

Economic development leadership team ready to implement action plans

The leadership team for the Lanark County Economic Development Strategic Planning process is ready to roll up its sleeves with action plans.

On Jan. 19, 30 leadership team members held a final wrap-up meeting to celebrate the completion of the county-wide Economic Development Strategic Plan, which was the result of a process that began in May 2017 and involved input from entrepreneurs, business leaders, local politicians, municipal staff, residents, students and service organizations throughout Lanark County, Smiths Falls and north Leeds. The process was led by Valley Heartland, Lanark County and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), and was driven by the leadership team and its four working groups, with representatives from every municipality in Lanark County.

“The leadership team and working groups dug deep into their research and analysis,” explained Stacie Lloyd, Regional Economic Development Officer for Valley Heartland. “They incorporated stats with stakeholder input from 338 questionnaires as they identified key growth sectors, future opportunities for workforce development and the positive impact of small businesses and entrepreneurs to our local economy.”

The plan provides Lanark County with a roadmap for future economic development programs and services for 2018 to 2020. The planning process provided the team with a concrete list of evidence-based action plans, and the leadership team is ready to roll up its sleeves and make things happen.

The plan indicates Lanark County has a well-diversified local economy, with opportunities across a range of sectors including agri-food/agri-business, construction and trades, manufacturing, arts, entertainment and tourism, healthcare, and education.

“The group looked at competitive positioning in these areas to accomplish community economic development goals and develop action plans,” Ms. Lloyd added.

The county-wide economic development strategy was approved by Lanark County Council at its Dec. 6, 2017 meeting, along with a 2018 budget commitment of \$40,000 to implement action plans in the strategy. A top priority action plan under the theme of “support entrepreneurs and business owners” is to implement a formal Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) Program, a community-based economic development program that focuses on supporting existing local businesses by systematically gathering information on their needs so that obstacles can be addressed and businesses can flourish.

“The benefits of BR&E are proven,” Ms. Lloyd says. “One example is in Wellington County, where a regional BR&E program was completed in 2014 and 270 businesses were interviewed. According to Mandy Jones, Economic Development Officer with Wellington County, and Bruce Moore, Team Lead for the Regional Economic Development Branch of OMAFRA, during the 18-month BR&E program follow-up, the county learned that 22 businesses had expanded and eight more had plans to expand

in the near future. Job creation and additional product lines for some businesses were added benefits for that county.”

At the wrap-up meeting, leadership team members signed-up themselves or noted additional partners and potential collaborators, such as business leaders and business support organizations, to help make the plans come to life. Some actions plans are already underway, and many are interconnected and will be long-term projects.

In the coming weeks, Valley Heartland will reach out to all those potential partners indicated by the leadership team. Those interested in being part of a team to implement the county-wide economic development action plans are encouraged to contact Ms. Lloyd by email at EcDev@valleycfdc.com or by calling 613-283-7002, ext. 106. The Lanark County Economic Development Strategic Plan will be posted on the county and Valley Heartland websites shortly. For now, a condensed list of the action plans can be found at <http://valleycfdc.com/strategic-planning/> or contact Ms. Lloyd for information.

“We are well-positioned for making things happen in economic development across the county,” said Lanark County Warden John Fenik. “This is thanks to the community engagement by businesses and residents, municipal involvement and the county’s focus on economic drivers.”

“It has been such a pleasure to work with the leadership team, the working groups and the stakeholders who provided input,” Ms. Lloyd added. “I look forward to working with them again to implement the plans over the next three years.”

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For more information, contact:

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