



# Council Strategic Plan

2022–2026

The 2022 – 2026 Essa Strategic Plan aligns strategic priorities, people, processes and technologies to deliver on commitments during this term of Council

**Where Town &  
Country Meet,  
to live and grow  
together in health,  
prosperity &  
peace.**

# Purpose of the Municipal Strategic Plan

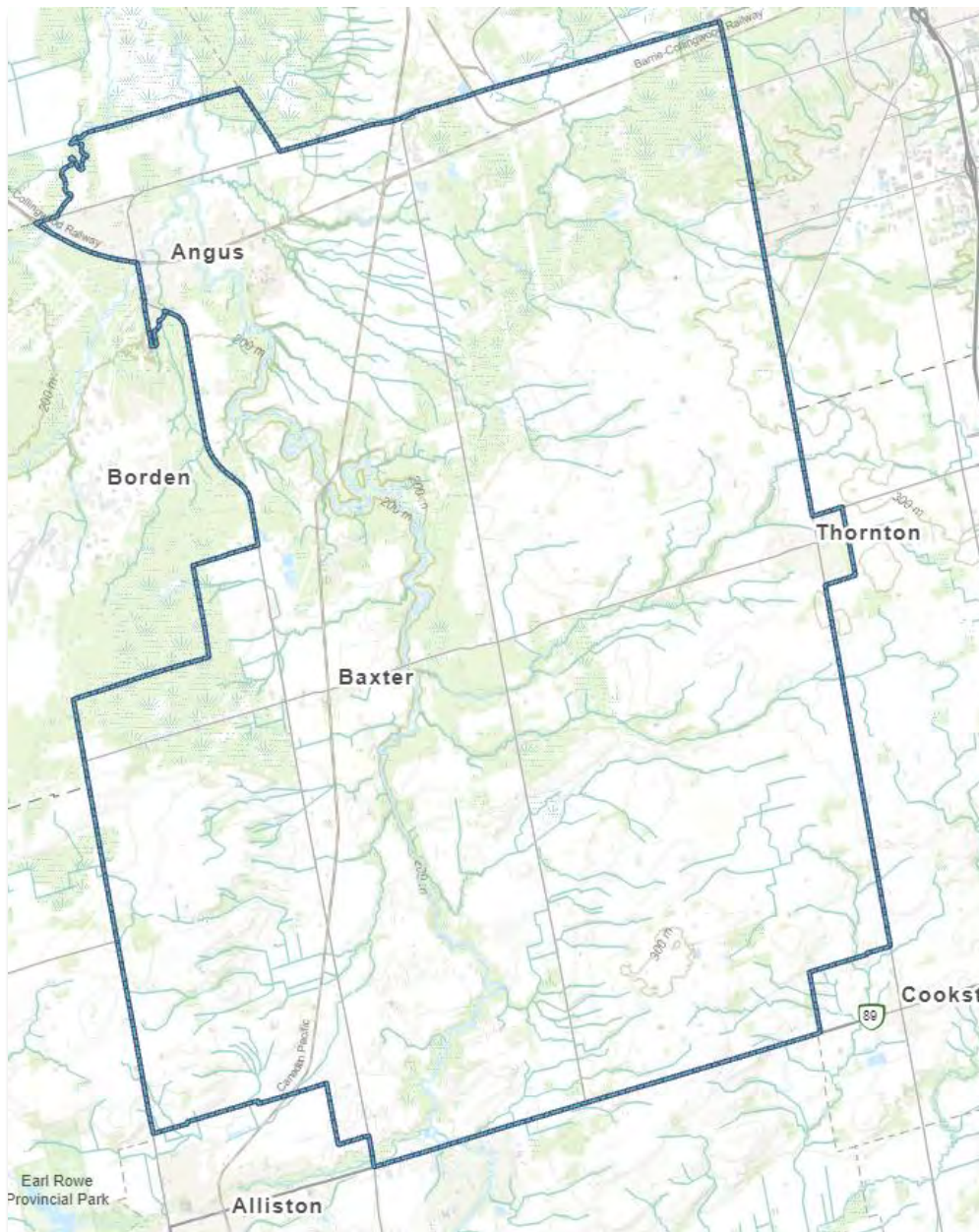
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## Essa's Mission...

Essa Township will be a place where town and country meet in a safe and healthy environment; the local government structure will serve you with a responsible plan going forward while protecting and preserving resources and linking people with communities.

## Purpose...

*The purpose of this Strategic Plan is to align priorities through leadership and collaboration, to provide for engagement and to establish Goals and Objectives.*



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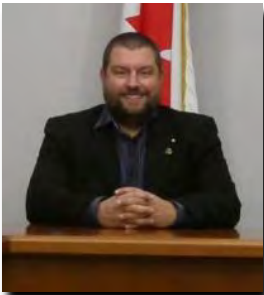
## Essa Council 2022-2026



Mayor - Sandie Macdonald



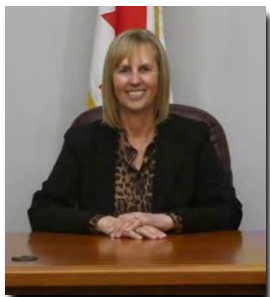
Deputy Mayor - Michael Smith



Councillor Ward 1 - Pieter Kiezebrink




Councillor Ward 2 - Henry Sander



Councillor Ward 3 - Liana Maltby

Priorities of Council:

- 
- “Schools
  - Internet
  - Safe Streets
  - Financial Sustainability
  - Solid Infrastructure
  - Environmental Stewardship
  - Protection of Farmland
  - Affordable Housing
  - Reasonable Tax Rates
  - Smooth Roads
  - Smart Growth
  - Attracting Industry”

## Framework of the Municipality

Essa lies directly southwest of the City of Barrie and is roughly 100 kilometres north of Toronto (north of Toronto following Highway 400). Essa encompasses a large geographic area - it is bordered by County Road 90 to the north (Barrie is located at the east end of County Road 90), County Road 27 to the east (containing the village of Thornton), Highway 89 to the south (the town of Alliston lies on this route), and County Road 15 to the west.

The municipality contains the three “primary” (relative to Essa), communities of Angus, Baxter and Thornton, and as well, some smaller hamlets nestled amongst agricultural lands and natural features not the least of which is the Nottawasaga River. As well, Canada's largest Canadian Forces training base, CFB Borden, is located inside Essa Township and alongside the town of Angus. Angus is a fully serviced and complete community containing all land uses and providing convenience to residents.

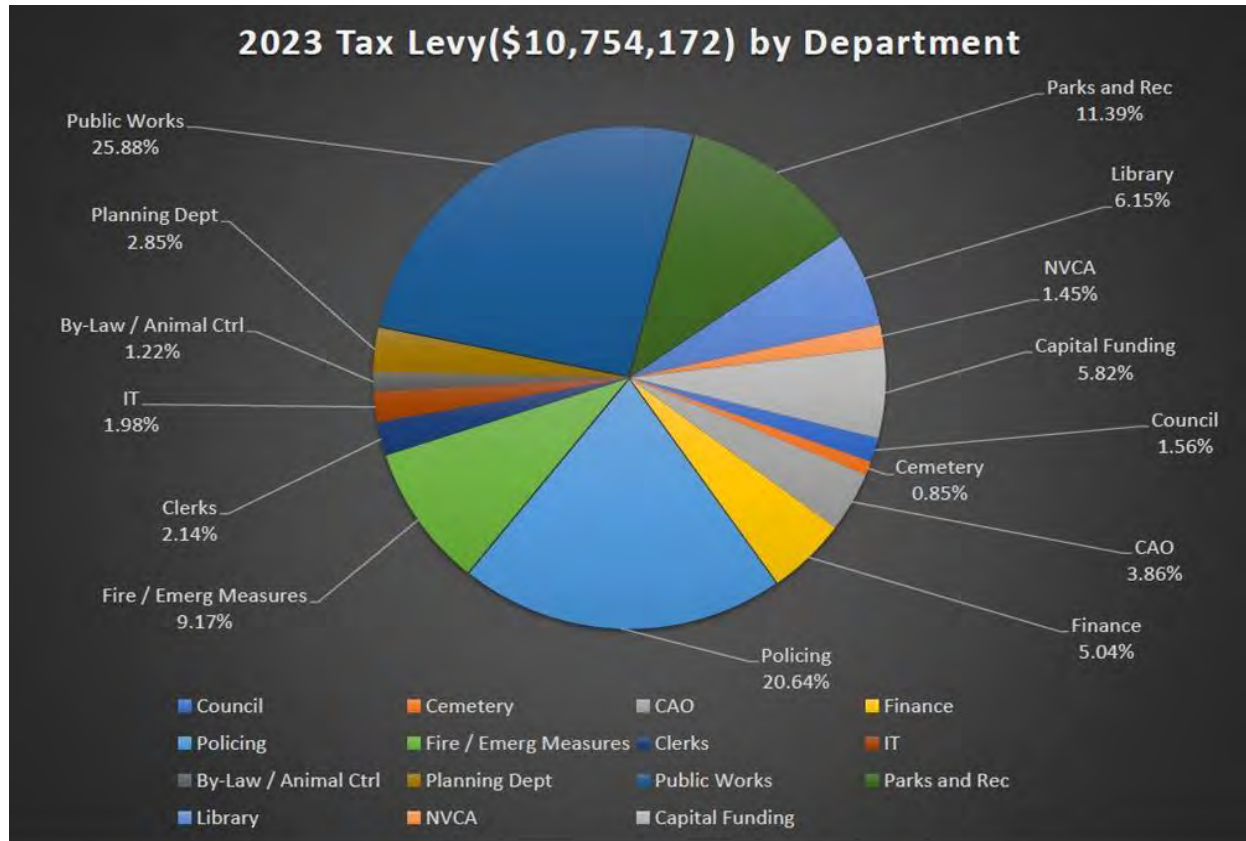
Other major, local employers (besides CFB Borden) include DECAST (a precast concrete manufacturing plant), Phoenix Building Components, Georgian Waste Services Inc., Road Readie Paving, Walker Drilling Ltd., Nobleton Truck Centre Ltd., Landshark Drilling, Alliance Agri-turf, FS/Cargill, White Veal Meat Packers and HJV Equipment.

Essa Township provides residents with the opportunity to enjoy living a rural lifestyle with the convenience of urban amenities. The Township is unique in its location and is truly a place "Where Town and Country Meet". It is home to beautiful rivers, picturesque landscapes, and provides convenient access to major cities. Essa provides a great place to live and work.

The Township has seen significant growth over the last 16 years: from 17,600 persons in 2006 to 21,083 in 2016 (Statistics Canada). Between 2006 and 2016, the Township was growing by approx. 348 persons per year whereas between 2016 and 2022 the population grew by approx. 377 persons per year – the 2023 population is estimated to be 22,214. Data from Statistics Canada suggests that between 2016 and 2021, growth in Essa far exceeded the average growth in the County of Simcoe.

Essa contains approximately 250 km of roads, most of which are paved with a total value of approximately \$163 Million including all components; 16 bridges valued at approximately \$50 Million; and an administrative building, roads garage, 2 arenas and 2 firehalls all valued at approximately \$50 Million.

Essa has one of the lowest tax rates in Simcoe County. Based on Municipal Property Assessment Corporation data, the taxes collected on the median home in Essa are approximately \$3,000 per household (2023).



The Strategic Plan identifies Council priorities and harnesses the initiatives of plans in place to undertake to deliver actions so that the Township can continue to improve upon its success, making it a great place to live, and can continue with sustainable long-range financial planning.

Plans (already) in place in the municipality:

- Departmental Plans
- Budget
- Asset Management Plan
- Bridge Assessment
- Development Charges Background Study
- Water and Wastewater Financial Plan
- Infrastructure Master Plan



## Departmental Overviews

### Planning Department

Planning Departments review applications for and provide recommendations to Council on Zoning By-law Amendments, Official Plan Amendments and Site Plan Control. The department spearheads the enforcement of the Zoning By-law and administers applications for severances and minor variances through the Committee of Adjustment.

Scheduled for 2023 and 2024 are an Official Plan Update by the local municipality, a Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) inclusive of settlement boundary expansions by the upper tier level of government, the County of Simcoe, and Provincial Bill 23 implementation actions.

Essa is currently threatened with a loss of agricultural lands due to development, contamination of its natural resources and a potential gap in information and capability if duties are downloaded by the province. Alternatively, it may have more control over its growth pattern and the direction of growth and settlement expansion.

The current Council has mixed feelings concerning higher densities in settlement areas, in part due to concerns for parking. Higher densities, to-date, have led to cars parking on streets giving cause for concern for safety on these streets. Council is generally in favour of mixed-use developments and attracting investment to Essa.

### Building Department

The Essa Building Department is tasked with the enforcement of the Ontario Building Code as well as municipal by-laws by managing building permit applications, inspections, and various other matters. The department has been working to modernize its processes, to go paperless and to streamline functions.

A recent project, beginning in 2022, has been to create a program to facilitate Additional Residential Units. Council is supportive of increasing fees if it leads to faster turn-around times.

### Parks and Recreation Department

The Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for the provision and ongoing upkeep of over 28 parks throughout the Township, including 9 soccer fields, 7 baseball diamonds, 3 splashpads, 1 skatepark, 4 tennis courts, 4 fishing parks, and 4 covered outdoor rinks, of which include lights, boards, glass, and a sport court surface. The department has recently undertaken to cut grass through in-house means, and this has led to space challenges for the parking of fleet.

The department is striving to improve relations with community groups and promote on-line bookings. In 2023, Staff began to undertake public consultations to collect ideas for new programs. Council is very much in favour of increasing recreational programming (depending on the cost) to serve all ages.

### Fire & Emergency Services

The Essa Fire Department operates out of 2 stations: Station 1 (Thornton) and Station 2 (Angus). Emergency response numbers fluctuate year-to-year but for the most part, Essa Fire responds to anywhere between 450-500 calls each year which includes responding to mutual aid calls to assist neighbouring departments.

The department is supported by dedicated volunteers but whose daytime availability is limited. Training requirements put a strain on resources.

Essa is proud of its Superior Tanker Shuttle Accreditation which helps to lower home insurance costs for residents.

Council, in 2023, has started on a new Fire Master Plan and plans to construct a new firehall in Angus to replace Station 2.

### Finance Department

Responsible for the overall management of the municipality's financial affairs and to provide financial leadership to Council and the Corporation to ensure long-term financial sustainability. Growth in the municipality continues to put pressure on costs and the municipality is always striving to seek out additional funding sources.

The current Council is committed to the municipal Asset Management Plan and an annual contribution of 3.7% from the municipal budget.

### Public Works Department

The Public Works Department maintains all municipal roads, bridges, sidewalks, water, sewer, and storm services within the Township limits. The department is also responsible for maintaining the Township's Engineering Standards and infrastructure planning such as capacity allocation of municipal water and sewer.

Council adopted an Infrastructure Master Plan in 2022 and initiated an Environmental Assessment of the Angus water system in 2023 with the intent to commence construction on an expansion in 2024 – scheduled for completion in 2025 at a cost of approx. \$15M.

Council intends to initiate an Environmental Assessment for the Angus wastewater treatment system soon thereafter, in 2025.

### Clerks/By-law Enforcement/IT Department

The Clerk's Department is responsible for the statutory duties of the Municipal Clerk in accordance with the Municipal Act and as well, enforcement of by-laws. The department maintains communications for the municipality as a whole. In recent years, the department has increased outreach to the public in new and updated formats including the Alertable App. This is in keeping with the current Council's desire for increased communications overall.

By-law enforcement demands have been increasing as the municipality grows, and as well, issues are becoming increasingly complex. Often complaints cross departmental functions and jurisdictions, and stem from larger societal problems.

Council is somewhat interested in a Ward/Poll Boundary Review but struggles with the cost since municipal resources are scarce. Council, over time, would like to move to a paperless system (Council agendas and minutes) and modernize elections. Streaming of Council meetings, to increase access to Council decisions and for accountability, may also be on the horizon.

Again, the current Council is very much mindful of revamped communications.

### Library

The Angus branch is a joint-use facility with the local high school, with approximately 10,000 sq. ft., while the Thornton Branch is approximately 3,000 sq. ft., including a community meeting room. The Library has many partnerships and special programs. Staff is constantly exploring new opportunities. Challenges include crowding, parking, internet and older building systems.

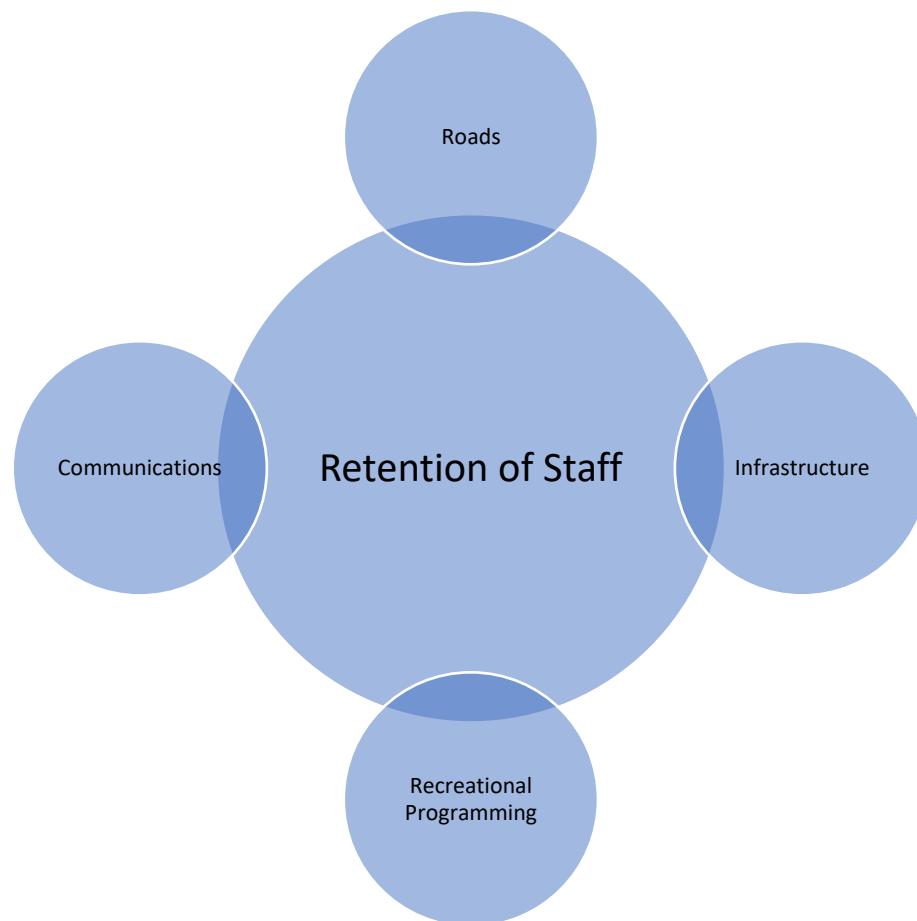
### Chief Administrative Officer

The CAO's Department is responsible for overseeing all aspects of the municipality including effective planning for the organization, administration and operations, and ensuring that all legal requirements are met. While Essa has exceptional staff, attraction and retention for positions continues to be a challenge due in part to external factors such as the economic climate, inflation, cost of hydro, heat, utilities, fuel and the overall cost of living.

## Council Concerns and Priorities

In general, the municipality is tasked with provincial cutbacks, the cost of aging infrastructure and aging buildings which staff and resources are outgrowing. The municipality has begun to research new software solutions, new means to attract and retain staff and partner with those around. Council has indicated to Staff that if new funding were to be secured, or presumably additional funding, then such funds should be put towards infrastructure investment.

Township staff led a strategic planning session with the new term of Council in December 2022. Council was asked a series of questions, and answers were ranked using a survey and voting online tool. Staff consolidated rankings along with already identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Based on the findings, it would seem clear that **Council's priorities are infrastructure, roads, retention of staff, recreational programming and communications.**

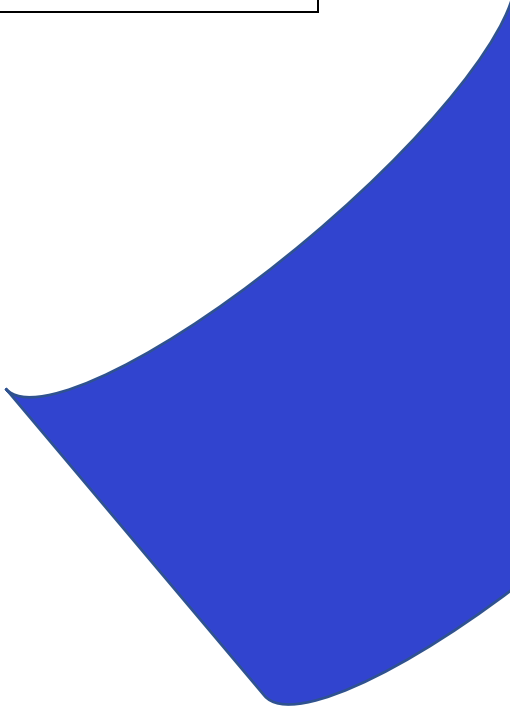


## Infrastructure



**Goal:** Identify and implement expansions to the municipal water and wastewater servicing systems in Angus that minimize impacts to both the natural and social environments and are both technically feasible and economically sensible.

<u>Status</u>	<u>Objective</u>	<u>Target Date/Comments</u>
	Complete Environmental Assessments for water and wastewater projects in Angus.	
	Permit housing and growth to continue to meet targets in accordance with an established Servicing Policy.	
	Align with partners and programs that will facilitate projects moving forward at minimal cost to taxpayers at large.	
	Attract Industrial land uses to assist with offsetting the burden on the tax base.	



## Road Safety and Road Improvements



**Goal:** Develop a safe, sustainable, connected, and accessible transportation network in Essa Township.

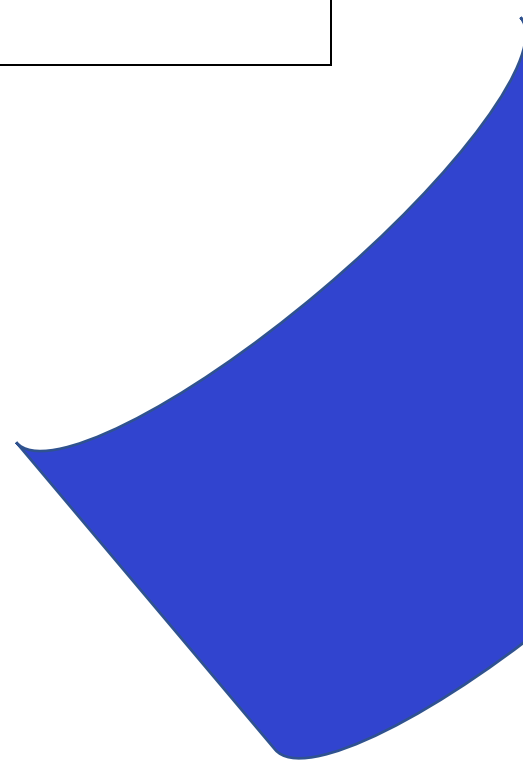
<u>Status</u>	<u>Objective</u>	<u>Target Date/Comments</u>
	Install traffic calming measures throughout the municipality.	
	Install crosswalk measures in walkable neighbourhoods.	
	Install intersection improvements throughout the municipality.	
	Review parking and no-parking zones in the municipality.	
	Review speed limits applicable to roads.	
	Review data collected on incidents and collisions on roadways.	
	Pave all roads in the Township.	
	Implement Automated Speed Enforcement.	
	Better accommodate mobility needs and ensure accessibility on roads, in all seasons. Encourage active transportation as a mode of travel.	
	Carry out specific street improvements.	

**Retention of Staff**



**Goal: Attract and retain qualified staff to provide for consistency and a high level of customer service.**

<b><u>Status</u></b>	<b><u>Objective</u></b>	<b><u>Target Date/Comments</u></b>
	Boost recruitment management with resources.	
	Consider an improvement benefits package.	
	Continue to ensure equity with other municipalities in the region.	
	Continue to support staff with opportunities for continued learning and professional development.	
	Host employee functions such as service awards and holiday functions.	



## **Recreational Programming**



**Goal: Improve opportunities for people of all ages to stay active and involved in their community.**

<b><u>Status</u></b>	<b><u>Objective</u></b>	<b><u>Target Date/Comments</u></b>
	Increase programming staff to propose new program ideas and to promote and organize opportunities in varying locations throughout the municipality.	
	Establish partnerships wherein new programs are marketed to Essa residents at minimal cost to the municipality.	
	Provide new green space and areas where public space can be utilized for people's enjoyment.	
	Increase trails and parks within Essa and improve on parks and facilities.	



## Communications



**Goal:** Improve community engagement through enhanced communications, maintaining a high quality of customer service.

<u>Status</u>	<u>Objective</u>	<u>Target Date/Comments</u>
	Refresh the Township's website as necessary, and ensure information is easily accessible.	
	Optimize procedures and processes with the public in mind.	
	Make use of web-tools to facilitate completing applications, payments and the transfer of information.	
	Reduce printed paper.	
	Use "apps" and other forms of social media to promote public meetings and community events.	
	Prepare additional on-line newsletters in addition to the traditional static newsletter.	
	Encourage public participation particularly in the preparation of plans for the municipality and engage citizens.	
	Support charitable community groups with meeting space.	

	Create a citizen-centred culture amongst employees.	
	Improve on internet opportunities throughout the municipality.	
	Increase volunteerism.	
	Modernize elections using newer forms of voting to increase voter turnout and ensure accessibility.	

## Conclusions

The most-supported concerns of Council are “Retention of Staff”, “Infrastructure”, “Road Safety” and “Road Improvements”. While each concern identified by Council should be considered in further detail, the results of the strategic planning poll conducted in the winter of 2022/23 show significant concern for retaining existing Township Staff and supporting the infrastructure, particularly roads, within the Township.

Council was also presented options of potential improvements that they might like to see implemented for this term of Council, with the option to add others. The most-prioritized improvements included repairing potholes and improving roads, followed by improving pedestrian crosswalks and providing for traffic calming.

Also high on Council’s wish list is that of “Recreational Programming” for all ages and improved “Communications”; and of course, Council’s goals and objectives cannot be met without a stable staff complement.

**Going forward**, Council should continue to review its Goals and Objectives annually. Budget deliberations provide staff and Council an opportunity to recap on progress made, and on future priorities.