

East Hants Economic Development Plan 2023-2027



EAST HANTS

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Defined Terms

Community of East Hants and Sipekne'katik: Geographic area of Municipal District of East Hants and the Sipekne'katik First Nation community of Indian Brook (IR#14)

East Hants: Geographical area of the Municipal District of East Hants

Economic and Business Development Division: Division within the Municipality of East Hants responsible for Economic and Business Development

Municipality of East Hants: Municipal government for the Municipal District of East Hants

Plan: This Economic Development Plan

Executive Summary

This Plan outlines a four-year economic development plan that will serve as a foundation and guide for future economic planning for East Hants. It has been developed to align with the East Hants Strategic Plan 2021-2024 and other current municipal planning initiatives. Many ongoing objectives outlined in the former Strategic Economic Plan 2015-2020 have been incorporated into this Plan as key action items.

This Plan will also build on East Hants' strengths and opportunities of having:

- a connected location;
- developing industry sectors;
- a young, growing, educated population; and
- a high quality of life.

This plan identifies that fostering further economic growth in East Hants will require a focus on two strategic goals: growing investment and supporting workforce development. The Municipality of East Hants will endeavor to grow investment by attracting new businesses to the area and supporting existing businesses. Growing business investment leads to overall community growth.

To attract investment, this Plan will focus on combining complementary industries and increasing commercial inventory. East Hants will also continue to provide assistance to businesses in recovery from the Covid-19 Pandemic and will encourage and support businesses in technological adoption and exploring new markets.

One of the biggest challenges faced by businesses today is the shrinking workforce and labour shortage. Supporting workforce development by increasing the working-age population and upskilling workers is essential to growing the economy. Building a strong and resilient community through infrastructure and public service investment will also assist in retaining workforce by creating an inclusive and connected community. Having a healthy workforce is also a crucial component in attracting new businesses to the area and growing investment.

Since the challenges for economic growth are interconnected, the solutions and potential impacts proposed in this Plan are also interconnected. As a result, this plan needs to be flexible with room for consideration and adaptations as the economic landscape changes. While the high-level elements of the vision, goals, and objectives will remain constant, the actions can be adapted as needed to reflect lessons learned and new opportunities.

Vision

East Hants is a thriving and growing community with vibrant business districts and a robust, skilled workforce.

Strategic Goals

To achieve our vision, two strategic goals have been established:

1. Grow Investment

- Grow commercial property tax assessment to \$200,000,000.

2. Support Workforce Development

- Increase population to 25,000 residents.
- Increase median household income to \$97,750.

Strengths and Opportunities

To achieve the vision for East Hants, the Economic and Business Development Division will leverage East Hants' connected location; develop construction, advanced innovative materials, transportation, and retail industries in the region; continue to build our resilient communities; and strengthen our young, educated, and growing population.

Connected location

East Hants is Atlantic Canada's best-connected location. It offers local, national and international companies access to key transportation networks, customers and suppliers. East Hants' location is one of the region's best advantages and companies can leverage this to build globally competitive businesses.

Industry

East Hants is home to a number of developing sectors. The local economy has competitive advantages in key sectors such as construction, transportation and retail. There is the opportunity to leverage these industries in collaboration with the resource industry to grow and develop the advanced and innovative building material and manufacturing sector in our region.

Young, educated and growing

East Hants is young, educated and growing. Local residents have the education, training and skills to help companies grow into the future. With a vibrant and expanding population, East Hants has the skilled workforce to help drive the industry forward.

Quality of life

East Hants has the perfect blend of lifestyles. Residents, businesses and visitors can enjoy the benefits of natural beauty and landscapes in both suburban and rural communities while still being in close proximity to Halifax. Local amenities and opportunities make East Hants attractive to residents, businesses and visitors.

Strategic Goal 1: Grow Investment

Objective 1: Attract Business

In 2021, 592 businesses were operating with employees within East Hants. Half of these businesses were in the following sectors: construction (21.5%); retail trade (11.3%); other services (except public administration) (9.8%); and agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting (7.8%)¹. When businesses invest in a community, it creates jobs, contributes to household incomes and grows the commercial tax base, which enables further public investments in infrastructure and services.

As East Hants continues to attract new business with its connected location and skilled labour force, there is an opportunity to focus on securing commercial investment that impacts multiple sectors or is part of key supply chains. For example, innovative construction materials and advanced building systems have been identified as emerging industries in response to the global demand for more sustainable construction products. This type of new industry has the potential to create stacked investment through efficiencies gained in key sectors surrounding resources, transportation, manufacturing and construction. These types of combination and innovative businesses and sectors will be targeted for investment over the next five years. Having an inventory of high-potential market-ready lands for commercial and industrial uses will be essential in securing these types opportunities and others as interest in East Hants continues to grow.



Business Parks and commercial districts are important for the long-term economic growth of East Hants.

The Municipality of East Hants has also identified a gap between strong retail demand and low available inventory. In 2018, Cushing Terrell Architecture Inc. completed a Retail Market Analysis on behalf of the Municipality of East Hants². This study identified that the Elmsdale trade area has the market-driven opportunity to become a self-sufficient retail trade area. In 2018, the study recommended that East Hants' retail trade area could support between 225,000 to 275,000 square feet of new retail space by 2027. This high-demand/low-supply market provides an opportunity for strategic planning of new and expanded commercial zones to attract businesses to take advantage of these opportunities.

Key Actions

- Identify and acquire lands for future business park, commercial, and social, infrastructure development to ensure an adequate supply of these lands for long-term growth.
- Continue to expand, develop and manage Municipal owned business parks.

- Promote and grow commercial districts (Village core, mixed-use zones etc.) to increase retail supply inventory.
- Leverage regional and national partnerships to increase trade and investment.
- Explore an incubator hub and coworking spaces for business start-ups and growth.
- Market East Hants for investment in transportation, manufacturing, construction, and retail.

Measurements

- Commercial property tax assessment.
- Retail inventory.
- Number of businesses.
- Market-ready commercial land.

Objective 2: Support Business

The Economic and Business Development Division answered a record number of business support service requests during the Covid-19 Pandemic. As highlighted during the pandemic, internet connectivity and technology are essential for the survival of many businesses. Technology will continue to evolve with new advancements shaping how we do business. Automation and technological adoption have been identified in this Plan as playing significant roles in helping address today's labour force shortage.

Connectivity and technological adaptation are not the only areas where businesses have identified the need for support. In 2021, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada reported that around 30% of small and medium-sized enterprises were no longer operating after five years of starting up or entering the Canadian market³. Many businesses struggle due to financial reasons, unsuccessful planning, regulatory/legal challenges and human resources issues. The Economic and Business Development Division provides services to support challenges at all stages of a business's life cycle. Working with local businesses to identify and address these types of issues early is critical to helping them successfully navigate challenges and create a resilient business community.



A local retail store owner who is part of East Hants' resilient business community.

Key Actions

- Continue to support business start-ups, and consider including business support funding programs.
- Strengthen businesses' resilience through continuous improvement and productivity supports (including lean, service management, etc.).
- Promote and support businesses in adopting green sustainable practices and solutions.
- Promote and support businesses in digital adoption.
- Encourage businesses to explore automation and technological solutions.
- Help businesses access the global market through exporting and trade opportunities.
- Support tourism businesses in recovering from the pandemic and growing their products.

- Strengthen partnerships with agencies and organizations (Chamber of Commerce, NS Labour Skills and Immigration, CBDC, etc.) to align efforts and collaborate on support opportunities available to businesses.
- Increase awareness of available services offered by the Economic and Business Development Division to local businesses.

Measurements

- Retail space inventory.
- Retail sales.
- Number of businesses.
- Number of businesses exploring new markets.
- Number of businesses exploring productivity, automation and technological solutions.

Strategic Goal 2: Support Workforce Development

Objective 1: Grow the Tradeable Workforce

East Hants has a young, educated population with 65.2% of residents being working age of 15 to 64 years old⁴. This percentage is slightly higher than the Nova Scotia provincial percentage of 63.7% and the Canadian national percentage of 64.8%⁴. Despite a skilled, young labour force, East Hants is not exempt from the labour shortage crisis. There are more people in Canada leaving than entering the labor force. The influx of in-migration from other provinces and immigration from other countries that accelerated during the Covid-19 pandemic has helped increased East Hants' population. However, this influx has not been enough to counteract the aging population exiting the labour force.

East Hants' proximity to Halifax, with its efficient commuter routes, has many advantages but it does not create a captive labour force. While East Hants had a local workforce of 12,395 in 2021, only 31.2% worked within East Hants, and the remaining 68.8% worked outside of the Municipality of East Hants, primarily in Halifax (CSD)⁴. Businesses find themselves competing not just locally, but also regionally, nationally and internationally, to attract employees who have the requisite education, training and skills needed to fill the gaps. Between 2021 and 2022, the job vacancy rate for the economic region of Annapolis Valley, which includes East Hants, increased by 1% from 4.3% to 5.3% with over 2,300 job openings as of June 2022⁵.

The average hourly wage offered dipped throughout 2021 in the East Hants Economic Region (ER) from \$18.40 per hour in January to \$17.80 per hour in December but rebounded to \$19.70 per hour by June of 2022⁵. Median household income also increased with Statistics Canada reporting a 16.6% growth from \$72,898 in 2015 to \$85,000 in 2020⁴. With job vacancies and wages rising amongst a shrinking labour force, East Hants must undertake strategic efforts to attract new talent and develop existing talent to sustain even modest amounts of economic growth. The issues and initiatives outlined in this Plan to grow the tradeable workforce were drawn from the East Hants Workforce Development Plan 2022-2027⁶.



A welder who owns an industrial workshop in East Hants can face many challenges in hiring employees to grow their business.

Key Actions

- Manage the economic development working group with key stakeholders in the community to collaborate on solutions to the labor shortage and economic issues.
- Explore developing a local immigration partnership for East Hants.
- Connect newcomers to community supports.
- Provide opportunities and connections for employers to upskill workers.
- Collaborate with secondary and post-secondary schools to prepare for tomorrow's job skills.
- Assist students with career exploration by connecting them with potential employers and opportunities.
- Encourage employers to fill ongoing job vacancies by hiring from unrepresented groups and participating in immigration programs.
- Promote East Hants' advantages and values as a place to live and work to attract labourforce.

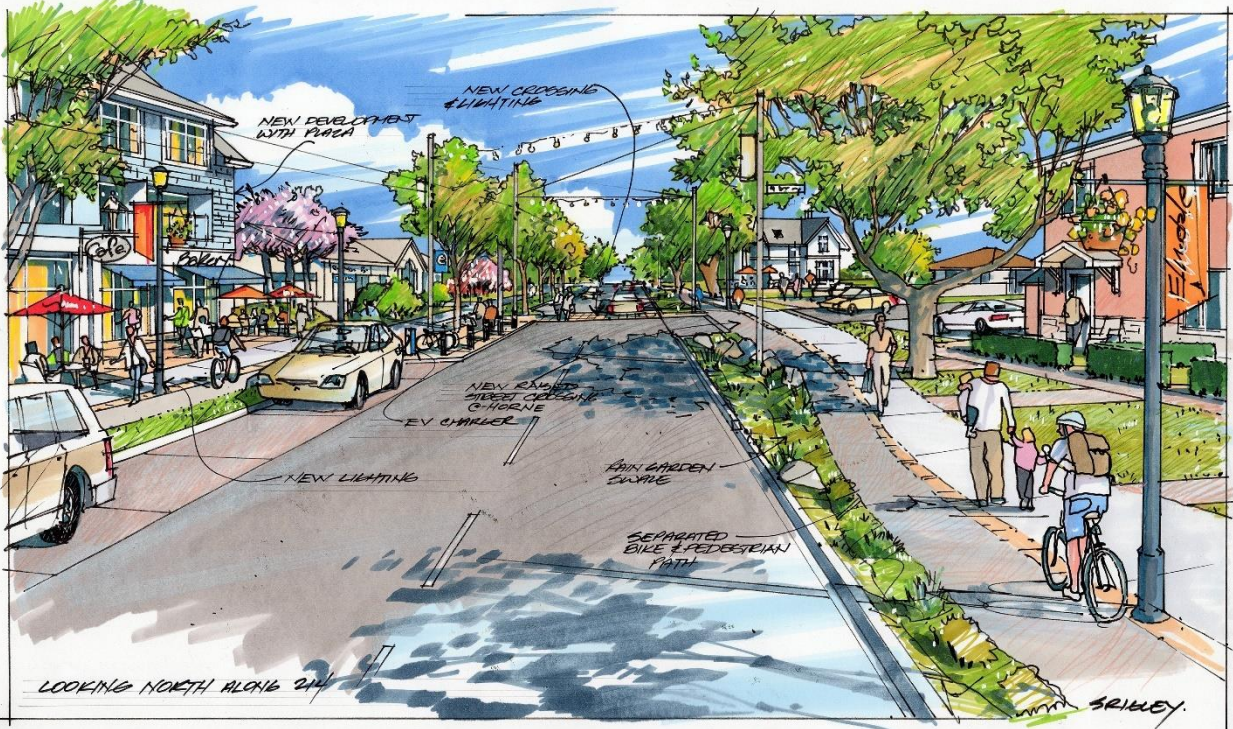
Measurements

- Population.
- Workforce.
- Median household income.
- The prevalence of low income.

Objective 2: Build Resilient Communities

As East Hants' population grows, additional social and public infrastructure will be required to meet the needs of the community. Building and maintaining infrastructure creates direct and indirect economic impacts and generates opportunities for the future. Future infrastructure in East Hants should be inclusive and focused on encouraging a connected community with easy access to public spaces and inclusive services.

As indicated in the Municipality of East Hants' Transit Service Operating and Business Plan prepared by WSP in April 2020, demand for public transportation also continues to grow⁷. Public transportation provides transportation at a lower cost for residents and assists in connecting people to services and businesses throughout the community. If people feel connected and their essential needs are met, they will choose to stay in East Hants. Having a happy, healthy, connected community is crucial to increasing the workforce and attracting investment.



Building and maintaining infrastructure, like the Elmsdale Village Core Streetscape concept design (pictured above), creates positive economic impacts and is crucial to increasing the workforce and attracting investment.

Key Actions

- Continue to explore and implement public transportation as a service for the community.
- Plan for active transportation networks to improve connectivity.
- Collaborate with the Joint Regional Transportation Agency for the Regional Transportation Plan and future planning.
- Advocate with Province to expand provincial services offered within East Hants;
- Increase collaboration with educational institutions.
- Increase civic space in future planning.
- Implement the Elmsdale Village Core Streetscape concept design.

- Continue to enhance all the village cores' and rural centers' walkability and streetscapes to build socio-economic benefits for the surrounding communities.
- Finalize and implement a plan to develop the former Lantz and Elmsdale School sites.
- Collaborate with the Province to increase affordable housing inventory.
- Create a public dashboard that tracks housing supply key performance indicators.

Measurements

- Population.
- Workforce.
- Median household income.
- The prevalence of low income.
- Cost of living (housing, etc.).
- Waste diversion.
- Establish a baseline of quality of life measurements.

Implementation

This Plan will span four years from 2023 to 2027. While the Economic and Business Development Division will facilitate and guide the Plan's implementation, the Municipality of East Hants, partners and the community as a whole are needed to achieve the vision and grow the local economy. In addition, this plan will be flexible with room for consideration and adaptations as the economic landscape changes. While the high-level elements of the vision, goals, and objectives will remain constant, the actions can be adapted as needed to reflect lessons learned or as new opportunities arise.

Goals have been developed by comparing past statistical data, examining trends, and applying an ambitious strategy. Updates on the implementation of the Plan will be reported and progress will be shared with Municipal Council, the community, and partners through engagement opportunities. Not all measures can be reported annually due to data availability and some of the overall success of this Plan will only be able to be evaluated after the next Canadian Census is completed. The Economic and Business Development Division will also strive to use any new sources of data or information that may become available over the next four years to evaluate the success of this Plan.

References

¹ Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. (2022b, February 10). *Canadian Business Counts, with employees, December 2021*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3310049301>

² Cushing Terrell Architecture Inc. (2018, April). *East Hants, Nova Scotia Retail Market Analysis*. <https://www.easthants.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/EAST-HANTS-Retail-Analysis-web.pdf>

³ Government of Canada, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, Office of the Deputy Minister, Small Business, Tourism and Marketplace Services & Small Business Tourism and Marketplace Services. (2021b, December 22). *Key Small Business Statistics – 2021*. <https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/sme-research-statistics/en/key-small-business-statistics/key-small-business-statistics-2021>

⁴ Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. (2023, February 8). *Profile table, Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population - Nova Scotia [Province]*. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=Nova%20Scotia & DGUIDlist=2021A000212&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0>

⁵ Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. (2023, March 21). *Job vacancies, payroll employees, job vacancy rate, and average offered hourly wage by provinces and territories, quarterly, unadjusted for seasonality*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410032501>

⁶ Municipality of East Hants. (2022) *East Hants Workforce Development Plan 2022-2027*. <https://www.easthants.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/EH-Workforce-Development-Plan-2022-2027.pdf>

⁷ WSP. (2020, April 14). *Transit Service Operating and Business Plan Municipality of East Hants*. https://www.easthants.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/East-Hants-Transit-Update-Report_14April2020_Final.pdf