



Report to Council

Department: Development Services
Division: Economic Development
Date: September 2, 2025
Prepared by: Nelson Silveira, Manager, Economic Development
Report Number: Economic Development-2025-11
Subject: Business Case – Analyst, Economic Development and Business Relations
Number of Pages: 8

Recommendation(s)

That Economic Development-2025-11 entitled Business Case – Analyst, Economic Development and Business Relations prepared by Nelson Silveira, Manager, Economic Development dated September 2, 2025 be received, and

That Council support the grant application to the Rural Ontario Development Program seeking funding to support the hiring of a full time Analyst, Economic Development and Business Relations position.

That Council approves the post budget operating expense in the amount of \$116,000 for a contract extension to the Analyst, Economic Development and Business Relation position to be funded from the Town's Salary Stabilization Reserve.

Purpose

This report will provide Council with an overview of the Analyst, Economic Development and Business Relations position, outline the continued need for this role as identified in the Town's

Organizational Review, and seek Council's support for extending the contract. The report will also provide information on the Town's application to the Rural Ontario Development (ROD) Fund to help offset the cost of the position over the next two (2) years.

Background and Discussion

Business Retention and Expansion Project 2024-2025

In 2024 the Town was successful in receiving a \$65,000 grant from the Rural Ontario Development (ROD) Program (formerly known as RED). This funding has allowed the Town to hire a one (1)-year contract position in Development Services that has focused on local business support initiatives, corporate-wide grant writing, and assisting the Economic Development Division in completing action items identified in Council's Strategic Plan. This grant also funded the purchase of a two (2) year subscription to a grant software, Grant Match, which provides Administration with a streamlined approach to access and track funding opportunities for economic development and corporate-wide projects. The ROD Grant Funding has further enabled the Town to retain a consultant to explore the feasibility of an Industrial Community Improvement Plan (CIP) to assist in business expansion and attraction efforts.

The Analyst position has played an essential role in supporting the Manager, Economic Development by adding capacity to advance Council's strategic priorities, streamline business support services, and secure external funding to reduce reliance on the tax base. The impact of the Analyst role can be demonstrated through key performance indicators.

Since November 2024, the Analyst has completed several projects, including but not limited to:

Business Walks: 60 businesses directly interacted with during business walks in Essex Centre and Harrow

- 6 business issues identified during walks. All issues identified were given a course of action or resolved within 2 business days.

Business Resources: Developed and distributed business support packages which included information on current government programs, supports and agencies to assist in business expansion efforts. Packages were tailored to specific industries and sent via email to businesses in the following sectors:

- Agricultural (x2 distributions = 80 total packages)
- Industrial (x2 distributions = 32 total packages)
- Small Business: (x2 distributions through email and downtown business visits = 160 total packages)

Business Engagement: Conducted over 30 one-on-one discussions to provide supports to new or existing businesses which included referrals to community funding programs and resources, information on available properties, transient vendor licenses, and grant funding opportunities.

Grant Applications: Since November of 2024, a total of 30 grant applications have been submitted or in the process of being submitted prior to Q3 2025. For comparison, prior to the Analyst role commencing in November 2024, 13 applications were submitted in that same time frame.

- 23 grant applications submitted totalling \$5,227,528.20 in potential funding
- 7 grant applications currently in the pre-submission stage to be submitted by Q3 2025
- 9 grants secured totalling \$349,242.69 (\$287,847.00 in 2024)
- 6 grants pending approval totalling \$4,126,908.52

Capacity and Organizational Review Alignment

In 2024, the Town of Essex completed and Council adopted an Organizational Review which identified the need to expand the Economic Development Division in Development Services to meet growing demands in business retention and expansion, grant writing, and strategic and corporate-wide project delivery. The review noted that the Manager, Economic Development was increasingly required to focus on higher-level strategic initiatives and regional partnerships, leaving limited capacity for project execution, grant development, and direct business engagement. To address this, a one (1)-year contract position was created in late 2024 to provide operational support, improve service delivery, and enhance organizational effectiveness.

Without the Analyst role, which is set to end in November 2025, the increasing demands for investment attraction, business support, and cross-departmental collaboration on grant writing may not be met. By maintaining this role, the Town will ensure sustained progress on Council's strategic goals, reduce risks of missed funding opportunities, and improve service delivery to the business community.

The 2024 Organization Review recommended an analysis on this position to determine if it should become permanent full-time, and to be presented in budget if so. Due to the timing of the contract expiry, and other competing budget priorities, it is recommended to extend the contract to continue evaluation. Pending the 2026 deliberations, a new position may be present in the Finance Department to alleviate some of the grant writing/tracking duties which would allow for a re-evaluation near the contract expiry to determine best alignment of duties.

New Rural Ontario Development Application

Administration has prepared an application to the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs' Rural Ontario Development (ROD) Program. ROD provides 50% Cost-Share funding to support activities that create strong rural communities in Ontario and opens doors to rural Economic Development, by funding Projects that:

- address barriers to Economic Development
- increase capacity and effectiveness for Economic Development
- build rural community capacity to attract, retain and expand businesses
- better position rural communities to attract or retain investment
- support jobs to be attracted and retained in rural communities
- support economic growth and resiliency through regional partnerships
- address Workforce development challenges
- transform community assets to drive Economic Development

This application seeks funding to offset the costs of the Analyst position over the next two (2) years while supporting the implementation of three (3) key municipal priority areas, in addition to continuing to provide support in delivering measurable results in grant funding, business support, and strategic and corporate-wide project advancement:

1. The launch of a dedicated Development and Business Concierge service to streamline investor and business interactions with the Town:
 - Provides a single point of contact for businesses navigating development approvals and incentives.
 - Predictability and clarity of Town-led processes by providing a “Roadmap to Ribbon-Cutting” that clearly outlines the stages the application must pass with the responsibilities and deliverables listed for the relevant Town departments and the applicant.
 - Offers fast-tracked development review for projects that meet Council’s strategic priorities (mid to large-scale industrial, affordable housing, etc.).
 - Identification of grant and funding opportunities for investors to maximize savings through the development process.
2. Implementation of the Proposed Industrial CIP Program to encourage new industrial development and expansion:

- Promote the Industrial CIP and eligible lands in regional and provincial investment attraction efforts through partnerships with Invest Windsor Essex and Invest Ontario.
 - Compiling contact lists, maintaining relationships, and conducting targeted outreach to promote the CIP and highlight industrial development opportunities in the Town.
 - Developing tailored investment packages highlighting the CIP's incentives, available land inventory, servicing information, and the Town's competitive advantages. These packages would be used to market the community to site selectors, developers, and industrial businesses.
3. The completion of a Housing Needs Assessment to support long-term planning and meet Council's identified strategic action items:
- Gathering demographic, economic, and housing market data from Statistics Canada, CMHC, and municipal sources to build a local housing profile.
 - Coordinating surveys, workshops, and consultations with residents, developers, Affordable Housing Task Force, and social service providers to capture local perspectives on housing needs.
 - Identifying housing gaps (e.g., rental units, attainable homes, senior housing), in the Town of Essex to reduce barriers in local workforce attraction and ensuring the Town is competitive in attracting industrial and commercial investment by aligning housing supply with economic growth goals.
 - To support infrastructure grant applications, including the Housing Accelerator Fund, the Canada Public Transit Fund, and the Canada Community-Building Fund amongst others.
 - The Analyst would complete all works related to the Housing Needs Assessment without additional contracted consulting fees which can typically range from \$30,000 to \$40,000.

While the Town is required to commit 50% of the costs for this position under the ROD application, the grant provides an opportunity to offset approximately half of the financial burden for the next two (2) years. Council’s endorsement of this ROD application shows the Town’s commitment to maximize external funding while acknowledging that, regardless of the outcome, this position is necessary to support the Town’s long-term economic growth and strategic objectives.

Financial Impact

This position is currently being funded through Town of Essex Economic Development Reserves and the Rural Economic Development program until November 2025 as approved in the budget. Administration is seeking Council’s support on a new application to the ROD Program, which if approved, would fund 50% of the position’s costs, with the grant covering the remaining 50% over the next two (2) years. If the grant application is not approved, the Town would be responsible for 100% of the costs of the permanent, full-time position as identified in the Organizational Review and would instead only renew the contract for a one-year period.

The following table depicts the funding scenario:

Scenario	ROD Contribution	Town Contribution	Total Cost
ROD Application Approved (50% funding for two years)	\$118,000.00	\$118,000.00	\$236,000.00 2026: \$116,000 2027: \$120,000
ROD Application Not Approved (100% Town funding for one year)	\$0	\$116,000.00*	\$116,000.00

*In the event the Town is unsuccessful in obtaining ROD grant funding for the position, Council may fund the position over the next year as follows:

Funding Source	Amount
Town of Essex Salary Stabilization Reserve	\$116,000

The Salary Stabilization Reserve was created in 2023 with the Reserve Management Plan. Each year wage savings, benefit plan surpluses and other wage budget differences are allocated here. The use of this reserve per the policy is to limit the impact of salary related expenses, of which this contract extension would qualify for. The reserve has adequate balance to fund this expense.

Consultations

Kate Giurissevich, Chief Administrative Officer
 Lori Chadwick, Director, Development Services

Link to Strategic Priorities

- Embrace asset management best practices to build, maintain, and continuously improve our municipally owned infrastructure.
- Leverage our Town’s competitive advantages to promote jobs and economic investment.
- Take care of our natural environment and strengthen the sense of belonging to everyone who makes Essex “home”.
- Deliver friendly customer service in an efficient, effective, and transparent manner while providing an exceptional working environment for our employees.
- Build corporate-level and community-level climate resilience through community engagement and partnership and corporate objectives.

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	Business Case - Analyst, Economic Development and Business Relations - Economic Development-2025-11.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Aug 27, 2025

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

No Signature - Task assigned to Lori Chadwick, Director, Development Services was completed by workflow administrator Shelley Brown, Deputy Clerk, Legal and Legislative Services

Lori Chadwick, Director, Development Services - Aug 27, 2025 - 2:46 PM

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Giurissevich". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the name and title of the signatory.

Kate Giurissevich, Chief Administrative Officer - Aug 27, 2025 - 2:51 PM