



## **Administrative Report**

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

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

**Date:** Wednesday, November 5, 2025

**Subject:** Strategic Plan Implementation Update 2025

**Report #:** 2025-1105-CAO-R10-SZ

---

### **Purpose**

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

### **Background**

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

The Strategic Plan is founded on three strategic goals:

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

- **Building a Regional Powerhouse**

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

This annual report to Council provides an update on the implementation of the 2024–2027 Strategic Plan. With support from StrategyCorp Inc., the plan was finalized and approved in December 2023, and StrategyCorp’s engagement concluded in February 2024. Since then, the Senior Leadership Team has collectively reviewed priorities, monitored progress, and provided updates to ensure the plan remains active and aligned with Council’s direction.

The report summarizes key successes achieved to date and demonstrates how the Strategic Plan is guiding decision-making, service delivery, and organizational priorities. It also highlights progress made through the Implementation Roadmap and action items, which continue to move the County toward fulfilling its vision and mission.

## **Discussion**

Two years into implementation, substantial progress has been made in embedding the Strategic Plan into day-to-day operations. The Implementation Roadmap continues to provide clear priorities, accountability, and realistic timelines for Administration. To ensure alignment across the organization, all Directors have conducted rollout meetings with their teams, integrating the Strategic Plan into departmental objectives. Project tracking software remains in use, supporting real-time updates on action item progress, enhancing collaboration and communication among team members, and providing a framework for public reporting.

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

---

Since 2023, the County has continued to engage employees in conversations about the Strategic Plan. In 2023, an Employee Engagement Survey identified areas for improvement, particularly in teamwork, innovation, and senior leadership’s communication of a clear vision and values. The Strategic Plan has served as a catalyst for addressing this feedback and fostering

deeper conversations with team members about how their work connects to the broader County service delivery goals. For example, leaders at Sun Parlor Home recently held a meeting to raise awareness of the Strategic Plan and gather input on enhancing SPH's role in the Implementation Roadmap and action items. The team's engagement and quality of ideas were inspiring. Building on these efforts, a follow-up Employee Engagement Survey was conducted in September, 2025, to assess progress and ensure that initiatives continue to align with team member priorities. Administration is currently awaiting the survey results.

To date, team members across the County continue to provide positive feedback on the Strategic Plan and their ability to contribute individually and collectively to the County's success.

## **2025 Lessons Learned**

---

The second year of implementation has built on the foundations established in 2024, with continued progress despite ongoing challenges. The first year coincided with significant turnover in senior leadership, and while many leaders were navigating learning curves, they advanced strategic priorities alongside their teams. This year, the focus has shifted toward sustaining momentum and refining processes.

Managing progress across initiatives that involve multiple departments and team members remains complex. Early reliance on Excel and email proved cumbersome, leading to the successful implementation of project tracking software with the support of IT. The Executive Assistant to the CAO continues to maintain the comprehensive list of action items and key performance indicators, enabling effective metric tracking and reporting. Collaboration with the Communications team has further ensured templates and processes are in place for annual public reporting to Council.

A key lesson reinforced this year is the importance of keeping the Strategic Plan top of mind across all levels of the organization. From County Council to the Senior Leadership Team and front-line staff, intentional alignment to the Strategic Plan has proven critical. Weekly maintenance of the tracking software and dedicated discussion of challenging action items during monthly one-on-one meetings between the CAO and Directors have helped sustain progress and accountability.

In January 2025, a dedicated Strategic Planning meeting with the Senior Leadership Team provided an opportunity to debrief the past year, celebrate successes, and set realistic plans for the coming year. Looking ahead, efforts in 2026 will focus on maintaining alignment with departmental objectives, monitoring progress against action items, and continuing to embed the Strategic Plan into daily operations. This year's Employee Engagement

Survey will also provide valuable feedback to assess the impact of these initiatives and ensure the County remains on the right track toward achieving its strategic goals.

## **2025 Strategic Plan Accomplishments**

---

**Appendix A** to this report highlights the action item accomplishments for 2024 and 2025, as well as initiatives commenced in 2025 that will carry forward into 2026. An estimate of the percentage of completion is also provided. For initiatives that will be ongoing for the duration of the term of Council, the percentage of completion has been set at 75% to reflect that we are three-quarters of the way through the term at the time of this report.

In 2025, Administration has expanded the scope of strategic initiatives. Sixteen items that were listed as “To Do” in 2024 but not previously tracked have now been activated and are reflected in the table below. This addition, along with newly identified departmental priorities, has increased the total number of tracked action items to from 70 to 96 for 2025.

A key example of targeted departmental planning is Sun Parlor Home. On February 26, 2025, the senior leadership team and interim administrators at Sun Parlor Home held a dedicated Strategic Plan meeting. Since then, a Strategic Plan for the Home has been implemented under the leadership of the new Administrator. The Strategic Goals for Sun Parlor Home have been incorporated into the County’s 2025 initiatives and resulted in the addition of 10 additional action items not included in the 2024 report.

Overall, Administration is currently tracking:

<b>Action Items</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>
Completed	19	31
In Progress	42	43
Ongoing	9	5
To Do	0	10
On Hold	0	7
Total	70	96

## **2025 Highlights**

---

Each of the three Strategic Plan Goals witnessed achievements in 2025. Noteworthy accomplishments include:

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

Master plans and strategic plans continue to guide our focus and results. The County-wide HRIS system was implemented, marking a major milestone in modernizing the HR and Payroll functions. Council visibility also increased, with enhanced efforts raising the profile of the Warden at both the regional and provincial level. The Attendance Support Policy was reintroduced and pending Council approval will be implemented, demonstrating tangible progress on workplace priorities.

Work with local municipal partners also advanced steadily. A consolidated database of shared service and procurement opportunities was developed, regular CAO check-ins with Council and the Warden were initiated, dedicated CAO/Council Pre-Budget Consultation meetings were instituted and a “Warden/CAO/Clerk Tour” to local municipal councils was launched. Reviews of funding and cost recovery models for shared services advanced, as did consultation to identify local municipal priorities. While some initiatives remain ongoing or on hold, 2025 reflected strong momentum under Goal 1, with many initiatives now complete and others well-positioned for continued progress.

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

Our greatest asset continues to be our team members, and in 2025 the County made significant strides to strengthen both employee engagement and Council effectiveness. Foundational governance work was completed, including reviews of Council Remuneration, the Procedural By-law, and delegation authorities, as well as the establishment of a formal reporting structure for Council outcomes. At the organizational level, measurable workforce metrics were introduced, employee recognition programs expanded, and a formal Council education and training program launched. These steps reflect strong progress toward building a transparent, supportive, and accountable culture.

With much of the groundwork in place, efforts are now shifting toward longer-term initiatives. The County advanced a Strategic Plan reporting framework, prepared for upcoming compensation reviews with bargaining units, and expanded opportunities for staff engagement through County Connect and the “Ask Our CAO” program. Early steps were also taken to formalize biennial employee engagement surveys, advance recruitment and employee development strategies, and continue modernizing records and

information management practices. By the end of 2025, approximately 75% of Goal 2 initiatives were complete or well underway, ensuring the County remains on track to meet its 2027 commitments.

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

As growth pressures continue across Essex County, strengthening the financial and capital foundation remains essential to long-term success. Building on the comprehensive Long-Term Capital Expansion Program and Reserve & Reserve Fund Policy established in 2024, the County advanced condition-based asset reporting and completed a full asset inventory in 2025. Legislative asset management requirements were also met through annual plan updates, and the County Road 42/43 and 42/19 roundabouts now stand as completed examples of critical infrastructure delivery that improves mobility and regional connectivity.

Sound land use planning continues to be central to a resilient regional economy. The County's Official Plan update, completed in 2024 and officially approved by the province in 2025, has provided the framework to guide commercial, residential, and industrial development. In 2025, supporting studies, including an industrial lands CIP guideline and a development charges background study, moved forward to ensure growth is both sustainable and financially viable. Additional feasibility and condition studies at Sun Parlor Home were initiated to help inform long-term planning for long-term care facilities.

Housing affordability and attainability were also advanced as regional priorities. The Regional Affordable and Attainable Housing Strategy, which was 75% complete in 2024, reached full completion in 2025 with Council's approval on September 3. The approval included both the Housing Strategy and the Regional Housing Needs Assessment. With this milestone achieved, the County can now move forward from planning into implementation, with the goal of bringing forward low- or no-cost options for Council and local municipal partners in the near future.

Advancing Truth and Reconciliation and deepening relationships with First Nations partners also continued in 2025. Work progressed on the County's Truth and Reconciliation Action Plan, with initial consultation and relationship-building outreach initiated. New efforts are underway to assess partnership opportunities in economic development, cultural programming, and service delivery. These initiatives, combined with a growing emphasis on transparency and consultation with local municipal partners and regional agencies, are helping position Essex County as a collaborative regional leader prepared to meet future challenges.

## **Looking Ahead to 2026**

---

As the County enters the final stretch of this Council term, 2026 will be a year to focus on completing the remaining initiatives and embedding the Strategic Plan into day-to-day operations. With 75% of the work now complete, attention will turn to the more complex and longer-term priorities that remain in progress.

Key areas of focus will include completing the next phase of the Road Rationalization Study, strengthening shared service and cost recovery models, and continuing to modernize internal systems and processes. Work will advance on employee wellness and attendance initiatives, as well as the completion of a Truth and Reconciliation Action Plan. A compensation review for bargaining units will also be undertaken in preparation for upcoming negotiations.

On the planning and growth front, several major studies will move forward, including the condition assessment and feasibility study of Sun Parlor Home and implementation options for the recently approved Regional Affordable and Attainable Housing Strategy, with the aim of identifying low- and no-cost solutions for consideration. In parallel, work will continue on updating the County's land use mapping and regional energy plan.

In the first quarter of 2026, Administration plans to engage StrategyCorp Inc. to conduct a Strategic Plan Update and Alignment Session. This session will offer a platform for Council to individually and collectively provide feedback and insight into the plan and help set the stage for the transition to a new term of council later in the year.

Administration will continue to check in with County Council and staff to keep the Implementation Roadmap relevant and achievable, ensuring momentum carries through to 2027 and beyond.

## **Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications associated with this staff report.

## **Consultations**

- The County of Essex's Senior Leadership Team.

## Strategic Plan Alignment

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

## Recommendation

That Essex County Council receive report number 2025-1105-CAO-R10-SZ, Strategic Plan Implementation Update as information.

## Approvals

Respectfully Submitted,

*Sandra Zwiers*

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

Appendix	Title
A	Strategic Plan Implementation 2025 Status Update
B	Strategic Plan Slide Deck Presentation 2025