Middlesex 2046

Official Plan Update

Consultation Report

April 2022

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1.0 Introduction

Middlesex 2046 is a community engagement campaign about land use in Middlesex County. Middlesex County is creating an updated Official Plan – its land use framework for growth and development.

Consulting with people who live, work, or volunteer in the County is an important part of this process.

1.1. Why Middlesex 2046?

Over the next 25 years, the County will grow at a faster rate than the previous 25 years. In 2021, the County engaged Watson & Associates Economists to prepare growth forecasts over a 25-year time horizon. The project considered provincial projections and recent, rapid increases in growth within Middlesex County.

The project resulted in three growth scenarios: high, low, and reference. These three scenarios form the basis for growth planning in Middlesex County.

The low scenario predicted population growth to 96,300 by 2046, and the high scenario predicted population growth to 115,000 by 2046. The reference scenario predicts a population of 107,600 in 2046.

1.2. Consultation Topics

The purpose of the Middlesex 2046 campaign was to engage stakeholder groups and the broader public in meaningful conversations regarding how the County should plan to accommodate this growth.

Conversations focused on five topics:

1. Agriculture.
2. Natural heritage.
3. Economy.
4. Development.
5. Housing.

Feedback and ideas related to each of these topics are described throughout this Report. In many stakeholder conversations, discussions on development and housing were interrelated, as such, feedback related to these comments have been combined in this Report. It is important to note that ideas, suggestions and comments described in this report are directly communicated from participants during the community engagement process, some of which do not necessarily reflect the views or recommendations of Middlesex County nor Boulevard Strategy Group.

There are other topic areas the County is considering as part of the review of its Official Plan, such as source drinking water protection, provincial changes, and administrative or technical matters.

While stakeholders were informed of these considerations, outcomes are largely prescribed by legislation and do not lend themselves to meaningful two-way engagement.

2.0 Methodology

Middlesex County undertook a robust community engagement campaign that commenced in February 2022. This Report summarizes results of engagement activities up to April 5, 2022.

2.1. Project Objectives

Two sets of objectives drove work planning for the Middlesex 2046 project – objectives specific to Middlesex County and objectives related to the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) core values.

2.1.1. Middlesex County Objectives

The following objectives related to the specific corporate communication and engagement needs of Middlesex County during the Official Plan update process:

- Sessions for in-depth conversation are provided with key stakeholder groups including local municipalities, local businesses and developers, and agricultural producers/ businesses.
- The County's Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) is informed of the communication and engagement strategy, has opportunity to provide direction, and members are empowered as champions who can promote the County's communication and engagement activities.[1]
- County Council is informed of the communication and engagement strategy and empowered as champions who can promote the County's communication and engagement activities.
- Regulatory agencies are provided with proposed amendments and have ample time to provide comments.[2]
- Members of the public are aware of the Official Plan update and are provided with opportunities to participate.
- First Nations or other Indigenous communities are invited to participate using the method of their choice.
- An open house and public meeting are held in accordance with the provincial *Planning Act*.
- A minimum 20-day public notice period – prior to the public open house and public meeting – is provided in accordance with the provincial *Planning Act*.

[1] The County's Planning Advisory Committee has been provided with a series of opportunities to provide input on the Official Plan through meetings arranged by County staff.

[2] Proposed amendments have been circulated to commenting agencies by County staff.

2.1.2. IAP2 Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation

The Middlesex 2046 campaign was also prepared with line-of-sight to the IAP2 core values for the practice of public participation. The values include that public participation:

- Is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have the right to be involved in the decision-making process.
- Includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
- Promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision-makers.
- Seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
- Seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
- Provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
- Communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

2.2. Process and Tactics

The following consultation and engagement tactics were employed as part of the Middlesex 2046 community engagement campaign.

2.2.1. Community Survey

A community survey launched on March 7, 2022, and closed on April 4, 2022, with a total of 489 responses.

The survey was offered primarily through an online format. Hard copies were available at County library locations, and this option was promoted for residents who preferred to participate through non-digital formats.

Of the survey respondents:

- 94 per cent live in Middlesex County.
- 44 per cent work in Middlesex County.
- 26 per cent volunteer in Middlesex County, and
- 49 per cent indicated they are a patron / customer of Middlesex County businesses and attractions.
- "None of the above" and "Prefer not to respond" responses were each minimal.

Q1 Which of the following statements describe you? (Check all that apply):

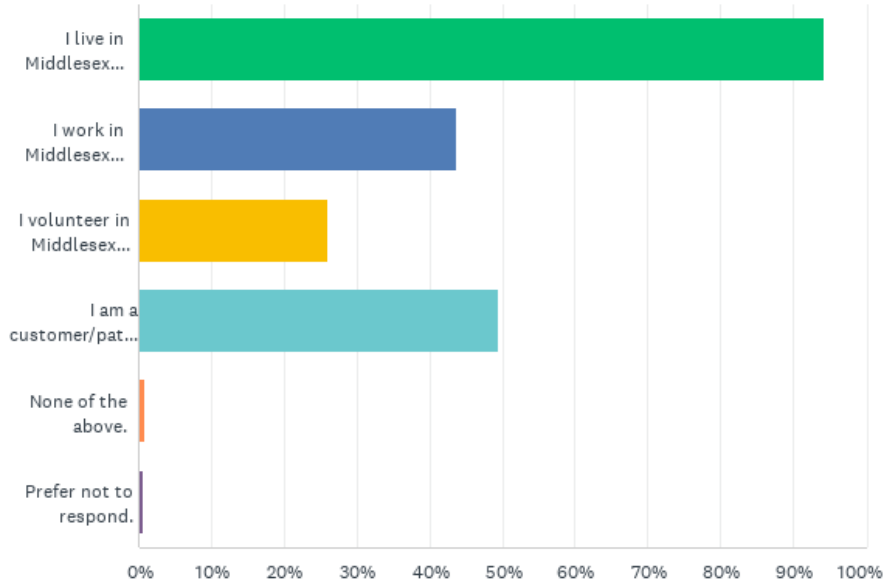


Figure 1: Q1 of the Public Engagement Survey

When asked where they spend most of their time within Middlesex County:

- 13 per cent indicated Adelaide Metcalfe.
- 17 per cent indicated Lucan Biddulph.
- 25 per cent indicated Middlesex Centre.
- 12 per cent indicated North Middlesex.
- 25 per cent indicated Southwest Middlesex.
- 28 per cent indicated Strathroy-Caradoc.
- 14 per cent indicated Thames Centre, and
- 3 per cent indicated Newbury.
- "Unsure / Prefer not to respond" responses were minimal.

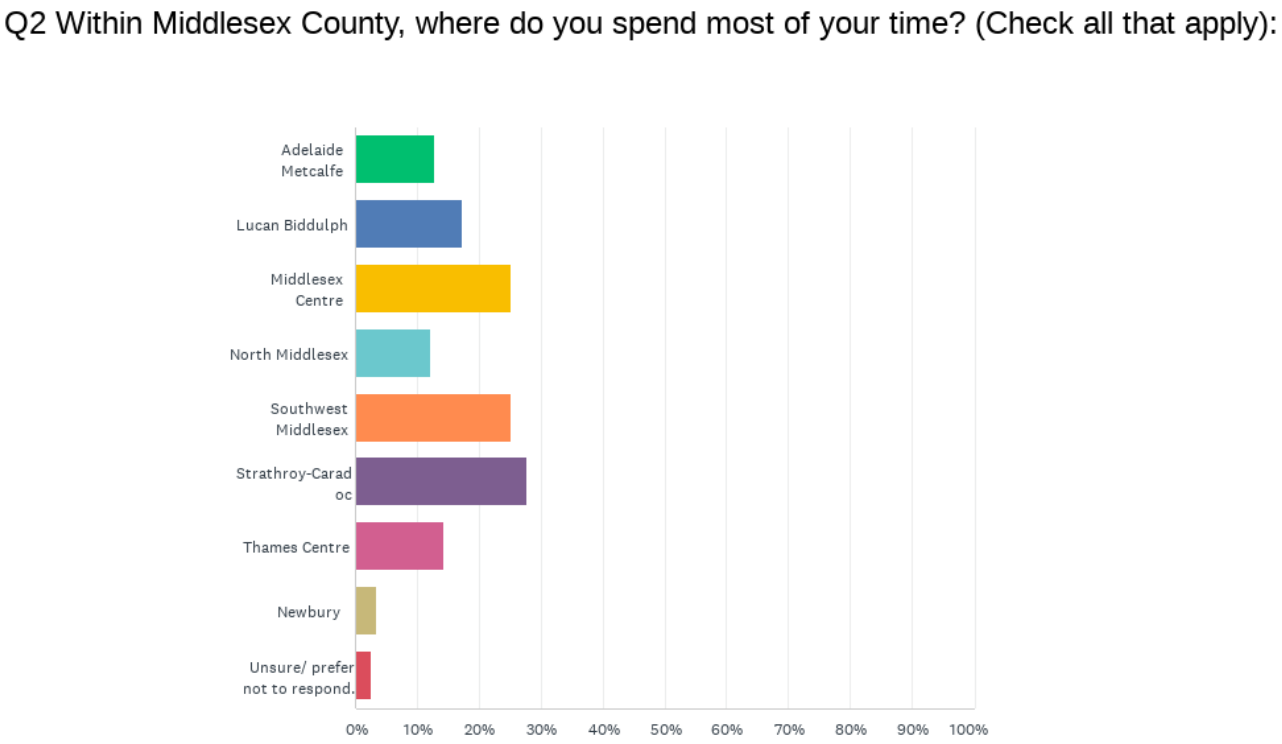


Figure 2: Q2 of the Public Engagement Survey

2.2.2. Virtual Workshops

Four virtual workshops were held with key stakeholders in the Official Plan update process:

- Workshop with local Chief Administrative Officers and designates, March 25, 2022 – 11 participants.
- Workshop with agricultural sector representatives, March 29, 2022 – 12 participants.
- Workshop with local developers and business leaders, March 30, 2022 – 18 participants.
- Workshop with elected officials from local Councils within Middlesex County, March 30, 2022 – 21 participants.

2.2.3. Virtual Public Open House

A virtual public open house – open to all members of the community – was held on March 30, 2022. A total of 21 participants were engaged in the virtual format.[3]

[3] Includes members of the administration and elected officials.

2.2.4. Written Feedback

Members of the public were also invited to submit written comments through mail, email, and online form submission.

Eight submissions were received from elected officials, citizens, and community groups. Community groups that provided written comments included:

- Camp Kee-Mo-Kee.
- Concerned Residents of Thames Centre.
- Canadians for Safe Technology (C4ST).

Written comments relating to Official Plan topic areas are provided throughout this Report. General comments that do not relate specifically to topic areas included:

- Middlesex County needs to provide advance, direct written notice to property owners for development proposals within 120 metres of property lines.
- Middlesex County needs to work seamlessly with Planning partners such as local municipalities, conservation authorities, and other regulatory agencies, to provide consistency and certainty during the Planning Approval process.
- Middlesex County should continue to grow engagement with First Nations communities and acknowledge that individuals from First Nations live within Middlesex County's communities.

2.2.5. Collaboration with County Planning Advisory Committee

The Middlesex County PAC has been engaged in the Official Plan update from the outset of the project. Staff has been consulting the PAC with in-depth conversation throughout the process.

With respect to the Middlesex 2046 community engagement campaign, PAC members were provided leadership and guidance on community engagement tactics.

2.2.6. Collaboration with County Planning Staff

A meeting with County Planning staff was held on February 16, 2022, to outline the proposed process for community engagement and hear ideas.

County staff were involved in hearing community feedback during the virtual workshops and public open house and play an important role in incorporating community feedback in the Official Plan Amendment.

2.2.7. Agency Circulation

As part of the consultation process, draft versions of the changes under consideration by the County were circulated to regulatory agencies.

Comments were received from the following agencies:[4]

- Enbridge Gas.
- CN Rail.
- Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority.
- Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc (Planning staff).
- County of Lambton (Planning staff).
- Lake Huron and Elgin Area Water Supply Systems.

Due to the technical nature of these interactions, feedback from agencies is being reported and considered separately by staff and is not included in this Report.

2.2.8. Outreach to Indigenous Communities

The County Warden has reached out to potentially interested First Nations to understand their level of interest in participating, and their preferred mode of engagement.

These conversations are ongoing, and results are not yet available to include in this Report.

2.2.9. Promotional Activities

Opportunities for community engagement were communicated in the following ways:

- Detailed content and background information available on a dedicated section of Middlesex.ca.
- A story map to explain the County's collective challenge and engage the community in meaningful conversation.
- Frequent posts to County social media channels.
- Public notice in local newspapers.
- Formal emails and correspondence to stakeholder groups.
- Promotion through partnerships with local municipalities.
- Promotion by Members of the County's Planning Advisory Committee throughout their networks.
- Promotion by Members of County Council throughout their networks.

[4] Comments received by time of writing. There may be additional submissions after this Report is published.

3.0 Agriculture

Agriculture is the most significant land use within Middlesex County and a major contributor to the local economy and culture.

Agriculture in Middlesex County has a $1.2 billion annual impact, with 7,800 jobs and $290 million in wages and salaries.

The County is reviewing its agricultural land use policies to:

- Ensure the continued protection of agricultural land.
- Explore potential changes to minimum farm sizes to meet changing local needs.
- Allow for limited flexibility in dwellings for agri-tourism, agri-business, multi-generational housing, and housing for farm labour.
- Explore potential changes to surplus dwelling policies.
- Community feedback related to these issues is provided below.

3.1. Community Survey Results

Of the respondents who provided information (n=451), 31 per cent are involved in the agricultural industry of Middlesex County, and 69 per cent are not involved in the agricultural industry.

Q3 Are you involved in agriculture within Middlesex County as a producer or owner/employee of an agri-business or agri-tourism operation? (Check one):

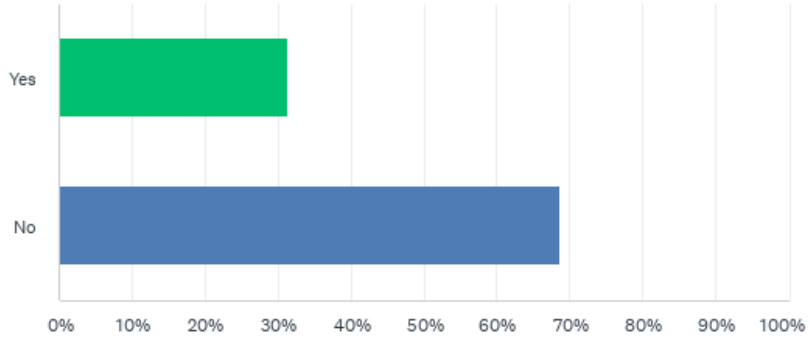


Figure 3: Q3 of the Public Engagement Survey

When asked – on a sliding scale – how important it is to protect agricultural land from future development (with 0 indicating "not important", and 100 indicating "very important") of 449 responses (n=449) the average response was 84.

3.1.1. Minimum Farm Sizes

The County currently requires that new farms be a minimum of 40 hectares (approximately 100 acres). When asked how they feel about this requirement, of 449 responses (n=449):

- 42 percent felt the minimum farm size should be reduced.
- 25 percent felt the minimum farm size should remain at 40 hectares.
- 3 percent felt the minimum farm size should be increased from 40 hectares.
- 23 percent did not have an opinion on the issue.
- 7 percent were unsure or preferred not to respond.

3.1.2. Limited Flexibility for Dwellings and Structures

Middlesex County is considering limited flexibility for dwellings and structures on agricultural land that are indirectly related to farming uses, such as structures for agri-business, agri-tourism, multi-generational housing and housing for farm labour. When asked if Middlesex County should allow for these dwellings and structures, of 449 responses (n=449):

- 71 per cent indicated “yes, agricultural landowners should have additional flexibility”.
- 18 per cent indicated “no, agricultural land should be used directly for farming uses”.
- 8 per cent did not have an opinion on the issue.
- 3 per cent were unsure or preferred not to respond.

3.1.3. Surplus Dwelling Policy

When farms expand, they sometimes acquire additional dwellings or structures that are surplus to their operations. Under the current policy, Middlesex County generally allows these dwellings to be severed for sale if they were constructed prior to 1999. Middlesex County is considering changing this policy to allow for dwellings that are at least 20 years old.

When asked how they would feel about this change, of 448 responses (n=448):

- 59 per cent support the change.
- 13 per cent do not support the change.
- 15 per cent do not have an opinion on the issue.
- 5 per cent were unsure or preferred not to respond.
- 8 per cent had an alternate suggestion.

Of those who offered an alternate suggestion, the prevailing theme was that the age of dwellings allowed to be severed for sale should be reduced with

several respondents suggesting a dwelling age of 10 years. Others suggested 5 years or no timeline at all. Some felt that this issue should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

3.2. Virtual Workshops and Public Open House

The need to protect agricultural land for future generations of farming was a key theme across all virtual workshops and the public open house. Many participants stressed that, once paved, farmland is lost forever with negative implications for future farmers, local food security, and environmental concerns.

Participants indicated that, to protect farmland, future development must be tight and not expand into agricultural land, explaining that agriculture and residential development are incompatible uses.

Some participants requested that the County consider re-zoning undeveloped land back to agriculture. Other participants indicated there may be potential for development on agricultural land that is demonstrated to be unsuitable for farming.

Participants were somewhat open to flexibility in dwellings and structures indirectly related to farming operations, such as agri-business, agri-tourism, multi-generational housing, and housing for farm labour. Some involved in the agricultural sector noted that, with current housing challenges, and ongoing distancing requirements through the COVID-19 pandemic, finding suitable housing for farm labour is challenging and additional flexibility may be welcome.

There was no consensus on minimum requirements for new farm sizes. While participants felt strongly about the need to protect agricultural land for future generations, some felt smaller parcels would allow for easier entry for new farming operations, particularly in specific areas such as apple orchards and mushroom farming.

Others felt that the existing requirement of 40 hectares is the minimum amount of land required for a farming operation and that costs per hectare are not a significant barrier to entry at that scale. Most, if not all, participants agreed that, regardless of the minimum farm size, the land must be used for farming and not estate homes.

The majority of participants supported changes to the County's surplus dwelling policies to allow surplus dwellings for sale if they are at least 20 years old. Some participants felt a shorter timeline of 10 years would be appropriate.

3.3. Written Feedback

The following written feedback was received related to issues covered under the agriculture topic area:

- The County should exercise caution in allowing Additional Residential Units on farm properties – multi-generational solutions are good for the short-term but could result in surplus dwellings that are severed for sale in the future.
- Smaller farm parcels may offer opportunities for smaller scale or unique farming opportunities, but there have been traditional instances where estate homes are built on smaller parcels that risk future farming practices.
- Reducing minimum requirements for farm sizes would make farming more viable to new entrants in the sector.
- One community member suggested a minimum farm size of 30 hectares (75 acres).
- Policies must protect against growing pressures for “estate homes” or “executive-style homes” on agricultural land to protect valuable farming land for future generations.
- The County should ensure size and other requirements associated with severing surplus dwellings are clear in the Official Plan, not just the building age.
- The County should exercise caution when interpreting Census of Agriculture data.

4.0 Natural Heritage

Middlesex County's natural heritage system includes woodlands, wetlands, valley lands and watercourses. Natural heritage is important because it:

- Provides habitats for plants and animals.
- Connects people to recreation and nature.
- Filters pollution and sediment from the water and air.
- Reduces flooding and erosion.
- Stores carbon and reduces greenhouse gas emissions, while supporting resilience against climate change.
- Supports the local economy with natural resources and tourism attractions.
- Supports agricultural producers through healthy soil and growing conditions.

As part of the community engagement campaign, Middlesex County sought perceptions from the community on protection of the natural heritage system and specific areas of concern.

4.1. Community Survey Results

When asked – on a sliding scale – how important it is to protect Middlesex County's natural heritage system from future development – with 0 indicating "not important," and 100 indicating "very important" – of 434 responses (n=434) the average response was 85.

26 per cent of respondents indicated they had specific concerns regarding Middlesex County's natural heritage system. There were concerns about:

- Increased growth, development, and human activities, and negative impacts on natural resources and the environment.
- Biosolid operations and proximity to the Sydenham River.
- Preservation of woodlots, forests, and trees in general.
- Preservation of animal habitats.
- Preservation of Komoka Provincial Park and conservation authority lands.
- Alterations to ponds and wetlands (for example, gravel pits).
- Development near watercourses and on floodplains.
- Ensuring development does not result in a loss of farmland and protects food security.
- Increased traffic, noise, and air pollution.
- The need for greater recreational use of natural assets.

4.2. Virtual Workshops and Public Open House

There was limited discussion regarding Middlesex County's natural heritage system during the virtual workshops and public open house. Participants indicated they were most interested in discussing other topics under consideration.

4.3. Written Feedback

The following written feedback was received related to issues covered under the natural heritage topic area:

- The County should restrict biosolid fertilizer storage or other activities due to risk of contaminating soil, groundwater, rivers, source water and threats to species.
- The Thames River needs to be protected and enhanced within Planning policies, including increased opportunities for recreational use.

5.0 Economy

With skilled workers, world class education and research facilities, low start-up costs and shovel-ready sites, Middlesex County is a premiere business location.

Middlesex County offers competitive labour costs, highway access, reliable and affordable energy, a skilled workforce, proximity to major markets, outstanding educational facilities, strong business networks, research and development resources, and exceptional quality of life. Key sectors include agriculture and agri-business, manufacturing, small business, and tourism.

Middlesex County has recently completed an Economic Development Strategic Plan, and is reviewing land use policies to strengthen support for economic objectives. This review includes broadband internet, employment land suitability and availability, infrastructure suitability and availability, creative industries, and other supports.

5.1. Community Survey Results

When asked about their roles in the local economy and workforce, of 426 responses (n=426):

- 30 per cent are business owners within Middlesex County.
- 30 per cent are employed at a business within Middlesex County.
- 11 per cent work remotely for a business located outside of Middlesex County.
- 16 per cent commute to a business located outside of Middlesex County.
- 2 per cent are students.
- 19 per cent are retired.
- 4 per cent are not currently in the workforce.
- 5 per cent are none of the above.
- 3 per cent preferred not to respond.

Q11 Which of the following statements best describes you? (Check all that apply):

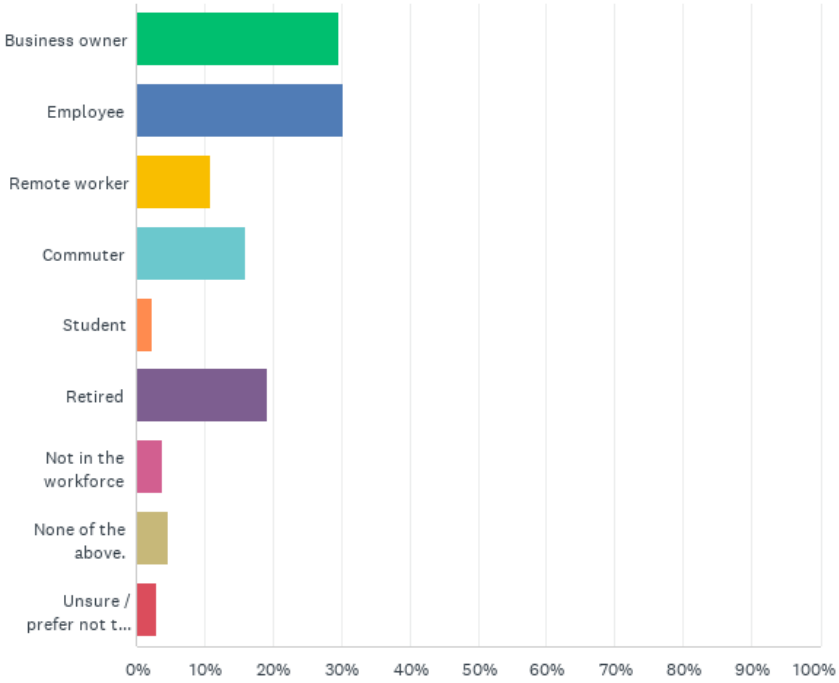


Figure 4: Q11 of the Public Engagement Survey

Based on a 5-star rating, with 5 as "excellent" and 1 as "poor", respondents were asked to rate employment options and the suitability of local infrastructure for employment. Average ratings are as follows:

- Availability and diversity of employment options in Middlesex County (n=416) – **3 stars**.
- Availability, affordability, and reliability of high-speed internet in Middlesex County (n=422) – **2.4 stars**.
- Quality of Middlesex County's transportation system for employment (n=420) – **2.2 stars**.
- Availability of services and utilities in Middlesex County for employment (n=419) – **2.8 stars**.

When asked to identify Middlesex County's greatest tourism assets, of 419 responses (n=419), feedback was as follows:

- Natural attractions – 79 per cent.
- Agricultural attractions – 51 per cent.
- Shopping and retail – 18 per cent.
- Sports and recreation – 38 per cent.
- Community festivals, fairs, and events – 62 per cent.

- Arts, culture, and heritage – 16 per cent.
- Restaurants, cafes, and breweries – 34 per cent.
- Entertainment venues – 9 per cent.
- Other – 6 per cent.

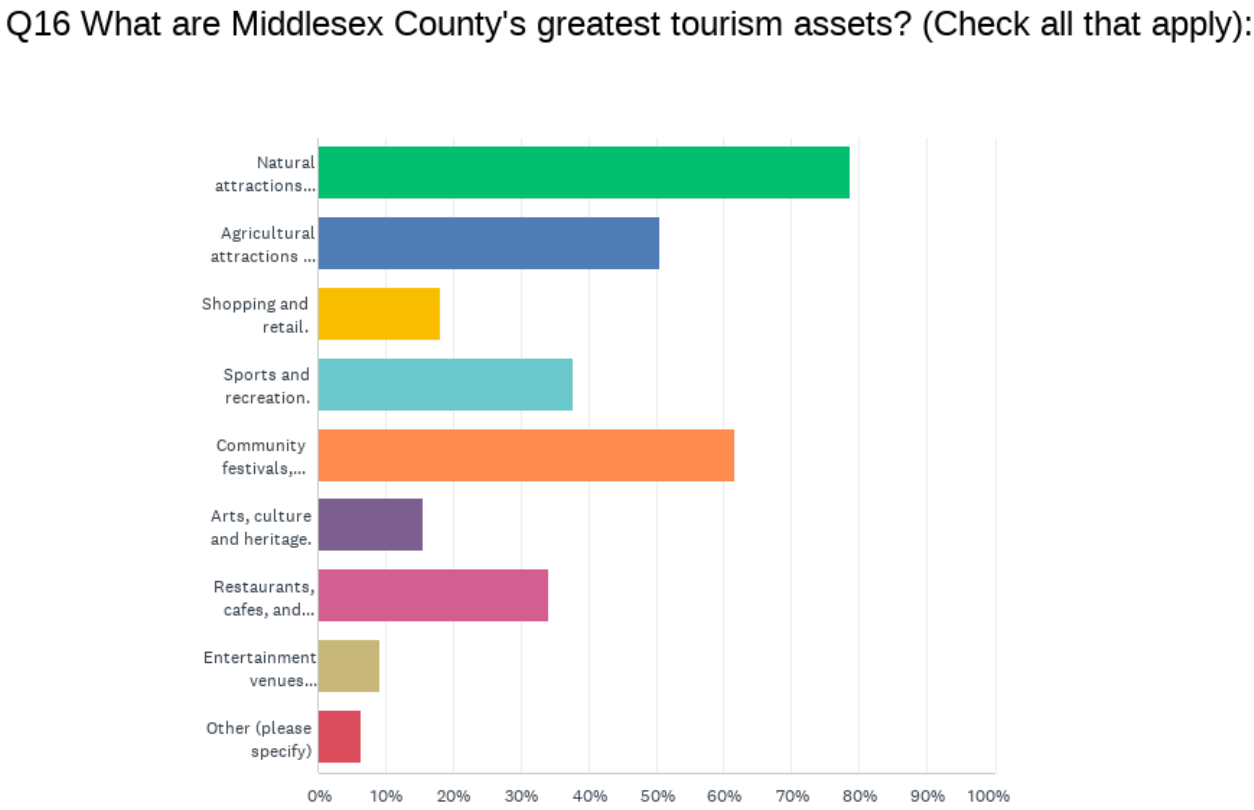


Figure 5: Q16 of the Public Engagement Survey

Those who responded with "other" indicate farmers markets/ downtown markets are an important attraction. Others indicated the need to strengthen agri-tourism. Several respondents expressed local destinations are limited relative to other communities.

5.2. Virtual Workshops and Public Open House

Transportation networks within Middlesex County were generally viewed as positive, except public transit.

While the community transportation pilot was viewed as a positive development, participants noted significant enhancements are necessary to connect current and prospective employees to local job opportunities.

At present, it is difficult to travel to employment, school, healthcare, and shopping without access to a vehicle.

Participants indicated that continued improvement in high-speed internet is important across the County. This was a particular issue in rural areas, where participants noted that modern farming practices are heavily dependent on technology and connectivity.

Several participants cited commercial and industrial development along major highways – particularly the 400 series highways – as a significant economic development opportunity as these parcels would be attractive from a shipping and logistics perspective.

There were several suggestions to help Middlesex County become more competitive from a land use perspective:

- Increase the supply of serviced land, recognizing that unserviced land represents a poor return on investment for economic development leads.
- Continue to improve infrastructure and high-speed internet.
- Expand public transit.
- Create more affordable housing options for current and prospective employees.
- Review incentive programs and Community Improvement Plans (CIPs) to ensure they are more attractive than competitor communities.
- Promote the tourism sector from a lifestyle perspective, encouraging prospective businesses and talent to "live where you play."

5.3. Written Feedback

The following written feedback was received related to issues covered under the economy topic area:

- The organization *Canadians for Safe Technology (C4ST)* is advocating for the installation of fibre optic cable over wireless options when it comes to the installation of high-speed internet in Middlesex County.
- VIA Rail is an important consideration in transportation systems, with passenger pick up in Glencoe.
- Many local downtowns are on County roads and the County must play a role in downtown revitalization and renewal, collaborating with local business associations.
- Planning policies should require green spaces and ecological spaces to be incorporated as part of employment lands.
- The County and its partners should expand Community Improvement Plan opportunities to hamlets and small towns.

6.0 Development and Housing

Since 2016, Middlesex County and local municipalities have seen an increasing amount of development applications and approvals. There has been a 100 per cent increase in subdivision and condominium activity, and a 25 per cent increase in local approval issues like zoning amendments and minor variances. With anticipated growth projections, this activity is expected to increase even further.

Recent trends suggest new developments are larger in volume and are more complex. This is consistent with growing demand for residential and commercial properties in Middlesex County.

If Middlesex County's population grows to between 96,300 and 115,000 by 2046, between 10,800 and 17,900 housing units will be required to meet the needs of the community.

The community's challenge is to ensure these housing units are created in a way that is:

- Attainable, accessible, and affordable for new homebuyers, renters, and seniors.
- Respectful of Middlesex County's natural heritage system.
- Constructed in urban areas so that agricultural land continues to be protected.

Middlesex County is considering a range of housing options to explore this challenge, such as townhouses, row houses, apartments, tiny homes, and Additional Residential Units within existing homes and backyards.

6.1. Community Survey Results

6.1.1. Growth and Development

When asked for overall perceptions related to growth in Middlesex County, of 420 responses (n=420):

- 20 per cent indicated they strongly approve.
- 41 per cent indicated they approve.
- 18 per cent indicated they neither approve nor disapprove.
- 9 per cent indicated they disapprove.
- 6 per cent indicated they strongly disapprove, and
- 4 per cent indicated "other".

Those that selected "other" offered the following comments:

- Services must be in place to support growth – both traditional infrastructure and community infrastructure such as recreational centres and schools.
- Concerns regarding threats to agricultural land and natural features.
- Ensure growth is equitably balanced throughout Middlesex County.
- Ensure balanced growth with commercial and industrial development to provide employment options.

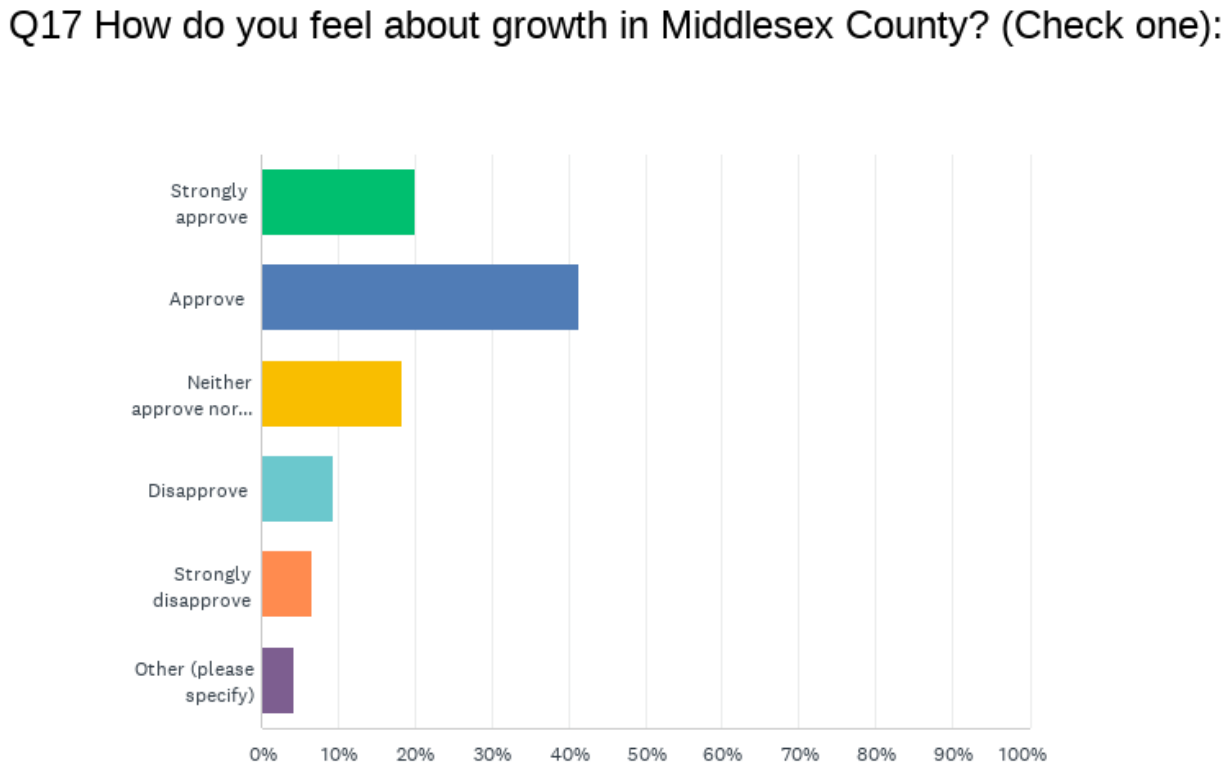


Figure 6: Q17 of the Public Engagement Survey

When asked for overall perceptions related to development in Middlesex County over the past 5 years, of 417 responses (n=417):

- 7 per cent indicated they strongly approve.
- 36 per cent indicated they approve.
- 28 per cent indicated they neither approve nor disapprove.
- 20 per cent indicated they disapprove.
- 6 per cent indicated they strongly disapprove, and
- 4 per cent indicated "other."

Those who selected "other" provided the following comments:

- Need more variety of housing options that are more attainable / affordable, including rental options.

- Concerns regarding increasing urban sprawl and the need for more intensification.

Respondents were asked if they had ideas on how Middlesex County can best accommodate growth over the next 25 years.

236 participants provided responses, and key themes included:

- The County should provide for a greater range of housing options that are more suitable for local household incomes, first time buyers, rentals, and seniors.
- The County should prioritize the creation of new affordable housing.
- The County should encourage increased densities in settlement areas, building up instead of out.
- The County should allow flexibility for housing on farms.
- The County should proactively plan and manage growth.
- Planning policies should retain rural / small town feel.
- The County should prioritize the protection of farmland.
- The County should prioritize environmental preservation and sustainable development.
- Planning policies should discourage rapid growth.
- The County should ensure strong infrastructure (such as bridges, roads, development land, natural gas, high-speed internet) is in place prior to development.
- The County and government partners should ensure community services (such as schools and hospitals) are in place prior to development.
- Community amenities (such as community centres, grocery stores, and gas stations) should be in place prior to development.
- The County should expand transit and minimize traffic congestion.
- The County and local municipalities should reject “cookie cutter” development proposals.
- Planning policies should leverage local downtowns for intensification opportunities.

6.1.2. Housing

When asked to describe their current experience in the housing market, of 415 responses (n=415):

- 86 per cent own a home.
- 7 per cent rent a home.
- 2 per cent are preparing to enter the housing market.
- 4 per cent share a home with family.

- 1 per cent preferred not to respond.

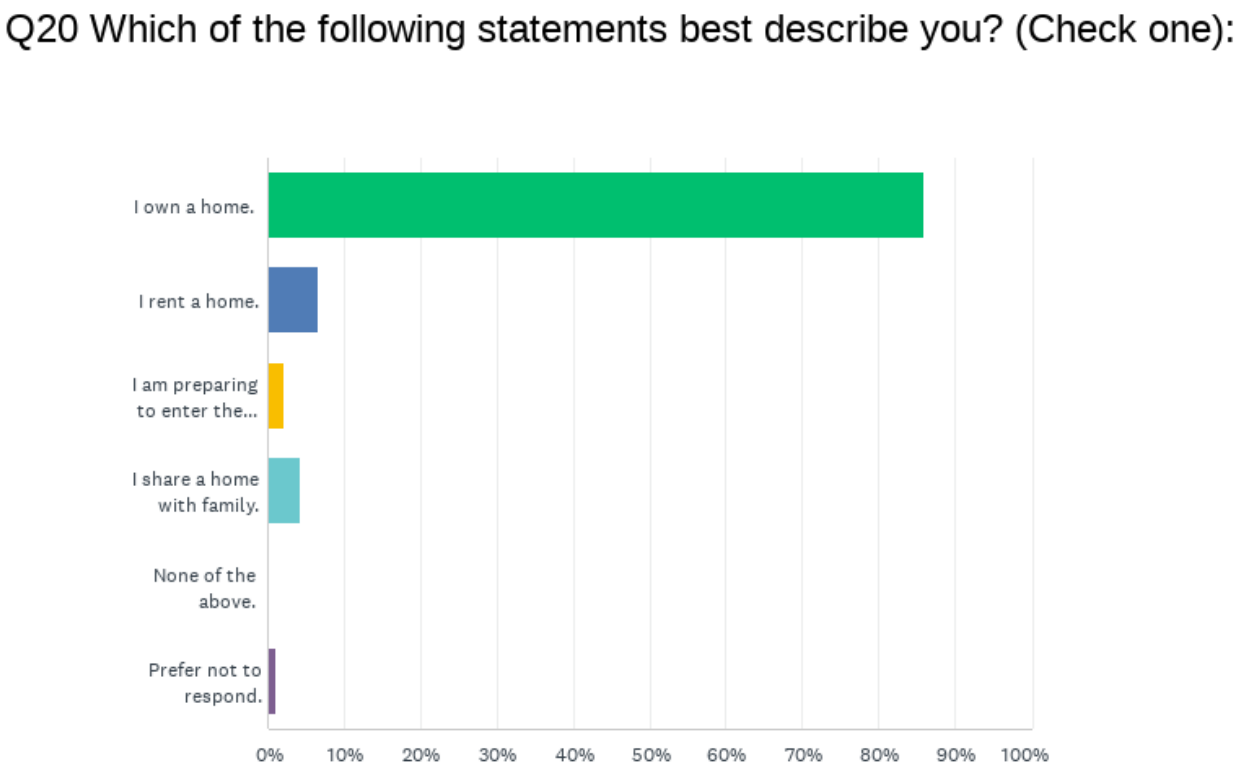


Figure 7: Q20 of the Public Engagement Survey

Based on a 5-star rating, with 5 as "excellent" and 1 as "poor", respondents were asked to rate the availability and affordability of housing in Middlesex County. Of 411 responses (n=411) the average rating was **2 stars**.

Respondents were asked to indicate the housing options that Middlesex County should explore to meet demand for between 10,800 and 17,900 new homes by 2046.

Of 417 responses (n=417):

- 65 per cent indicated townhouses or rowhouses.
- 54 per cent indicated apartment buildings.
- 45 per cent indicated tiny homes.
- 42 per cent indicated Additional Residential Units in existing homes.
- 30 per cent indicated Additional Residential Units in existing backyards.
- 52 per cent indicated duplexes, triplexes, or fourplexes.
- 11 per cent were unsure or preferred not to respond.

Q22 If Middlesex County's population grows to between 96,300 and 115,000 by 2046, between 10,800 and 17,900 new housing units will be required to meet the needs of the community. What housing options should Middlesex County explore to meet this demand? (Check all that apply):

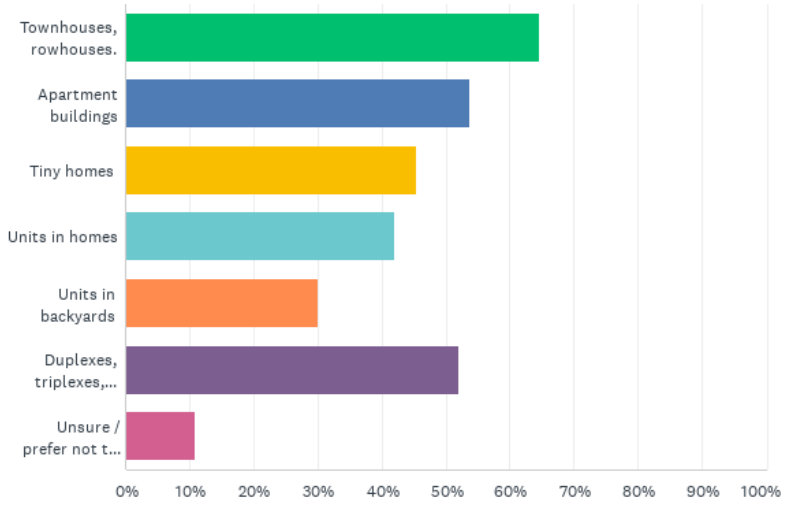


Figure 8: Q22 of the Public Engagement Survey

When asked if they had ideas or suggestions to address housing demands in Middlesex County, 171 respondents provided feedback.

Themes included:

- All options should be considered to address housing in Middlesex County.
- Housing affordability is a crisis that requires urgent action – government reviews will not be enough.
- Housing affordability will be difficult for Middlesex County to address as there are larger forces that are outside County control.
- The County needs to focus on red tape reduction will all governments and agencies to speed up supply. Also examine urban boundary expansion to allow for faster builds.
- Increase densities and reduce urban sprawl.
- Create one-level, affordable options for seniors.
- Create a variety of options for affordable starter homes.
- Create and enforce quantity, safety, and quality of rental supply.
- Consider rental units on rural properties.
- Hold developers accountable for creating affordable units and ensure definitions of affordability are clear and consistent with local household incomes.

- Allow for severances of farmland that are not suitable for agriculture.
- Explore opportunities for tiny homes on existing lots and tiny communities.
- Allow for multi-generational housing on rural properties.
- When smaller units with small private lots are built, ensure proximity to shared assets and natural amenities.
- Increase flexibility for additional rental units on existing properties, and host educational seminars for interested property owners.
- Slow growth and maintain small town feel.

6.1.3. Virtual Workshops and Public Open House

In speaking with staff and elected officials from local municipalities, it was evident that there are varying perceptions of growth based on recent local experiences – some communities have experienced high growth over a number of years, some have recently experienced an influx of growth, and others are expecting a wave of growth in the near future.

While many residents see opportunities associated with growth – such as new markets for local business, new entrepreneurs, new community infrastructure, and schools that can remain open – these views are not universally shared. In some communities, the ongoing costs of new infrastructure and community amenities are becoming factors in local property taxes.

There are others who are resistant to changing the traditional character of their communities or may support change if it is not within their neighbourhood.

Some residents are cautious about growth due to perceived unsustainable demands on services and infrastructure, including traffic congestion. There have also been instances with residents expressing concern regarding attainable or affordable housing options close to existing residential neighbourhoods.

Among those participating in virtual sessions, there were universal concerns regarding the availability and affordability of housing in Middlesex County. For local businesses, it is becoming increasingly difficult for employees to secure housing options that are consistent with local salaries.

To address housing availability and affordability, there was overall support for Middlesex County to pursue a variety of options – particularly townhouses, rowhouses, apartment buildings, duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes – to diversify beyond single family residential development.

Some participants noted that Additional Residential Units (ARU) policies have the potential for immediate impact as approval and construction timelines

are shorter than for larger developments. While there was support for tiny homes, some participants questioned the long-term viability of this option.

Some participants expressed that stronger affordable housing criteria is required for developers, to ensure units deemed affordable are proven to be affordable for the communities they are intended to serve. Participants noted the importance of increased rental units that are safe, high-quality, accessible, and affordable.

Representatives from the business and development community provided specific insights to accommodate 2046 growth projections:

- Policies must be proactive, not reactive.
- Middlesex County should ensure there is confidence in growth projection data.
- Increased options for seniors will help to free up older housing stock.
- There is currently a market for all types of housing under consideration by Middlesex County.
- Public education is required on the need for new forms of development, as "NIMBYism"[5] continues to be a barrier.

6.1.4. Written Feedback

The following written feedback was received related to issues covered under the development and housing topic area:

- Planning for walkable communities is vital, particularly where affordable / attainable housing units are present.
- Brownfield sites provide unique opportunities for development; to facilitate, Middlesex County should ensure sites are connected to public water supply and staff are skilled in brownfield remediation policies and funding opportunities.
- Governments should ensure development benefits the community and does not put pressure on existing taxpayers.
- Commercial development and economic opportunities must accompany residential development.
- Middlesex County and its partners should ensure planning policies maintain a "small town," people-oriented environment, ensuring that development is phased and appropriate for the community fabric and lifestyle.

[5] "NIMBY" refers to "not in my back yard" – it is a planning term that refers to neighbourhoods that are resistant to change and prefer to maintain the status quo.

- Middlesex County and its partners should ensure new development is appropriate to local household incomes and offer opportunities for first time buyers.

7.0 Next Steps

The themes described in this Report have been presented to County Planning staff as they continue to prepare the Middlesex County Official Plan Amendment (OPA).

Wherever possible, community feedback will influence the final OPA to be presented to County Council for approval in late spring 2022.

Concurrently with this process, the following additional engagement activities are planned for April and May 2022:

- Presentation of consultation results to the Middlesex County Planning Advisory Committee – April 2022.
- Presentation of consultation results to Middlesex County Council – May 2022.
- Statutory public meeting (with public notice to be provided at least 20 days in advance) – May 2022.
- Preparation of the final OPA – May/June 2022.
- Final Council approval – anticipated late spring 2022.

Updates will continue to be posted to the County's website at middlesex.ca for members of the public.

8.0 Acknowledgements

The Middlesex 2046 community engagement campaign was made possible through the support and contributions of the following groups:

- Thank you to the approximately 500 community members and organizations who took the time to complete the Middlesex 2046 survey, attend the virtual open house, or prepare a formal submission.
- Thank you to Middlesex County agriculture representatives for providing guidance and sharing firsthand experiences to inform how land use can support Middlesex County's $1.2 billion agricultural sector.
- Thank you to local business leaders and development community representatives for sharing how land use can strengthen economic development and address current housing demands.
- Thank you to elected officials representing local municipalities within Middlesex County for their interest and enthusiastic participation.
- Thank you to local municipal Chief Administrative Officers, Planning and Communications staff for providing technical contributions and promoting community engagement opportunities throughout local communities.
- Thank you to partner agencies – including the Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority, CN Rail, Enbridge Gas, Lake Huron and Elgin Area Water Supply Systems and Lambton County – for their thoughtful advice and contributions.
- Thank you to First Nations communities who have expressed interest in opening productive, long-term dialogue with Middlesex County on land use and other matters of mutual interest.
- Thank you to Middlesex County's Planning Advisory Committee for their leadership and guidance during the development of the community engagement campaign.
- Thank you to Middlesex County's Director of Planning Services and to Planning staff for their leadership and guidance throughout the campaign.
- Thank you to Members of Middlesex County Council for promoting community engagement throughout their networks, participating in public sessions, and for continued leadership as the Official Plan Amendment is prepared and presented for approval.
- A special thank you to Warden Alison Warwick for championing community engagement during the virtual public open house and stakeholder workshops.

Boulevard Strategy Group was pleased to work with Middlesex County to prepare this Official Plan Consultation Report.

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