ST. THOMAS
THE RAILWAY CITY



St. Thomas 2051
Phase 1 Engagement Report

Spring - Summer 2026

St. Thomas 2051
Setting the Track for Our Future

Territorial Acknowledgement

The City of St. Thomas respectfully acknowledges that it is located on the traditional territories of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and Attawandaron (Neutral) Peoples, whose longstanding relationships with this land continue to this day. We recognize the enduring presence, knowledge, and contributions of Indigenous Peoples and honour the treaties and agreements that continue to shape this region, including the nearby treaty lands of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee-Delaware Nation.

We acknowledge our shared responsibility to care for the land, water, and natural environment, and we are committed to fostering respectful relationships, reconciliation, and meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities as we work together toward a more inclusive and sustainable future.

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Section 1
Introduction



St. Thomas 2051 - Overview

What is St. Thomas 2051 and what is this Project About?

The City of St. Thomas is undertaking a comprehensive review of its Official Plan that will result in a brand new Official Plan to guide the City's growth and development over the coming decades. This new document will build on the strengths, character and history that is represented throughout the City today while establishing a policy framework for the type of community the City wants to become by 2051.

The Official Plan establishes the City's vision and provides policy direction to guide decisions about where and how growth occurs, where housing and employment uses are located, how natural heritage and environmental systems are protected, and how transportation, infrastructure and public services are coordinated.

The Official Plan is one of the City's most important long-term decision-making documents and why this update process has been framed as ***"Setting the Track for Our Future"***.

Meaningful Engagement Leads to Better Outcomes

A central component of St. Thomas 2051 is meaningful engagement with the community. The City recognizes that a successful Official Plan must reflect the experiences, priorities and aspirations of the people who live, work, invest, study and participate in the community. Engagement is therefore intended to include a broad range of perspectives, including long-time residents, newcomers, Indigenous communities, businesses and entrepreneurs, youth, families, renters, older adults, and people and communities that may have historically experienced barriers to participating in planning processes.

The engagement program is being undertaken as part of a three-phase Official Plan update process. Phase 1 focuses on consultation and engagement, identifying issues and opportunities, developing a vision, establishing goals and objectives, and presenting findings to Council. Phase 2 will focus on policy development and preparation of a draft Official Plan, supported by further public and stakeholder engagement. Phase 3 will involve review of the draft and comments received, followed by a statutory public meeting and consideration of the final Official Plan for adoption.

About this Engagement Report

This Engagement Report documents the City's approach to public and stakeholder engagement undertaken through Phase 1 of the Official Plan update. It provides further detail on the engagement strategy, the audiences and stakeholders engaged, the methods and activities used to obtain input, participation levels, and the feedback received. The report also summarizes the key themes and priorities that emerged through the engagement process and identifies how this input is being considered in the development of the Official Plan's vision, goals, objectives and policy framework.

Ultimately, the engagement process is intended to ensure that St. Thomas 2051 is informed by a broad range of community perspectives and provides a vision and policy framework that reflects what St. Thomas is today, what the community values, and what it could become by 2051.

Section 2
Community Engagement Overview

Staff formally reinitiated the comprehensive review and update of the City of St. Thomas Official Plan through at the March 2, 2026 Council meeting. The project timeline and project scope, along with a draft workplan for this undertaking, were provided in that report

To ensure that residents, landowners, businesses, etc. were able to provide meaningful input and feedback early into the City's Official Plan review, several in-person and online engagement opportunities were provided.

Phase 1 engagement opportunities included the following:

- Official Plan Relaunch and Visioning Presentation and Workshop – May 2026
- Growth Management, Residential and Housing Affordability Workshop – June 2026
- Economic Development, Commercial and Employment Workshop – July 2026
- Speak Up St. Thomas Official Plan Project Page – June 2026
    - Community Survey
    - Story / Vision Board
    - Pin-Drop Comments



Phase 1 Community Engagement

Laying the Foundation for a Successful Review

The existing City of St. Thomas Official Plan was approved by the Province in 1980. While several large amendments have been passed since its original approval, and the City has been able to manage growth and development across St. Thomas over the past several decades, a new Official Plan is needed to respond to current and future conditions and trends.

To make sure that the City gets things right, it is undertaking a comprehensive engagement process with Phase 1 setting the foundation for the future policy development and updates to come.

The engagement process is helping identify opportunities and constraints, setting a vision and establishing goals and objectives to base the future policies and City direction around, and assisting in creating an overall strategy for the development of the new Official Plan.

Community Engagement Numbers

Over 50 individuals attended the workshop sessions that were held at Memorial Arena from May to July and were composed of Council members, the public, and representatives from the business and development communities. These sessions provided important input and discussion on the focused topics and activities that were prepared for those days.

In addition to the focused workshops, the Speak Up St. Thomas Official Plan project page has been a valuable tool to share the information and studies that the City has prepared to date to inform the Official Plan review and to serve as a platform to for further engagement. As of the writing of this report, over 100 individuals have completed the online survey, over 50 individuals have provided location-specific input and comments on the pin-drop interactive map, and there have been 20 contributions to the vision / story board.

Engagement Survey Results

The online survey posted on the City's Speak Up St. Thomas project page provided a list of 29 questions on various topics related to land use, housing, transportation, economic development, environmental protection, infrastructure, parks, and community services. These questions were framed to help identify what topic area was of most importance to the individual respondent, what needed improvement and what could use better direction through the Official Plan update.

It is important to note that the survey results should be considered very much "community input" as part of a land use planning process rather than being statistically representative of a public opinion poll. Further, the respondent group itself was comprised of roughly 87% residents and should be viewed in that light as well.

Notwithstanding these caveats, the findings of the survey that are to be provided, and the key themes that were identified through that process, were consistent with the input and discussions that were received through the workshops and the other online engagement platforms. These forums included discussions with landowners, business and development representatives, in addition to Council and resident participation.

Engagement Result Themes

1 - Managing Growth While Improving Quality of Life

There was general recognition that the City is growing and that this growth creates opportunities for housing, employment and investment, however, there was a strong expectation that this growth should be accompanied by:

- infrastructure investment;
- adequate transportation capacity;
- affordable and diverse housing;
- parks and recreation;
- community facilities and services;
- protection of natural areas;
- attractive and complete neighbourhoods; and
- protection of St. Thomas' identity and character.

This was particularly evident with the responses to the growth-related questions where 63% selected that a balanced combination of growth within the downtown, existing built-up areas, corridors, employment areas and greenfields is preferred, rather than concentrating growth in one specific location.

From an Official Plan review perspective, this establishes a growth-management framework that links growth to the associated community and broader expectations that comes with that growth. The overarching theme or objective would be that growth should make St. Thomas a better community, not just a bigger community.

2 - Housing Affordability and Housing Choice

The results support what has generally been communicated publicly in that housing affordability and housing choice are of most importance to those that responded with 86% identifying more



Engagement Result Themes

affordable housing as either important or very important and approximately 89% identifying that housing for young families was similarly important or very important.

Of interest in the survey results was that specific housing for seniors was identified by approximately 78% as being important/very important. While the City has seen an increase in various housing forms, approximately 71% identified a need for more diverse housing types, 69% provided a greater need for rental housing, and housing near transit and services was also identified by 69% of the respondents.

In translating this information to the Official Plan review, supply, affordability, housing tenure, housing type, location and accessibility need to be looked at holistically rather than treating affordability solely as a matter of increasing residential density.



3 - Complete Communities

The survey results identified very strong support for neighbourhoods and communities that were designed where residents could access everyday needs without having to drive for every trip. This was also reflected through the comments and discussions that were had at the various workshop sessions and activities that were held at those events.

Of note, 73% supported or strongly supported mixed-use development within neighbourhoods with written responses identifying the following as desirable neighbourhood characteristics:

- safety;
- parks and trails;
- sidewalks;
- trees;
- local services;
- different housing types;
- employment opportunities;
- community connections; and
- mixed-use development

The Official Plan should ensure that Complete Communities are a central organizing principle where housing, employment, shops and services, parks, schools and community facilities, transportation and the public realm are appropriately integrated.

Engagement Result Themes

4 – Transportation Offering Versus Transportation Demand

As confirmed through the survey results, the City remains a strongly automobile-oriented community with approximately 88% identifying that they typically drive to travel around the City. While this reflects the realities of how the community was historically built, and how the industry continues to develop, there is a clear tension in the survey results with what is being provided and what the respondents desire as there is significant demand for improvements to transportation alternatives.

Trail connections, sidewalks, transit service, cycling infrastructure, and accessibility are some of the additional transportation priorities that were identified. Written comments also provided more clarity on these directions by providing:

- improved north-south connections;
- better cycling connections;
- trail extensions;
- safer pedestrian infrastructure;
- improved transit;
- connections between new employment areas and the rest of the City;
- improved connections between St. Thomas and London; and
- planning transit infrastructure proactively rather than reactively.

While the City has completed a Transportation Master Plan in 2025, and the recommendations and directions provided in that document will need to be considered, it is important to note that the transportation framework for the Official Plan should not be framed as cars versus active transportation/transit. As provided by the survey results, direction should be to support a multi-modal transportation system that maintains an effective road network while providing realistic alternatives to automobile travel.



Engagement Result Themes

5 – Infrastructure Capacity Concerns

In addition to a general desire for alternative modes of transportation throughout the City, and for developments and neighborhoods to be more responsive to these alternatives, there was also general concern with respect to infrastructure investment and the need for infrastructure to keep pace with population growth. While approximately half of the respondents identified this as a top five priority, the infrastructure capacity concerns also included community facilities, schools, and parks and recreation capacity in addition to the traditional traffic, water and wastewater concerns that would normally be raised when questioned about the City's infrastructure.

From an Official Plan perspective, infrastructure should be elevated from a supporting policy to a fundamental growth-management principle where there is an identified stronger relationship between growth, infrastructure capacity, transportation, parks and recreation, community facilities, servicing, and development timing.

6 – Economic Diversity

The results of the survey indicated that economic diversity is of great importance to the respondents, however, revitalization of downtown businesses is of primary concern. Respondent provided that the innovation and technology sector, commercial development, tourism, agri-business, and general industrial sectors were all of importance with 44% - 51% of the votes while 72% of respondents provided that the downtown was the economic sector that needed the most attention.

The Official Plan will need to ensure that it provides direction for an employment strategy that supports a diversified economic ecosystem, including major employment, industrial development, commercial areas, downtown businesses, innovation, tourism, agriculture and home-based businesses. The Official Plan review will also need to consider provincial direction and potential changes with respect to the requirement to use standardized land use designations in Official Plans and what that might mean from an implementation perspective.



Engagement Result Themes

7 – Downtown Revitalization

While the downtown was identified as a priority area from an economic and business perspective for the City, the revitalization of the downtown was also identified as an area that the City should be prioritizing from a broader perspective. Some of the responses that were provided identified opportunities around:

- vacant and underutilized properties;
- mixed-use development;
- upper-storey residential;
- adaptive reuse;
- public realm improvements;
- pedestrian and cycling infrastructure;
- landscaping;
- public art;
- tourism;
- restaurants and entertainment;
- cultural uses; and
- railway heritage.

There was also a recurring concern about cleanliness, safety and the experience of the downtown environment.

Considering the input that was received and noting how a vibrant downtown can contribute overall to the City, from an Official Plan perspective, attention should be paid to framing the downtown as an area for urban regeneration and placemaking rather than simply an area for commercial activities. This should highlight the downtown as an area for housing, business, culture, heritage, tourism, public spaces, entertainment, and services.



Engagement Result Themes

8 – Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities

The single most valued community asset to the respondents of the survey by a considerable margin were the City's parks and open spaces. Parks, community centres and trails were the amenities that the community prioritized the most.

In addition to the options that were provided in the survey itself, the written responses provided the following that help round out where potential gaps currently exist:

- indoor swimming/aquatic facilities;
- indoor recreation;
- youth facilities and programming;
- sports fields;
- trails;
- childcare;
- libraries;
- community centres; and
- facilities serving growing neighbourhoods.

The City has recently completed its Parks and Recreation Master Plan that will help inform the Official Plan update, however, the results of the survey further support that parks, recreation and community facilities should be treated as growth-supporting infrastructure, rather than simply amenities to be provided after development occurs.

9 – Environmental Protection

Among all of the results of the survey, the responses on the environment were exceptionally strong and consistent. Water quality protection, protection of natural areas, sustainable development, and tree canopy enhancement all received 90% or higher in level of importance to the respondents.

Written responses also identified tree removal, natural areas, climate change and extreme weather, air quality and pollution, and maintaining environmental quality as the City grows as general concerns.

Staff identified the natural environment as an important area that required further study and support from an Official Plan review perspective and a Request for Proposals to have a consultant undertake a natural heritage systems study to help inform the policy direction of the Official Plan has been initiated.

From the results of the survey, the Official Plan should provide an environmental framework that integrates natural heritage, water resources, tree canopy, climate resilience and sustainable development into the broader growth-management strategy.



Engagement Result Themes

10 – Heritage and Small-Town Character

As the City continues to grow, its heritage and small-town character remain the two areas that are under the most tension with the respondents of the survey and would be consistent with input and feedback received through other engagement platforms.

Small-town character was identified as the City's second most valued asset at 65% and approximately 69% of the respondents considered cultural heritage conservation as important or very important in the survey.

While the respondents were in support of more housing, employment, mixed-use, infrastructure investment, higher levels of transportation choice, and the City's continued economic growth, the results provide that growth and character are not mutually exclusive objectives. From an Official Plan perspective, the policy framework will need to consider how growth should be designed, located and managed to protect the small-town character of St. Thomas. Further, this would recognize heritage as a community and economic asset of the City while providing a framework for heritage conservation, adaptive reuse and integration with redevelopment.



Section 3
Draft Official Plan Vision and Goals

The proposed draft vision, goals and objectives establish the strategic foundation for the City of St. Thomas Official Plan, articulating the community's long-term aspirations and providing direction for future growth, development and policy decisions through to 2051. The vision describes the desired future for the City, while the goals and objectives identify the priorities and outcomes needed to achieve it.

Community engagement has played an important role in shaping this framework by identifying residents' and stakeholders' priorities, concerns and aspirations for the future of St. Thomas. Feedback received through the engagement process, together with technical analysis and planning considerations, has informed the development of the draft vision, goals and objectives. These will guide the preparation of the new Official Plan's policies and continue to be refined as the update progresses.



Draft Official Plan Vision and Goals

St. Thomas Vision 2051

"To become a complete, connected, prosperous and resilient community where growth improves quality of life, creates opportunity and strengthens the City's distinctive character."

The vision for the City is to have growth make St. Thomas a *"better community"*, not simply a *"bigger community"*. With this as the guiding principle, and the Official Plan being the foundational document for future land use planning decisions, the policies of the Plan should help achieve this vision.

The draft vision would support growth through the provision of a diverse range of housing, support a strong and diversified economy, connect people to parks, recreation, services and employment, and ensure that infrastructure and community facilities keep pace with development. This would also provide for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment, heritage resources and railway legacy that contribute to the City's identity, while creating attractive, inclusive and accessible neighbourhoods and public spaces for current and future generations.



Draft Official Plan Goals

To support that broad community vision, the following are a set of eight (8) goals to help act as overarching policy principles for the Official Plan:

Goal 1 — Manage Growth Responsibly

Direct and manage growth in a way that strengthens the community, makes efficient use of existing infrastructure and supports the long-term sustainability of St. Thomas.

Goal 2 — Create Complete and Connected Communities

Create neighbourhoods and mixed-use areas where people can live, work, shop, access services, enjoy recreation and connect with one another.

Goal 3 — Provide Housing Choice and Affordability

Ensure that St. Thomas provides a diverse range of housing options that respond to the needs of current and future residents and contribute to housing affordability.

Goal 4 — Build a Connected and Accessible St. Thomas

Provide a safe, efficient and connected transportation system that supports automobiles while expanding practical opportunities for walking, cycling and transit.

Draft Official Plan Vision and Goals

Goal 5 — Strengthen Economic Prosperity and Employment

Build a diverse, resilient and prosperous local economy that provides employment opportunities, supports local businesses and strengthens St. Thomas as a place to invest, work and do business.

Goal 6 — Provide Parks, Recreation and Community Infrastructure

Ensure that growth is matched by high-quality parks, recreation facilities and community infrastructure that support health, well-being and community connection.

Goal 7 — Protect the Environment and Build a Resilient Community

Protect the natural systems and resources that sustain St. Thomas while preparing the community for climate change and environmental pressures.

Goal 8 — Celebrate St. Thomas's Identity, Heritage and Sense of Place

Protect and strengthen the distinctive character, heritage and cultural identity that make St. Thomas a unique community.



Section 4
Conclusion and Key Takeaways

Phase 1 of the Official Plan's engagement has provided valuable community input to help establish the proposed vision and overarching goals for its review and update. The feedback received has highlighted the importance of managing growth responsibly while improving quality of life, providing housing choice, creating complete and connected communities, supporting economic prosperity, investing in infrastructure and community facilities, protecting the environment, and maintaining distinctive identity and character of the City of St. Thomas.

The next phase of the project will build on this foundation through the development of draft Official Plan policies. These policies will be informed by the engagement findings, technical studies, Provincial requirements, and other background work that has been undertaken.

The policy development phase will translate the community's priorities and the proposed vision and goals into a comprehensive policy framework to guide the City's future growth and development.

Community involvement will continue throughout this next phase with additional engagement proposed to align with the start of the Natural Heritage Systems and Natural Hazard review. An initial draft foundational policy structure, vision, goals, objectives for the Official Plan is anticipated to be circulated in Winter 2027.

Opportunities for further engagement and updates will be posted on the Speak Up St. Thomas Official Plan project page and circulated as required by legislation.

