



# Committee of the Whole

---

**Meeting Date:** April 28, 2026

**Submitted by:** Cara Finn, Director of Economic Development  
Joe Winsler, Director of Human Services

**Subject:** Workforce Navigator Pilot Project

---

## **BACKGROUND:**

The Middlesex Workforce Development Partnership, a collective of municipal and employment service partners, Chaired by the County of Middlesex, has identified Workforce Development and a Sustainable Workforce as key strategic priorities in its [2026-2028 Workforce Development Partnership Strategic Action Plan](#). To advance this work, an application was submitted in 2025 to the [Rural Ontario Development \(ROD\) Program](#) under the Community Development stream.

The ROD Program is designed to strengthen rural communities by supporting initiatives that enhance economic resilience, encourage business growth, and build a skilled workforce. This aligns with the Province's broader [Rural Economic Development Strategy](#), which focuses on community vitality, business attraction and expansion, and workforce growth.

In collaboration, Middlesex County Economic Development and Human Services brought forward a joint proposal centered on workforce development, attraction, and retention. In January 2026, the Province confirmed approval of the project, including funding to establish a Workforce Navigator position.

## **ANALYSIS:**

Ongoing engagement with employers, workforce agencies, and community partners, including findings from Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) surveys, continues to highlight workforce availability and system navigation as significant challenges within Middlesex County. Employers often report difficulty recruiting qualified candidates, while residents can face barriers in identifying and accessing employment and training opportunities.

While a range of programs are available through organizations such as Community Employment Choices, Youth Opportunities Unlimited, Fanshawe College, provincial ministries, and apprenticeship pathways, many rural residents remain either unaware of these services or unsure how to access them. Even relatively minor barriers such as completing applications, arranging transportation, or securing childcare can prevent individuals from pursuing opportunities that could improve their employment outcomes.

The Middlesex County Workforce Navigator role is intended to help address these challenges by providing individualized, hands-on support. Rather than requiring individuals to independently navigate multiple systems, the Navigator will work directly with participants to connect them with appropriate training, education, and employment opportunities, while offering ongoing guidance to support successful outcomes. Delivering tailored, one-on-one assistance to residents seeking employment, skills training, or career advancement within the County, the Workforce Navigator will act as a consistent point of contact, supporting individuals not only in understanding available resources, but in accessing and completing programs that lead to sustainable employment.

Over the term of the project, ending December 31, 2027, the Navigator is expected to support between 24 to 30 individuals (12 to 15 annually), with a focus on rural residents who experience barriers such as limited awareness of services, difficulty navigating multiple organizations, or lack of individualized guidance.

Individuals will be identified primarily through Human Services Ontario Works Case Managers and or Employment Ontario service providers. Additional referrals will be received through other support agencies including secondary schools throughout the County. The Workforce Navigator will work collaboratively with Ontario Works Case Managers and Employment Advisors to ensure wraparound supports are in place and that identified participant needs are effectively addressed.

Key functions of the role include:

- Intake and Individual Action Planning: Working with participants to assess goals, identify barriers, and develop personalized plans.
- Education and Training Navigation: Supporting access to GED completion, apprenticeships, short-term training, and postsecondary pathways.
- Employment Connections: Assisting participants with job readiness, including resume development, interview preparation, and connections to local employers.
- Access to Financial Supports: Guiding individuals in securing funding through programs such as Better Jobs Ontario and the Canada-Ontario Job Grant.

- Barrier Mitigation: Coordinating with local partners, including Community Employment Choices (CEC), Community Futures Middlesex, and the London Small Business Centre, to provide wrap-around supports.
- System Improvement: Identifying and tracking service gaps to inform future program planning and strengthen the overall workforce development system.

Key activities include:

- Intake & Personalized Action Plans: Meeting with individuals to identify career goals, barriers, and available supports.
- Training & Education Navigation: Assisting participants in accessing GED programs, apprenticeships, short-term skills training, or post-secondary pathways.
- Employment Matching: Supporting job seekers in connecting to local employers, including resume preparation, interview coaching, and introductions through workforce agencies.
- Resource Access: Helping individuals secure funding for training through provincial and federal programs (e.g., Better Jobs Ontario, Canada-Ontario Job Grant).
- Barrier Reduction: Coordinating with local organizations such as Community Employment Choices (CEC), Community Futures Middlesex, and the London Small Business Centre to ensure wrap-around supports.
- Gap identification: identify, track and create solutions to gaps in the current system to support future programming.

Following the pilot, outcomes will be reviewed to determine overall effectiveness. Based on the findings, Economic Development and Human Services will assess the feasibility of sustaining the role through base funding or through collaborative funding models with regional employment agencies.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

The total project cost is \$148,800, inclusive of both financial contributions and in-kind supports from community partners. The County's share represents 50% of the eligible costs, amounting to \$46,900 of the \$93,800 eligible total. This funding has been approved as part of the County's 2026 budget, and no additional financial impact is expected.

**ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC FOCUS:**

This report aligns with the following Strategic Focus, Goals, or Objectives:

<b>Strategic Priority</b>	<b>Goal</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
<p>Economic Development</p> 	<p>Enhance overall economic well-being and community prosperity by fostering a sustainable and thriving local economy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop and implement an Economic Development approach for the County, focusing on key priorities, actions, and areas of growth while providing strong support for small businesses and entrepreneurs, including agriculture-related businesses.</li></ul>
<p>Collaboration &amp; Partnerships</p> 	<p>Strengthen collaboration with local municipalities and regional partners to improve economic efficiency, enhance service delivery, and support regional development in alignment with community priorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Optimize service delivery through inter-municipal collaboration and shared services to improve efficiency and seamless operations.</li><li>• Build and enhance relationships with municipal, regional, First Nations, community, and private sector partners to align priorities, share resources, and implement joint initiatives that improve community well-being and economic growth.</li></ul>

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**THAT** the Workforce Navigator Pilot Project report be received for information.