

**REPORT TO:** Mayor and Members of Council

**PREPARED BY:** Felicia Krista, Economic Development & Communications Coordinator

**DEPARTMENT:** Economic Development

**DIVISION:** Economic Development

**MEETING DATE:** July 16, 2025

**SUBJECT:** DED-04-2025 Economic Development Q1 & Q2 Update

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### **PROPOSED MOTION**

THAT this report be accepted for information.

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

THAT this report be accepted for information.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Economic Development Department's 2025 Q1 and Q2 report outlines key accomplishments in business support, housing development, tourism promotion, and stakeholder engagement. Highlights include the launch of a formal Business Visitation Program, the introduction of new CIP housing streams, and the successful debut of the North Middlesex Wedding Show. Communications efforts were strengthened through newsletters, social media, and community surveys to keep residents and businesses informed and engaged. Strategic advocacy and regional collaboration continued to position North Middlesex for long-term economic growth and community resilience.

### **LINK TO STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

**Staff, Culture, Work Environment** By providing high-quality public services

**Fiscal Responsibility** By seeking fiscal sustainability by balancing service needs, demands, and growth

**Quality of Life, Recreation, Parks, and Culture** By fostering timely communication with residents, businesses, and community groups

**Economic Development** By promoting economic growth through implementation of the Economic Improvement Plan

## **BACKGROUND**

The Economic Development Department's 2025 Q1 and Q2 report highlights key initiatives and progress made from January to June in support of a strong local economy and vibrant community. Core focus areas included business retention and expansion through direct outreach, grants, and networking opportunities; the promotion and delivery of Community Improvement Plan (CIP) programs to support housing and downtown revitalization; and ongoing tourism and event promotion to drive local engagement. The department also strengthened communications through newsletters, social media, and surveys, while continuing to advocate for North Middlesex's economic priorities through regional and provincial collaboration. This report provides Council with a snapshot of the department's progress toward meeting key objectives outlined in the Municipal Strategic Plan and Economic Development Strategic Plan. A full report of measurable outcomes, data points, and departmental priorities for Q3/Q4 is expected in the year-end summary.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **1. Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E):**

During Q1 and Q2 of 2025, the Economic Development Department placed a strong focus on strengthening relationships with local businesses. In addition to ongoing support through grant facilitation and promotion of provincial and municipal programs, several new initiatives were launched to formalize and enhance BR+E efforts.

A formal Business Visitation Program was initiated, enabling staff to meet directly with local business owners and operators. These in-person meetings have helped identify current challenges, gather data on workforce and space needs, and build rapport between the municipality and the business community. Insights gathered during these visits are shaping future programming and advocacy priorities.

We have also begun the process of updating the North Middlesex Business Directory, which will serve as a key tool for both internal planning and public promotion. This directory will improve the visibility of local businesses, help residents and visitors discover services in the area, and allow us to target future communications and programs more effectively.

To further boost local business awareness, the department has implemented efforts to highlight businesses through municipal communication channels, including social media spotlights, blog features, and event tie-ins.

## **2. Community Improvement Plan (CIP) Programming:**

During the first half of 2025, the Economic Development Department successfully implemented and promoted several new streams within the Community Improvement Plan (CIP), resulting in increased interest and application activity. Notably, the addition of the Affordable Rental Housing Unit Program, the Additional Residential Unit Program, and the Conversion, Expansion, and Redevelopment Program marked a significant step forward in addressing local housing needs. These programs are designed to incentivize private investment in the creation of diverse housing options, especially rental and attainable units, by offering financial support for eligible projects.

There has also been continued uptake in core CIP streams focused on main street revitalization, such as façade improvements and signage upgrades, which help enhance the appearance and economic vitality of our commercial districts.

## **3. Tourism and Event Promotion:**

Tourism and event promotion played a key role in fostering local pride, attracting regional visitors, and supporting economic activity throughout Q1 and Q2. The Municipality hosted several new and returning events that generated significant community engagement and positive economic impact. A major milestone was the launch of the first annual North Middlesex Wedding Show, held at the Ailsa Craig Recreation Centre, which showcased local vendors, venues, and services while promoting the area as a unique rural destination for weddings and events.

We also saw strong participation in the annual Discover North Middlesex event, a well-attended showcase of municipal services, community groups, and local businesses. Additionally, the ongoing North Middlesex Market, held twice monthly, continued to grow as a platform for local makers, farmers, and entrepreneurs.

Several large-scale events are helping to establish North Middlesex as a vibrant hub for tourism and culture. The Bog Line Smoke Show kicked off their first annual event, drawing a significant crowd and generating strong regional interest. Anticipation is also building for upcoming events such as the Mud Creek Bluegrass Festival, the Ailsa Craig Highland Games, the Parkhill Fair, and the Ailsa Craig Main Street Car Show, which are expected to continue attracting visitors and further enhance the municipality's growing reputation as a destination for unique and high-quality rural experiences. Through cross-promotion, logistical support, and municipal coordination, the department played a key role in

elevating these events and reinforcing North Middlesex's growing reputation as a destination for unique experiences and rural charm.

#### **4. Communications and Engagement:**

In Q1 and Q2 of 2025, the Economic Development Department prioritized enhancing communication channels and increasing public engagement to ensure residents, businesses, and stakeholders remained informed and connected. Regular e-newsletters and social media campaigns were used to share timely updates on funding opportunities, community events, infrastructure projects, and municipal initiatives, helping to build transparency and trust with the public.

#### **5. Strategic Planning and Advocacy:**

Strategic planning and advocacy remained a key focus for the Economic Development Department in the first half of 2025, with continued efforts to advance the Municipality's long-term economic, housing, and infrastructure goals. Staff actively participated in regional economic development working groups, collaborating with neighbouring municipalities and partners to align shared priorities such as workforce attraction, housing supply, and communication.

Through these strategic efforts, the department continues to play a proactive role in shaping policies and partnerships that position North Middlesex for sustainable growth and prosperity.

### **FINANCIAL**

There are no immediate financial implications beyond existing departmental budgets

### **ATTACHMENT**

Prepared By: **Felicia Krista, Economic Development & Communications Coordinator**

Reviewed By: Brandon Drew, Director of Economic Development & Community Services

Reviewed By: Ralph D'Alessandro, Director of Finance /Treasurer

Approved By: Carolyn Tripp, Chief Administrative Officer