelph-Wellington, Downtown Guelph Business Association, Guelph Chamber of Commerce, industry.

### **Priority 5.4: Enhance wayfinding and visitor services assets.**

Wayfinding makes a community feel more cohesive and connected for residents and visitors, stimulating the economy by improving access to businesses and other key destinations. Guelph needs a consistent look and feel to its community assets, enabling visitors to find their way around town and communicating Guelph's unique brand identity.

#### **Actions:**

- Explore wayfinding best practices across Canada for communities like Guelph.
- With the implementation of the MAT, hire a wayfinding design firm to advise strategy, identity and signage and kiosk needs.
- Use the destination assets inventory (see priority 5.2) and the downtown placemaking strategy (see priority 5.3) in the development of a wayfinding strategy to guide investments in this visitor services infrastructure.

#### **Partner considerations:**

Destination Ontario, Tourism Industry Association of Ontario, Tourism Advisory Committee, Downtown Guelph Business Association, Regional Tourism Organization 4.



# Goal 6: Enhance Guelph's unique brand for business, talent, and visitors

A well-articulated place branding effort strengthens a community's sense of place by aligning the language and messages created for and by businesses, communities, and visitors. With implementing the Municipal Accommodation Tax, Guelph is excited to realize the new opportunities emerging from the collaboration of sector partners responding to post-COVID emerging tourism needs.



## The evidence:

- Targeted email newsletters — Mind Your Business and Network News — reaches over 3,750 subscribers.
- Social media communication via Visit Guelph and Invest in Guelph platforms — reach over 20,000 followers across all platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter).
- Guelph's unique sights, landmarks, and museums are successfully promoting themselves on TripAdvisor and connecting with visitors researching Guelph as a destination.

## **Priority 6.1: Create a marketing strategy that conveys the Guelph experience and value proposition.**

A reintroduced brand identity will help differentiate Guelph from other cities. Professional, creative marketing materials are a prerequisite for gaining attention from visitors and businesses. As well, Guelph must create materials that streamline the work done to communicate our value and raise the profile of our community to targeted industry clusters (see priority 2.2), sport and conference operators (see priority 2.4) and to attract talent (see priority 4.1).

### **Actions:**

- Engage a firm to develop a marketing strategy to support the promotional activities of Economic Development, Tourism and Guelph Junction Railway.
- Revisit and refine identity for brands owned by Economic Development and Tourism department (Invest in Guelph, Visit Guelph, Explore Guelph, Grow Guelph, and Guelph Junction Railway).
- Identify audiences and targeted messaging for each of Economic Development, Tourism and Guelph Junction Railway divisions.
- Identify collaterals and channels to communicate targeted messaging (such as LinkedIn account).
- Collect data to measure effectiveness of marketing tactics. Track and report key findings.

### **Partner considerations:**

Guelph Economic Development Advisory Committee, Tourism Advisory Committee, Grow Guelph Partners, accommodations.

## **Priority 6.2: Develop a revised destination marketing plan in conjunction with partners.**

With the implementation of the MAT, Guelph will have a revised destination marketing plan that will work to continue developing Guelph's unique brand (see priority 6.1), promote curated visitor experience (see priority 5.2) and support the City's placemaking plan (see priority 5.3) and visitor assets (see priority 5.4). In addition, Guelph Tourism will need the appropriate materials to support its economic development and tourism efforts, especially those across digital platforms.

### **Actions:**

- Annually assess Guelph's collateral and destination marketing needs and update existing collateral as needed.
- Annually assess destination marketing plan tactics.
- Consider partnership opportunities when developing collateral, placemaking efforts and visitor experiences.

### **Partner considerations:**

Tourism Advisory Committee, accommodations.

# Conclusion

The 2022-2026 Economic Development and Tourism Strategy is grounded in community and business engagement, research and the foundational successes of past programming, initiatives, and activities.

The City and community partners will collaborate to implement the goals and priorities within the framework of the City's values and the strategy's guiding principles. The following key performance indicators will help the City track, measure and analyze the strategy's effectiveness, and make course corrections as needed.

## Guelph Economic Development and Tourism key performance indicators

1. **Business outreach** – the number of businesses pro-actively connected with to provide indicating provision of supports and service to meet business needs.
2. **Business support and development** – measuring the programming, initiatives, activities and services provided to advance business growth.
3. **Investment attraction** – determining the success of programming and services that attract new business interest and investment into the city.
4. **Marketing and promotions** – measuring the various channels and means of connecting with target audiences.
5. **Service excellence** – measuring the ability to deliver appropriate services that meet the needs of business in the most appropriate way.
6. **Operational** – measuring how we utilize available internal networks and support other organizational departments.
7. **Key projects** – measuring the special initiatives work that enhances and support but is not part of the core division functions.

Supporting strategy documentation will undergo a data review in 2022 with the release of the 2021 Census of Population statistics and supporting data sets. The strategy will be refreshed in 2023 along with a more robust review in 2025.



**Economic Development  
and Tourism**

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