

2023

Municipality of Clarington Strategic Plan ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY REPORT

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1.0 ENGAGEMENT: THE PROCESS

1.1 Overview of the Approach

The Municipality of Clarington is developing a Strategic Plan. A new Strategic Plan is needed to set a future roadmap for the Municipality. Strategic Plans provide an opportunity for collective priority setting (Council, staff and community), and provide a platform for developing a shared vision, mission and strategic direction. Clarington's Strategic Plan is a hybrid Corporate/Community Strategic Plan that aligns the collective priorities of Council with those of the community. The intention is to utilize the new Strategic Plan as a compass and guidepost for Council over this term, and beyond.

Work on the Strategic Plan began with a commitment to community and staff engagement. The first step in the strategic planning process involved a Community Survey in February/March 2023. The survey provided an opportunity for all interested parties to share their ideas, thoughts and suggestions pertaining to Clarington's future. In April 2023, a Special Meeting of Council was convened and, with the insight obtained from the Community Survey, Council identified a Draft Vision, Mission, Thematic Areas of Focus and specific Strategic Actions. Staff subsequently developed a draft Strategic Plan and, with endorsement of Council, proceeded with broader community engagement over the summer and into the fall.

The services of an external Durham-based consultant were retained to assist Clarington with the second phase of community and staff engagement. Planning Solutions Inc. worked with municipal staff to revise the early Strategic Plan based on the input and suggestions that emerged from the engagement process. The consultant, together with municipal staff, developed a comprehensive Engagement Strategy focusing on both community and staff engagement.

Input from all sources was evaluated and enhancements were made to the draft plan, to reflect the insights and suggestions that were shared by community members, staff, and partners.

A schematic of the overall strategic planning process follows:



1.2 Alignment with the Multi-Year Budget

Just as the new Strategic Plan provides a new, forward-focused plan of action for this term of Council and beyond, the Municipality is advancing a new way of thinking, seeing and leading. For the first time, Clarington has developed a multi-year budget that supports an agile, effective and efficient performance framework.

This multi-year budget is the affordability tool that dictates the pace of Strategic Plan implementation. To use an analogy, if the Strategic Plan defines the ‘destination’ and where the municipality is going, the multi-year budget is the ‘gas pedal.’

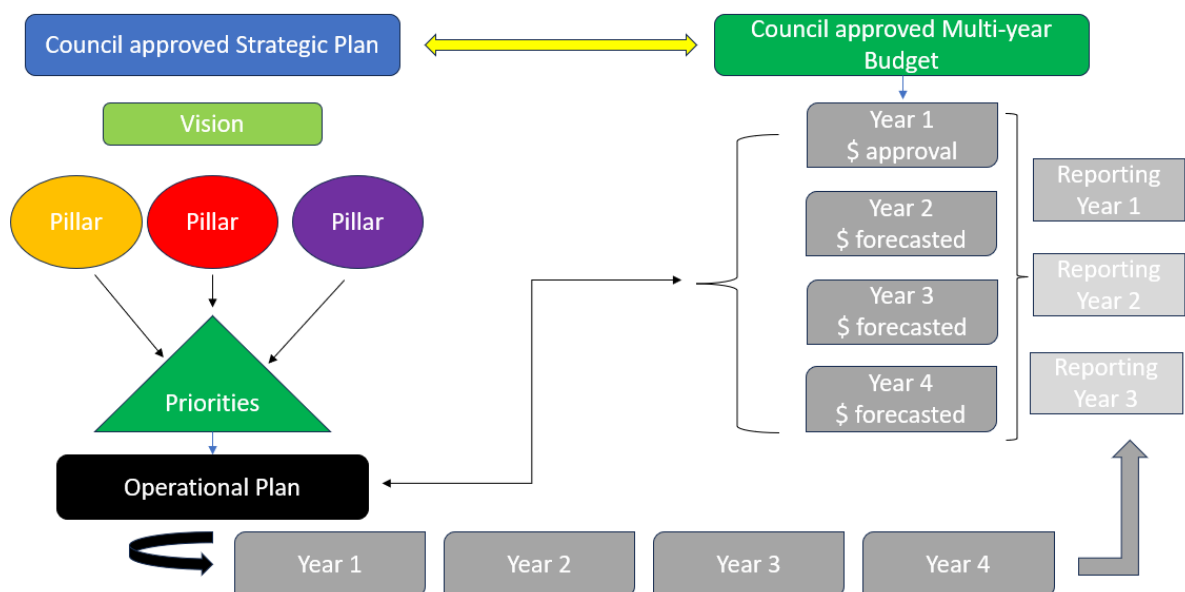
A new way of operating is needed given the seismic changes that are and will continue to impact the Municipality:

- Clarington was the fastest growing municipality in Durham Region between 1996-2021.
- The population is expected to more than double in the next 28 years (from 103,585 in 2022 to 221,000 in 2051).
- There is a need to think strategically and anticipate the impacts of climate change and the opportunity to build environmental and community resilience.
- Clarington is becoming increasingly diverse and there are opportunities to embrace equity and inclusion to ensure the municipality remains inclusive and welcoming.
- Changes in technology are driving the pace of change and requiring the municipality to constantly adapt and continue to deliver exceptional municipal services.

The result of these shifts and changes suggest that there will be new and increasing demands for municipal services, programs and infrastructure. Some of these services can be provided by Clarington directly; others will require a collaborative approach with partners and upper levels of government. Anticipating change and ensuring that critical priorities are not only identified, but adequately resourced will ensure Clarington's future remains bright.

Operationalizing the Strategic Plan and reporting on results will be critical. The following schematic provides an indication of how the Strategic Plan and the Multi-year Budget are aligned:

The Strategic Planning Process...Operationalizing & Reporting on Results



2.0 ENGAGEMENT SPECIFICS: WHO WE HEARD FROM

There were two distinct phases of engagement: at the onset of the strategic planning process (spring 2023), and on the draft Strategic Plan (late summer/fall 2023).

2.1.1 Community Engagement – Initial Survey

In total, 790 survey responses were received and yielded the following insight:

- 69% of respondents are satisfied with Clarington as a place to live.
- Top 5 most appealing things about Clarington, as identified by the community:
 - Open spaces
 - Community safety
 - Location
 - Community spirit
 - Infrastructure
- 53% of respondents are overall satisfied with the quality of Clarington's services.
- The top 5 priorities at the community level included:
 - Population growth/Urbanization
 - Affordability/Cost of living
 - Development/Urban sprawl
 - Traffic management
 - Taxes/User fees

The survey results were presented to Council during a strategic plan working session on April 27, 2023. Council and staff used this material to inform the development of the draft strategy. It was premised on three pillars: Planning for the Future; Service Excellence and Vibrant and Inclusive Communities.

The schematic below provides an overview of the structure of the early document.

Structure of the Draft Strategic Plan



2.1.2 Second Community Survey

Following the development of the draft strategic plan, Clarington engaged Planning Solutions Inc., to support a second round of public consultation. The draft strategic plan was shared with the community to ensure that it reflected the priorities of those it will serve. Several modalities were utilized to engage with the community to ensure a high-response rate.

In total, 1,678 survey responses were received and yielded the following insight:

- 94.64% live in Clarington; 22.29% live and work in Clarington.
- 38.75% of those who responded were 36-55 years of age; 21.37% were 56-65; 16.9% were 65-74 and 13.15% were 18-35. Responses were even received from those under the age of 18 (1.79%) and those 75 years of age and older (6.61%)
- The majority of respondents (45.62%) are familiar with the community and are long-term (20+ years) residents of Clarington. In addition, 20.99% have lived here between 11-20 years and 12.1% have called Clarington home for 6-10 years. A small percentage of new residents (2.8%) also responded to the survey.
- Should additional funds be needed to implement community priorities, 65% of respondents are supportive of increased user fees for municipal services (e.g., Building permits), while only 15.70% are supportive of reduced service levels.

Responses specific to the themes and actions are captured as enhancements to the final plan and reflected in greater detail in the sections below.

2.1.3 In-Person & Virtual Community Engagement Sessions

Four community engagement sessions were convened from September 20 to September 28, inclusive. These sessions focused on two-way information exchange. At the outset, context and background was provided to explain the process. Reference was made to the Community Survey that remained live. The second part of the community engagement sessions focused on hearing from participants regarding the vision, mission, themes and in particular, the strategic priorities that were top of mind for them.

A deliberate decision was made at the outset to convene community engagement sessions both in-person and hybrid, and to offer the sessions in a number of locations and at different times to accommodate as many community members as possible. There was no required registration as each session was open to anyone who had an interest in attending. Community members were invited to offer their thoughts on the document and share any gaps.

Date	Location	Time	Format
September 20	Diane Hamre Recreation Centre	11:30 am	In-person
September 21	Bowmanville Town Hall	6:00 pm	Hybrid
September 26	Orono Town Hall	7:30 pm	In-person
September 28	Courtice Community Centre	6:30 pm	In-person

2.2 Staff Engagement

Municipal staff were invited to participate in a staff survey and to attend one of three Staff Activation Sessions, one held at Public Works and two held at the Municipal Administrative Centre.

2.2.1 Staff Survey

In total, 166 municipal staff took the opportunity to participate in the survey. A number of suggestions emerged for enhancing the document, including the need to grow the staff complement to address the growth that is coming. As several staff noted, it is not enough to focus on staff recruitment and retention. There must be a strategic approach to ensuring the municipality continues to be 'bench strong' and can continue to offer exceptional customer service, programs and infrastructure.

2.2.2 Staff Engagement/Activation Sessions

Three staff engagement sessions were held from October 3 to October 5, inclusive. The specific dates, locations and details of these staff sessions follows:

Date	Location	Time	Format
October 3	Public Works	12:00 – 1:15	In person
October 3	Bowmanville Town Hall	2:00 – 3:30	In person
October 5	Bowmanville Town Hall	1:00 – 2:30	In person

The staff engagement sessions were structured in a variety of ways. The meeting with Public Works staff (occurring on their lunch hour), was organized as a two-way information presentation and dialogue. The two staff activation sessions that were held at the Municipal Administrative Centre were structured as Meeting Marketplace events, with information being provided first to offer context and specific stations to enable staff to offer additional levels of detail and suggestions. A total of 65 staff members attended one of the events.

3.0 ENGAGEMENT SPECIFICS: WHAT WE HEARD

3.1 General Observations

A number of important observations emerged from the overall engagement process:

- A solid alignment in priorities and actions between community members and Council.
- The community is very supportive of staff, and very supportive of investing in the corporation. There were many instances where participants suggested the need to build capacity to address the growth that is coming.
- There is a strong alignment with and respect for the work staff is doing.

The spectrum of community and staff interests highlighted several common interests, including:

Common Themes & Observations	
Area of Focus	Specific Observation
Access	To medical services and health care professionals To the broader community and beyond through enhanced connectivity (biking, walking trails, cellular and internet). The latter was noted as a major issue in the rural areas. To information – community engagement must be multi-channel and it must bridge the digital divide To elected officials (through informal meetings)
Equity	Leave no one behind Address homelessness as this is a growing concern across the Region Housing is a critical concern (for seniors who need to be able to age-in-place; for those who require transitional and/or supportive housing; attainable housing is also an issue)
Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability	Increased protection of natural areas Protection of agricultural lands
Responsible Growth	Balance between economic growth and environmental stewardship and sustainability Infrastructure must support growth
Revenue Generation	Pursue grant funding opportunities and identify innovative opportunities to diversify revenue

The engagement process confirmed the alignment of thinking among Council's collaborative strategic session, the input received from the community at the onset of the process, and the feedback on the draft plan from interested community members and Municipal staff.

The following provides an overview of the key points of convergence and divergence, based on the feedback received from all sources.

3.2 Points of Convergence – Community and Staff Input

Draft Strategic Plan Component	Recommendations for Change/Summary of Salient Points Raised During Engagement
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solid alignment with priorities • Some suggestions for enhancement • Stronger reference to environmental protection
Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs to be more aspirational • There are aspects of our past we should not be ‘honouring’ • Add a reference to connection – Clarington is a connected community • Identify the attributes and assets that set Clarington apart from all other municipalities • Reference the fact that Clarington is ‘the place to be’ • Ensure the Vision appeals to those who live, work and visit
Mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of Life is a vague term – hard to interpret and understand • Clarington’s purpose and value is to offer excellent service and services, programs and infrastructure within its mandate • Despite some minor suggestions for change, strong support for the Mission from the Community Survey and from staff
Strategic Themes in General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support from staff and community for the three Strategic Themes • Economic development is included in Vibrant and Inclusive Communities – hard to determine the level of support for this specific area of focus (unlike protecting the environment that is identified as a separate line item) • Emphasize responsible growth and ensure Clarington is a resilient, sustainable and complete community • Emphasize community health, diversity, inclusivity and vibrancy • Promote the delivery of exceptional municipal services and governance. Deliver services efficiently and effectively and in a way that is valuable for community members.
Overall Priority Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong support for the priority areas of focus • Some suggestions for restructuring (e.g., moving economic opportunity/prosperity out of the community priority and place it in the responsible growth priority) • Connectivity (internet, mobility, walkability, trails) needs to be addressed both across the municipality and beyond
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps identified by community and by staff

Draft Strategic Plan Component	Recommendations for Change/Summary of Salient Points Raised During Engagement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of suggestions made to ensure the actions are up to date in terms of status • Recognition that several actions are related • Ensure the actions are not limiting (e.g. apply to new residents and/or non-English speaking residents). Ensure the wording and language is inclusive for all.

Several suggestions emerged with respect to the inclusion of and reference to specific actions. These included the following:

- The need to build organizational resilience and grow (as well as recruit and retain staff).
- Implement a number of empowerment initiatives for staff targeting operational efficiency and effectiveness.
- Place a stronger emphasis on economic growth by separating this out from Vibrant and Inclusive Communities.
- Emphasize responsible and sustainable growth – bigger is not always better.
- Highlight the importance of Clarington's heritage.
- Embrace diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Refer to the importance of building relationships with partners, including upper levels of government and Indigenous communities.
- Take an anticipatory approach to the demands that are and will continue to emerge with respect to community needs.

3.3 Points of Divergence – Community & Staff Input

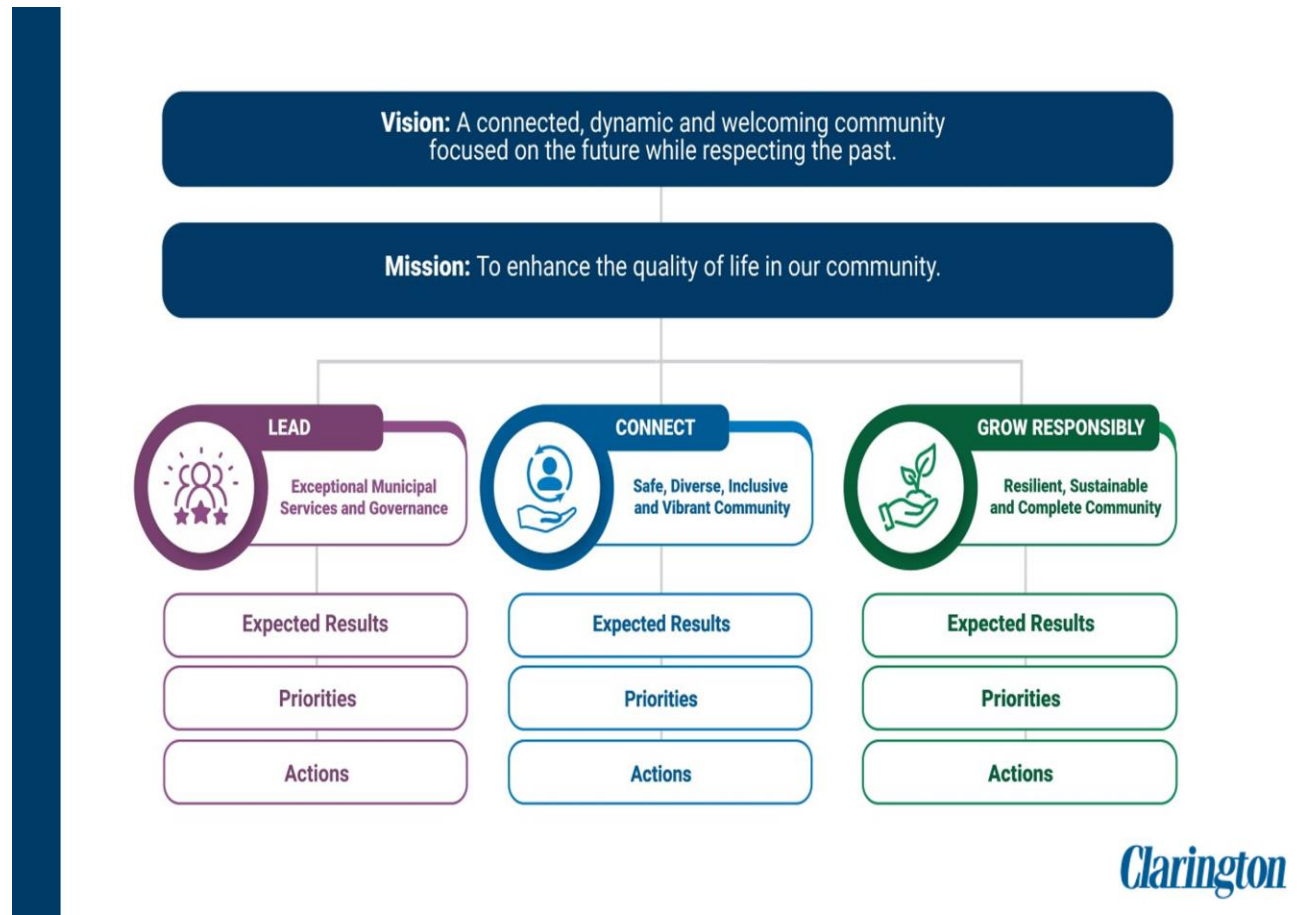
There were no areas of divergence with respect to community and staff input. In fact, there was a high degree of alignment. There was solid support for staff by community members. Community members gave particular prominence to Planning for the Future first, followed by Service Excellence and then Vibrant and Inclusive Communities. Staff, on the other hand, suggested priority emphasis should be placed on Vibrant and Inclusive Communities, followed by Service Excellence and then Planning for the Future.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the essence and expected results articulated in the Draft Strategic Plan be retained. Adjustments are based on the need for the following:

- An effective Strategic Plan must be actionable and measurable. Wording should be adjusted accordingly to reflect this.
- Several action items should be re-worded to be more strategic and less granular in focus. It is important that the Strategic Plan be strategic and not operational.
- Address the suggestions that emerged from the community regarding the need to publicly report on results.
- Incorporate the gaps and suggestions for change that members of the community and staff have highlighted, as follows:
 - Amend the Vision slightly but recognize that only minor enhancements are needed as the community survey respondents indicated 74.69% strongly agree or agree somewhat with the draft Vision. The new enhanced Vision should read: “Clarington: A connected, dynamic and welcoming community focused on the future while respecting the past.” This was suggested by a community member and in recognition of the fact that the phrase “honour our past” is not an accurate reflection as there are elements of the past we may not wish to honour. Also, include a reference to “connected” again in response to community and staff input.
 - Retain the Mission (To enhance the quality of life in our community) to reflect the 81.82% support from the Community Survey and the support from staff.
 - Reword the three themes to focus on:
 - Lead (Exceptional Municipal Services and Governance)
 - Connect (Safe, Diverse, Inclusive and Vibrant Community)
 - Grow Responsibly (Resilient, Sustainable and Complete Community)
 - Include an objective statement to provide a bridge between each theme and its specific strategic actions. The inclusion of an objective statement will serve to identify the desired outcomes.
 - Ensure the updated Strategic Plan incorporates the additional changes and suggestions received from community members and staff and that it is communicated to the broader community and staff how their input has helped to shape the final Strategic Plan.

A recommended structure for the Final Strategic Plan follows:



All of which is respectfully submitted,

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