



Growth Readiness Action Plan

Final Report 2022



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Executive Summary

Growth-ready municipalities are strategic in their planning. They create specific and actionable priorities to address essential municipal services and responsibilities in support of local growth. Economic expansion includes appropriate policy, private investment, the availability of land and housing, infrastructure to support the growth, adequate essential services, a solid financial foundation, and capacity for delivery. The vision for the Township of Whitewater Region is to maintain a rural quality of life by balancing sustainability and growth. According to the Final Growth Study Report, Township of Whitewater Region, 2020, Whitewater could see population growth of 19% by 2039. Municipal staff and Council need to be aware of the potential risks associated with growth and ensure they have the capacity and tools to manage growth-related risks effectively.

This plan has identified which steps the municipality can take to maximize future growth opportunities. To position themselves effectively and proactively, Whitewater Region will focus on core municipal responsibilities in the areas of administrative capacity, infrastructure, and economic development.

Administrative Capacity

To ensure that service delivery is maintained as the community grows, there needs to be adequate staffing with proper knowledge and training. Since Whitewater Region does not have an Economic Development Officer, existing staff need to be trained on growth plans, available lands, vacant properties, and economic development in general. A properly trained staff member can be the primary contact for investors and report on and follow-up on investment inquiries. Putting this into place will increase the investment success rate.

Infrastructure

Developing an asset management plan will give staff and Council the understanding of the overall health and needs of valuable assets. Implementing the Active Transportation and Trails Plan will create and improve opportunities to connect schools, parks, and villages, create new economic opportunities for existing and prospective businesses and expand tourism.

Economic Development

Supporting existing businesses is a primary tool to support growth and development, followed by effective planning to attract new businesses. Effective promotion of the current Community Improvement Plan will increase the participation rate and benefit local business and revitalization efforts. As a community grows and begins to attract people and businesses proactively, it first needs to identify why someone would choose the community over another. Using Whitewater's competitive advantages in campaigns and promotional material can help drive growth. Economic development creates employment and income for residents and revenues for the municipality to fund services and programs while creating whole communities where residents can work close to home and have a better work-life balance.

Introduction

The vision for the Township of Whitewater Region is to maintain a rural quality of life by balancing sustainability and growth. Growth can pose a unique set of challenges for municipalities. Economic expansion includes appropriate policy, private investment, the availability of land and housing, infrastructure to support the growth, adequate essential services, a solid financial foundation, and capacity for delivery.

This Growth Readiness Action Plan is the first piece of a three-part project to assist the Township through future development.

1. Growth Readiness Action Plan - A strategy that responds to increased growth pressures in the municipality.
2. Development Standards - A set of standards for new development in the municipality.
3. Comprehensive Zoning By-law Update - A modern, consistent document that regulates land use throughout the Township.

Since 2016, rural Ontario's population growth began to accelerate as urban housing markets climbed. Recent population increases, likely brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, are slowing down, although rural populations will continue to see strong growth rates beyond the pandemic.¹ According to the Final Growth Study Report, Township of Whitewater Region, 2020, Whitewater could see population growth of 19% by 2039. Municipal staff and Council need to be aware of the potential risks associated with growth and ensure they have the capacity and tools to manage growth-related risks effectively. By assessing Whitewater's readiness for growth, we can evaluate whether the Township is ideally positioned to support growth opportunities.

The main economic growth driver is the private sector. The Township's responsibility is to create an environment that positively promotes the region and removes barriers so investors (both businesses and individuals) can create growth. This plan has identified which steps the municipality can take to maximize future growth opportunities. To position themselves effectively and proactively, Whitewater Region will focus on core municipal responsibilities in the areas of administrative capacity, infrastructure, and economic development.

Whitewater Region
Population Growth by
2039

+19%

Final Growth Study Report,
Township of Whitewater Region,
2020

¹ Rural Ontario Institute, Rural Ontario's Population Growth During Covid 19, October 2021

Our Approach

This action plan was developed by a comprehensive analysis of completed plans and reports, demographics, and economic trends, and with the support of Township staff, Council, and key stakeholders, including government partners, businesses, and the public. A public online survey was completed by 200 respondents and 12 one-on-one phone interviews were conducted, followed by a planning session with Township staff.

Tourism

"Work with farmers, restaurants, and attractions, to create easy to follow itineraries. Think of Prince Edward County's evolution from 20 years ago to today."

Survey Respondent,
Online Survey, November 2021

Growth and Development Priorities for Stakeholders:

- ✓ Tourism and Recreation
- ✓ Business Attraction
 - grocery store
 - restaurants
 - hospitality
 - agri-business
 - professionals (work from home)
 - medical professionals
- ✓ Highspeed Internet
- ✓ Water and river access and promotion
- ✓ Creating roads safe for walking and biking
- ✓ Inventory of available industrial and commercial properties
- ✓ Track, report, follow-up on investment inquiries
- ✓ Staffing resources
- ✓ Infrastructure capacity

Three areas of focus were identified to address stakeholder priorities, Administrative Capacity, Infrastructure, and Economic Development. The actions in each area are prioritized with timeline, budget, and resource recommendations. These recommendations are supported by stakeholder engagement.



Survey Highlights



Services Needed

Restaurants
Grocery Store
Internet and Cellular



Priority

Internet/Cellular
Recreation/Tourism
Commercial Development

84%

Of respondents want the Township to encourage affordable seniors housing.



86%

Of respondents want the Township to encourage agriculture related businesses.

76%

Of respondents that own a business in Whitewater work out of their home.

70%

Of respondents said 'Creating Safe Roads for Walking and Biking' was extremely or very important.

Over
80%

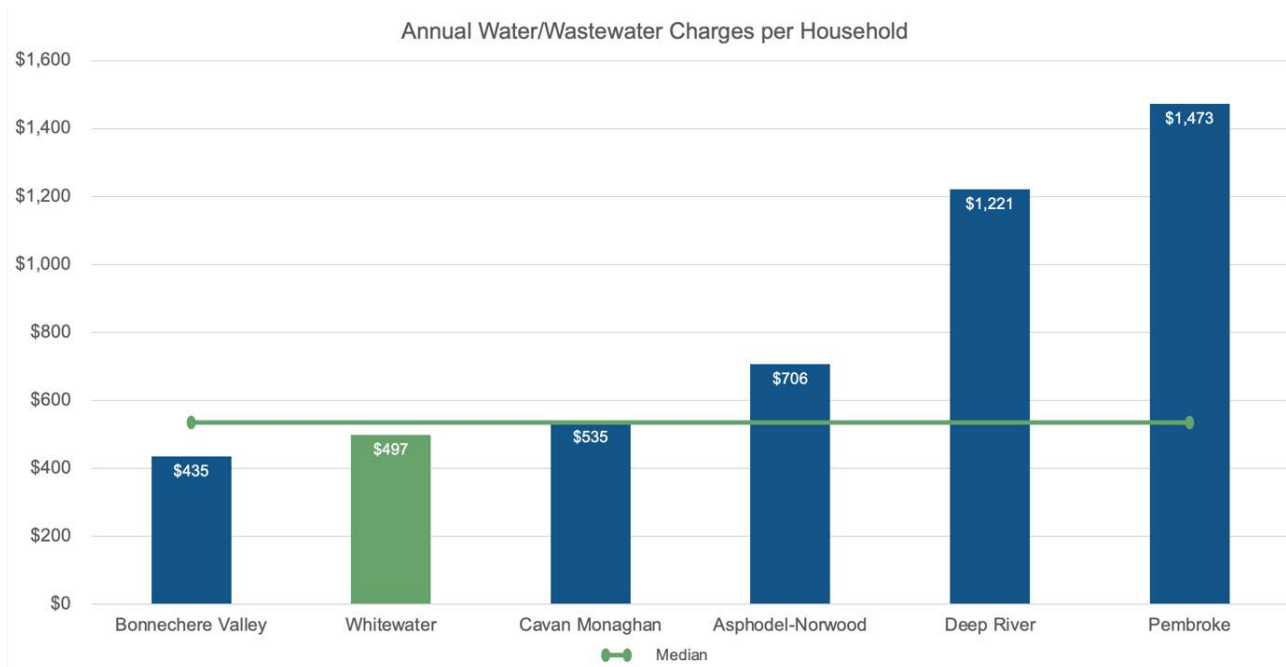
Of respondents said Whitewater Region is a good or excellent place to live.



Competitive Advantages

Whitewater Region boasts some of the most outstanding white water rafting in the country and over 160 km of waterfront along the Ottawa River and more than 40 lakes. The Township combines a slower-paced lifestyle with a vibrant outdoor recreational lifestyle. It is a safe community compared to larger centers, and its proximity to Pembroke (20 mins.) and Ottawa (1 hr.) make it an ideal location.

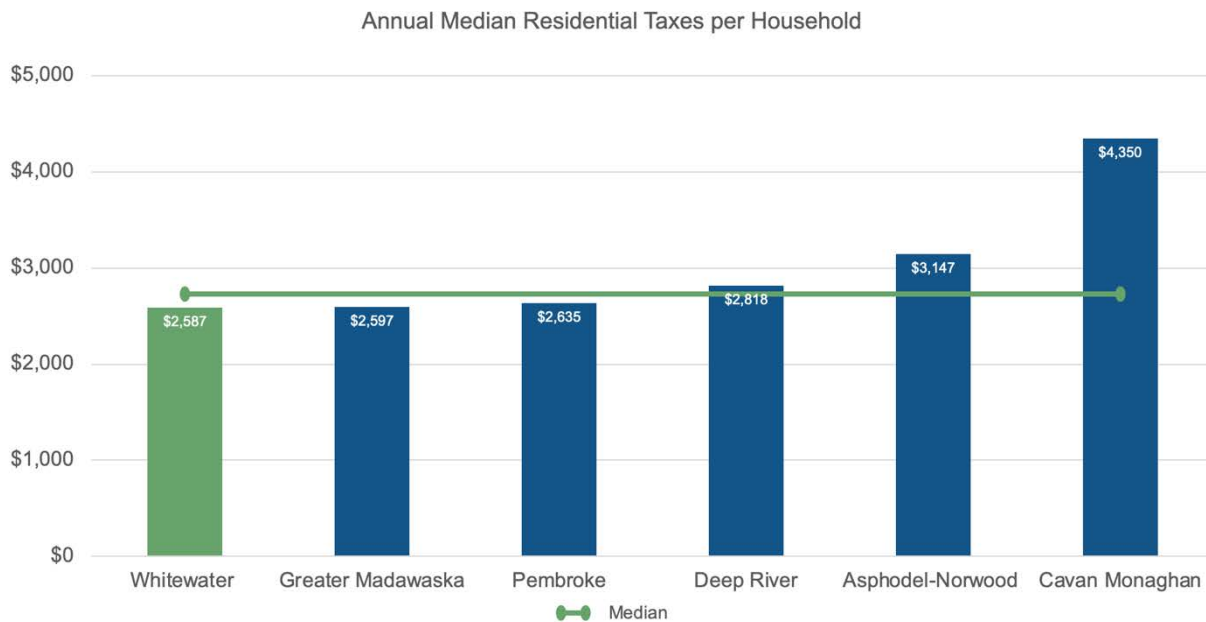
Whitewater Region has an average home sale price of \$313,631² compared to \$710,000³ in Ottawa, and water and wastewater charges are low compared to similar and neighbouring municipalities. The median annual water/wastewater charge is \$535 per household. Whitewater Region's annual rate per household is \$497.



Source: Municipal Financial Information Returns (FIR) 2019, 2020

² 2019 Real Estate Statistics, Signature Team Realty <https://signatureteamrealty.com/2019-real-estate-sales-statistics/>

³ Ottawa's new normal: Annual house price gains topping 16 per cent, Ottawa Citizen, <https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/ottawas-new-normal-annual-house-price-gains-topping-16-per-cent>. Jan 2022.



Source: Municipal Financial Information Returns (FIR) 2019, 2020

Whitewater Region has a low residential tax rate compared to similar and neighbouring municipalities. The median rate per household is \$2,726, and Whitewater's annual median rate is \$2,587.

As a community grows and begins to attract people and businesses proactively, it first needs to identify why someone would choose the community over another. Using Whitewater's competitive advantages in campaigns and promotional material can help drive growth. See Appendix A for creative samples using competitive advantages.



The Outdoors

Ottawa River
Lakes
Rafting
Waterfront
Recreation



Location

Proximity to
Ottawa and Pembroke



Low Cost of Living

Home Prices
Utility Rates
Property Taxes

Priority Areas

Administrative Capacity

A lack of municipal and professional capacity can be a significant barrier to growth. A municipality needs to adequately administer bylaws and policies and provide Council, residents, potential investors, and businesses accurate and reliable information. Meeting the challenges of growth requires a committed and proficient municipal administration.

To ensure that service delivery is maintained as the community grows, there needs to be adequate staffing with proper knowledge and training. Since Whitewater Region does not have an Economic Development Officer, existing staff need to be trained on growth plans, available lands, vacant properties, and economic development in general. A properly trained staff member can be the primary contact for investors and report on and follow-up on investment inquiries. Putting this into place will increase the investment success rate.



Infrastructure

The Township not only needs to meet its current infrastructure needs, but it must also plan to accommodate future growth needs. The development and growing population require added pressure on water and wastewater facilities. Growth and development affect the overall capacity of the municipality to provide infrastructure improvements and maintenance for the community.

Developing an asset management plan will give staff and Council the understanding of the overall health and needs of valuable assets. The plan will help make informed decisions for the future by identifying the impacts of growth, including costs to accommodate demand, operating expenses required to maintain current service levels while managing risk. Following the Asset Management Plan, it is recommended to conduct a Water and Wastewater Servicing Master Plan to provide a comprehensive strategy that incorporates all facets of the management, expansion and funding of the water and wastewater systems for the villages of Cobden and Beachburg.

Proper planning supports organized and realistic development. A Highway 17 Readiness Plan can help the municipality invest its money wisely in roads and adjacent properties to meet the demands of the forecasted population growth.

The majority of survey respondents said 'Creating Safe Roads for Walking and Biking' was extremely or very important. As the community grows, this will become more significant. Implementing the Active Transportation and Trails Plan will create and improve opportunities to connect schools, parks, and villages, create new economic opportunities for existing and prospective businesses and expand tourism.

It is essential to promote Internet and cellular expansion projects in the Whitewater Region to stay competitive while attracting new residents and businesses. The Township can do this by adding the information to the Township website, social media, and email.



Economic Development

Supporting existing businesses is a primary tool to support growth and development, followed by effective planning to attract new businesses. Promoting the area, businesses, and attractions also plays a vital role in growth planning. Economic development creates employment and income for residents and revenues for the municipality to fund services and programs while creating whole communities where residents can work close to home and have a better work-life balance.

It is essential to communicate what services the Township offers to support existing businesses. Seventy percent of the business respondents from the public survey were not aware of the current Community Improvement Plan (CIP). It is also essential to use everyday language when promoting the program. Business owners may not be familiar with the term CIP. Using the terms grants, funds, and incentives can increase the participation rate.

Measures and strategies need to be in place to continue to grow. The current community profile requires further development and a current inventory of vacant commercial properties and available lands. These measures will be tools for prospective investors. If this information is not readily available, investors will quickly look elsewhere. A marketing plan for resident and business attraction is recommended. This plan will help effectively attract the Township's target audience.

The Township can strengthen and create partnerships with government organizations to pursue opportunities to expand tourism, specifically to promote the river and lakes as a destination and develop a campaign to assist with farm diversification and increase awareness of local food. Utilizing already developed promotional campaigns and material can offset some marketing costs. A good example is updating the Eat, Play, Stay campaign.



Recommendations

Priority Area - Administrative Capacity (AC), Infrastructure (I), Economic Development (ED)

Priority Area	Action Item	Timeline	Resources
AC	1. Ensure adequate staffing for Planning and Building.	2022	Township Staff
AC	2. Create a primary contact for potential developers/investors.	2022	Township Staff
AC	3. Provide education and training to existing staff on growth and economic development.	2022	Township Staff, Economic Developers Council of Ontario (EDCO), Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade
AC	4. Create a database/spreadsheet to track, report, and follow-up on all investment inquiries.	2022	Township Staff
ED	5. Create an inventory of vacant commercial properties and available lands.	2022	Township Staff, Realtors, Business/Property Owners
AC	6. Actively pursue steps to continue with the modernization review.	2022	Township Staff
I	7. Add a page to the Township website with new Internet and cellular projects. Promote projects on social media, and through email.	2022	Township Staff, Internet Service Providers and Cellular Providers
ED	8. Promote the current Community Improvement Plan on social media, email, and the Township website. Use clear language (incentive, funding, grants) in the promotion.	2022	Township Staff, Ministry Of Agriculture, Food And Rural Affairs (OMAFRA)

Priority Area	Action Item	Timeline	Resources
I	9. Implement the Active Transportation and Trails Plan Budget Recommendation: \$500,000 (\$100,000 annually)	2022-2027	Township Staff, County, Algonquin Trail Advisory Committee, Cycling Clubs and Active Transportation Groups, Local Businesses, Beachburg Off-Road Cycling Association (BORCA), Ottawa Valley Cycling and Active Transportation Alliance (OVCATA), Renfrew/ UOV OPP Detachment, Renfrew/ County Public Health, MTO, Ottawa Valley ATV Club/OFSC District 6
AC	10. Build stronger relationships with partner organizations by becoming actively involved at a Board level.	2023	Township Staff, Chamber of Commerce, Ottawa Valley Tourist Association, Renfrew County CFDC, RT011
I	11. Complete an Asset Management Plan. Budget Recommendation: \$75,000	2023	Township Staff, Consultant
ED	12. Expand the current Community Profile. Create a visually appealing profile that can be added to the website and emailed to prospective investors. Budget Recommendation: \$3,000	2023	Township Staff, Consultant, Graphic Designer, see appendix A for creative samples
ED	13. Develop a Marketing Plan: a) Resident attraction (work from home professionals) b) Business attraction (grocery store, doctor recruitment, tourism operators, senior housing developer) Budget Recommendation: \$15,000-25,000	2023	Township Staff, Consultant, Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Housing, CMHC, Health Force Ontario, Chamber of Commerce, Ottawa Valley Tourist Association, Renfrew County CFDC, RT011, see appendix A for creative samples
ED	14. Examine options to create partnerships with government, businesses, and tourism organizations to pursue tourism opportunities. Priorities should be: a) continuing to promote the river and lakes as a destination, b) develop a campaign to assist with farm diversification (ie) farm gate routes/self-guided tours.	2023	Township staff, County of Renfrew, Neighbouring Municipalities, Chamber of Commerce, Ottawa Valley Tourist Association, RT011, Ministry Of Agriculture, Food And Rural Affairs (OMAFRA)

Priority Area	Action Item	Timeline	Resources
I	15. Conduct a Servicing Master Plan Budget Recommendation: \$80,000	2024	Township Staff, Consultant
I	16. Conduct a Hwy 17 Readiness Plan Budget Recommendation:	2024	Township Staff, Consultant
ED	17. Develop/update a campaign utilizing the current Eat, Play, Stay. Budget Recommendation: \$3,000	2024	Township Staff, Consultant, Graphic Designer, see appendix A for creative samples
ED	18. Examine options to create partnerships to support a skills development program to provide training for skilled labour.	2024	Township staff, County of Renfrew, large employers, Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, Ministry of Colleges and Universities, Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, Algonquin College
I	19. Continue to support Internet and cellular companies on local area expansions.	Ongoing	Township Staff, County, Internet and Cellular Service Providers, Canwisp, Eastern Ontario Regional Network (EORN), Ministry of Infrastructure

Appendix A – Creative Samples

Business and Resident Attraction Campaign Using Competitive Advantages

My Whitewater Life.



Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all participants of the Growth Readiness Action Plan including the residents, businesses and organizations that completed the survey and interviews.

Report prepared by
Strexer Harrop Consulting Group (SHCG)