Special Council Meeting Agenda

December 1, 2025, 4:30 pm

Location: Essex Municipal Building, 33 Talbot Street South and by livestream at https://www.youtube.com/@EssexOntario

Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request. Please contact the Clerk's Office at clerks@essex.ca or 519-776-7336 extension 1100 or 1101.

This Special Council Meeting is being held for the purpose of the Industrial Community Improvement Plan (CIP) Study, pursuant to Section 28 of the Planning Act.

Pages

1. Call to Order

2. Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that this land is the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations (comprised of the Ojibway, the Odawa, and the Potawatomi Peoples), and of the Huron-Wendat Peoples. We value the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original Peoples of Turtle Island who have been living and working on the land from time immemorial.

3. Declarations of Conflict of Interest

4. Adoption of Published Agenda

4.1 Special Council Meeting Agenda for December 1, 2025

Moved by _____
Seconded by _____
That the published agenda for the December 1, 2025 Special Council Meeting be adopted as presented / amended.

5. Reports from Administration 1

RE: Industrial Community Improvement Plan (CIP) Study

Recommended Action:

Moved by _____
Seconded by _____
That Development Services Report 2025-09 entitled Industrial Community Improvement Plan (CIP) Study prepared by Lori Chadwick, Director, Development Services dated December 1, 2025 be received.

6. Public Presentations

7. Adjournment

Moved by _____
Seconded by _____

That the meeting be adjourned at _____.

Report to Council

Department: Development Services

Division: Development Services

Date: December 1, 2025

Prepared by: Lori Chadwick, Director, Development Services

Report Number: Development Services-2025-09

Subject: Industrial Community Improvement Plan (CIP) Study

Number of Pages: 5 plus attachments

Recommendation(s)

That Development Services Report 2025-09 entitled "Industrial Community Improvement Plan (CIP) Study" prepared by Lori Chadwick, Director, Development Services dated December 1, 2025 be received.

Purpose

To present Council with the findings of the Industrial Community Improvement Plan (CIP) Study, proposed program details, consultation efforts, and next steps.

Background and Discussion

A principal goal in Council's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan, is to "leverage our Town's competitive advantages to promote jobs and economic investment". A strategic priority and action that Council identified to achieve this goal was through the exploration of using targeted Community Improvement Plan (CIP) incentives to

attract new businesses. As a result, and as approved in the current 2025 Budget, Council directed Administration to retain a consultant to assist in reviewing the feasibility of implementing a new CIP to incentivize large-scale, job-creating industrial development. Following a Request for Proposal process in spring of this year, the project was awarded to the Urban Insights team of consultants.

The goal of the Industrial CIP Study was to create a targeted, results-driven draft CIP program that will:

- Attract and retain high-quality industrial investment
- Support the expansion of existing industrial businesses
- Create good-paying local jobs
- Strengthen the Town's industrial tax base
- Align with broader economic development strategies

Community engagement was an integral part of the study's process. To ensure the proposed CIP reflected the needs and values of local stakeholders, such as industrial landowners and business operators, real estate and development professionals, regional and local economic development partners, and local residents and community members, the project team hosted a series of stakeholder interviews, roundtables, opinion surveys, and workshops to gather input and share updates. The Engagement Summary is attached to this report.

The Industrial CIP Study considered the Town's strong regional and geographical advantages such as our proximity to the Windsor-Detroit border, regional industrial development trends such as supply chain diversification, and our labour

market and workforce trends. The Industrial Trends Analysis is attached to this report.

The Town of Essex Draft Industrial CIP, attached to this report, has been developed in accordance with Section 28 of the *Planning Act* and is being presented to Council and the public at a Statutory Public Meeting on December 1, 2025. Notice of the Public Meeting was published and distributed in accordance with the *Planning Act* requirements.

The table below describes the Draft Industrial CIP Program Highlights:

Grant Program	**Purpose**	**Scale/Eligibility**
Tax Increment Equivalent Grant (TIEG)	Rebates a portion of new taxes on assessment growth for major projects.	40–100 % rebate, 5–10 years (tapered).
Development Charge Rebates/Deferrals	Reduces upfront capital costs for employment-generating projects.	Ranges from a 25% to 100% reduction within the Industrial Areas Town-wide CIPA (Schedule A), and a maximum 25% rebate in Industrial Sub-area 1 (Schedule B).
Permit & Application Fee Rebates	Offsets costs for planning and building approvals.	Up to $20 k (max 100 % rebate).
Feasibility & Design Study Grants	Helps fund technical studies and site feasibility work.	Up to $20 k (max 100 % grant).

Council is not required to adopt the Draft CIP as currently presented. The above are considerations, guidelines, and best practices.

An Implementation Plan, with detailed financial implications and opportunities is targeted to be presented in 2026 for Council's direction on the Industrial CIP and program launch. Input received at the Statutory Public Meeting will be considered and revisions to the proposed Industrial CIP, if necessary, will also be presented. Modifications can be made to the Draft CIP to ensure an appropriate balance of cost and return.

Financial Impact

The completion of the Industrial CIP Study was funded from a grant from the Province of Ontario's Rural Ontario Development (ROD) Program (formerly Rural Economic Development (RED) Program) and the Town's Economic Development Reserve.

Consultations

Nelson Silveira, Manager, Economic Development & Strategic Initiatives

Kate Rowe, Director, Corporate Services/Treasurer

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:	Industrial CIP Study - Development Services-2025-09.docx
Attachments:	- Town of Essex Industrial CIP Public Meeting Presentation Dec 1 2025 - Final Presentation.pdf - DRAFT_Essex-Industrial-CIP-November-12-2025 - Final for Public Meeting.pdf - Town of Essex Industrial CIP - Engagement Report.pdf - Essex Industrial CIP Report Segment - Industrial Trends Analysis NOV-10 (1).pdf
Final Approval Date:	Nov 26, 2025

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

Kate Giurissevich, Chief Administrative Officer - Nov 26, 2025 - 7:38 PM

Industrial Community Improvement Plan: Study & Considerations

December 1, 2025

PUBLIC MEETING

Who We Are:

Ryan Mounsey, CEO of Urban Insights Inc.

Nancy Reid Oldridge, Principal of Vitality Planning

Melissa Durrell, CEO of Durrell Communications

Jason Kipfer, Executive Director of Growth and Operations at Explorer Solutions

Purpose of Presentation:

To present a Draft Industrial CIP, summarize stakeholder engagement, and outline next steps

Objectives:

- Review why an Industrial CIP is beneficial
- Highlight how engagement shaped the Draft CIP
- Summarize key programs and incentives for consideration
- Gather Council feedback
- **Receive for information only**

What is an Industrial CIP?

A targeted plan to encourage industrial development using tools like:

- **Financial incentives (e.g. tax grants, DC rebates)**
- **Streamlined approvals and reduced red tape**
- **Programs to support site readiness and servicing**

Why an Industrial CIP?

The Challenge:

- Many industrial lands in Essex remain unserviced or underutilized.
- Businesses face high upfront costs and long timelines.
- Competing municipalities offer stronger incentive packages.

The Opportunity:

- An Industrial CIP introduces financial tools to:
  - Reduce upfront costs for investors
  - Encourage modernization and redevelopment
  - Support shovel-ready industrial land
  - Tie incentives to tangible outcomes like job creation and site improvement (tiered criteria)

Outcome:
A more competitive, investment-ready Essex that facilitates growth with fiscal well-being.

Benchmarks

Local Benchmarks:

- Windsor. No DCs. 100% TIEG.
- Amherstburg. No DCs
- Kingsville. Reduced DCs (phased) TIEG.
- Tecumseh. DC exemptions (expansions)

Ontario Benchmarks:

- Ingersoll. No DCs.
- Tillsonburg. No DCs.
- Sudbury. Full TIEG incentive.
- Chatham-Kent. Full TIEG incentive.
- Niagara Region. 40-100% TIEG incentive.

Outcome:
Private sector investors are best positioned to identify optimal site locations and the incentive structures that most effectively support their development objectives. The greater the incentives the greater the interest.

Industrial Trends Analysis

Global Trends:

- Reshoring of manufacturing and supply chains.
- Rapid automation and digitization.
- Green energy transition accelerating worldwide.
- Increased focus on climate resilience.

Local Trends:

- Windsor remains Canada's automotive hub.
- Leamington hosts a major North American greenhouse cluster.
- The Gordie Howe Bridge will reshape regional logistics.
- Governments are prioritizing clean manufacturing and energy (ex. battery plant)

Outcome:
By aligning land-use policy, infrastructure investment, and targeted incentives, Essex can position itself to compete for the next wave of industrial investment.

Context and Opportunity

Competitive Advantages:

- Affordable industrial land
- Strategic regional access
- Proximity to skilled labour and established agri-food and manufacturing clusters
- Lower congestion and development costs, ideal for new or expanding industries
- Pro-investment local government and CIP tools

Challenges Identified:

- Limited serviced land
- Infrastructure gaps lead to development delays
- Fragmented land ownership complicates large-scale site assembly
- Lengthy and complex approval processes reduce development competitiveness

Opportunities:

- Agri-food processing and greenhouse-related industries
- Logistics and warehousing near Hwy 3/401 and the U.S. border
- Clean-tech manufacturing (solar, battery, hydrogen components)
- Data centres and advanced light industrial uses

Town of Essex Priority Industrial Areas

Maidstone Avenue West (County Road 8) corridor (Essex Centre)

- Proven market activity along Maidstone and direct access to Highway 3, with the Official Plan identifying Essex Centre for expanded industrial land.

Roseborough Road industrial park and immediate expansions (Harrow)

- Established 44-acre industrial park anchored by Sellick, with compatible surrounding uses, good shipping access

Walker Road (County Rd 11) / McGregor edge-of-settlement corridor

- Key north–south goods corridor with strong regional access, where rezoning near McGregor could capture spillover industrial demand seeking Windsor-Essex proximity at lower land costs.

Town of Essex Priority Industrial Areas

County Road 23 (Arner Townline) / Fairview Avenue axis (between Harrow and Kingsville)

- Strategic County corridor with large rural lots, and is well-suited for agri-food or logistics uses if supported by rezoning and phased servicing.

Previously re-designated “Industrial” lands identified under OPA 6 (Future Inspiration Industrial Park, Adjacent Lands)

- OPA 6 lands already re-designated for industrial use with a proposed M1.4 zone, making them policy-ready sites that should be serviced and marketed before pursuing new greenfield areas.

Engagement Overview

Engagement was conducted between July and October 2025. Approximately **100 people participated** in the engagement process, providing valuable insights that directly informed the design, priorities, and implementation framework of the draft Industrial CIP.

Who We Engaged:

- Local business owners and employers
- Industrial property owners and developers
- Real estate professionals
- Members of Staff
- Members of Council
- Regional economic development partners (ie. Chambers of Commerce, BIA, IWE)
- General Public

How We Engaged:

One-on-one interviews

Three Focus groups

Online Surveys

Engagement Overview

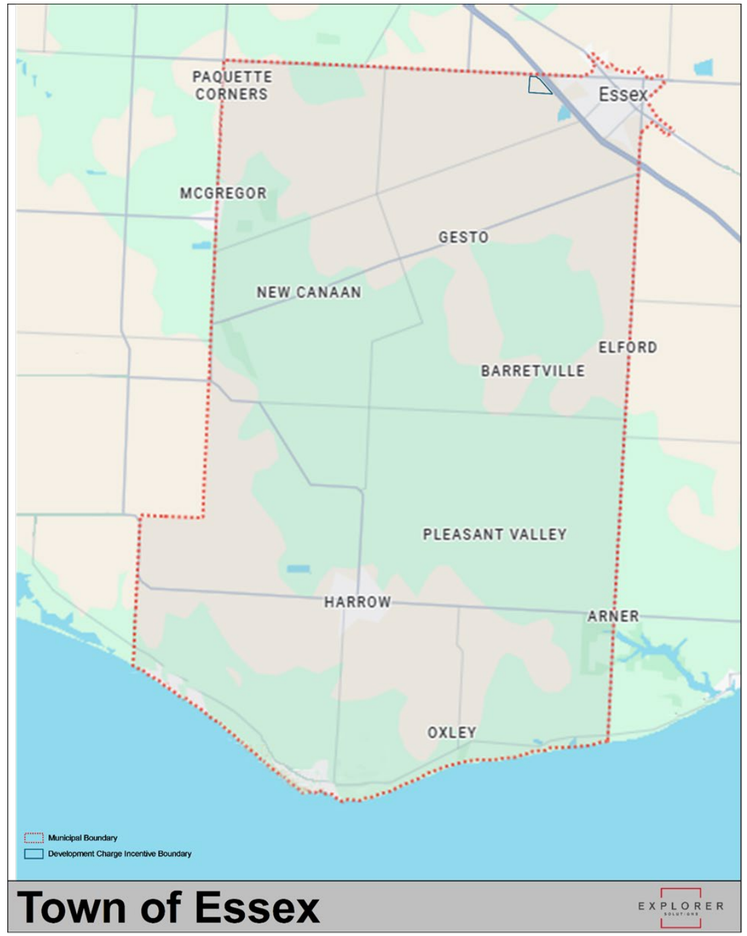
Key Takeaways:

- Essex is encouraged to invest in servicing lands, creating shovel-ready sites for existing business expansion and new investment opportunities
- The upfront financial costs (development charges, application & permit fees, designs, studies) can be high
- The approvals process can be unpredictable and lengthy
- Neighbouring municipalities have implemented Industrial CIPs and encouragement for Essex to position itself similarly
- Support for green development and job creation criteria in the CIP
- Strong interest in seeing Town and County incentives aligned

A Strategic Industrial CIP Program

- A tiered incentive program
- A stackable program
- A Town-Wide TIEG (Tax Increment Equivalent Grant) incentive
- An Area-Specific Development Charge Rebate (max. 25% DC reduction)
- Wind-down Colchester DC Program and redirect to new Program
- Coordination with County Grant Program

CIP Areas (Schedules A and B)



0 County Road 8 (North)

0 County Road 8 (South)

14028 Pinkerton Sideroad

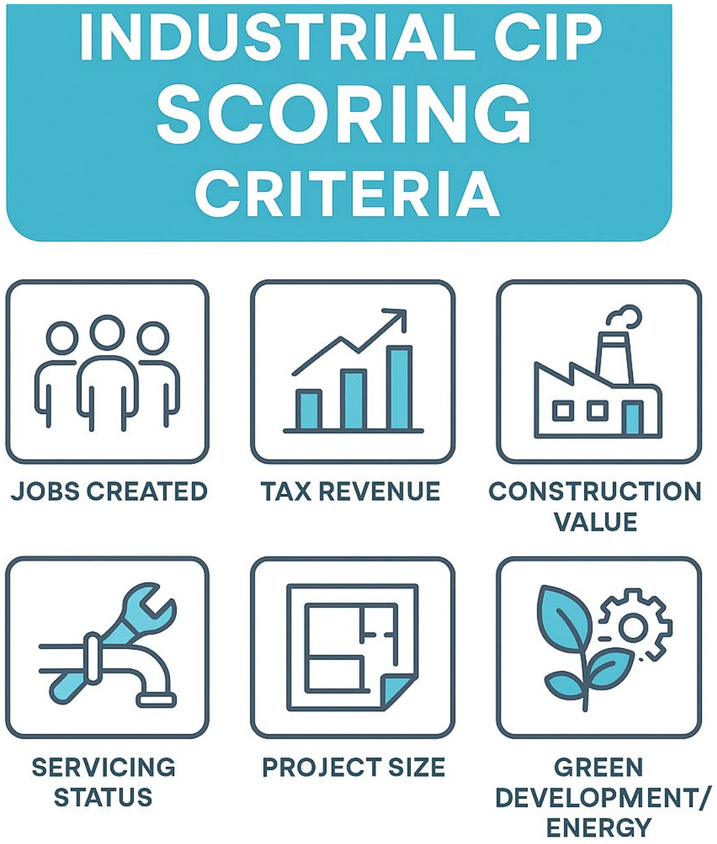
14016 Pinkerton Sideroad

14978 14th Concession

A Tiered System Criteria Based on Points and Matrix

Each project scored out of 24 points:

- 7-13 points = entry-level support
- 14-17 points = moderate support
- 18-21 points = strong support
- 22-24 points = maximum support



The Scoring Matrix Table

Criteria	1 Point	2 Points	3 Points	4 Points
Job Creation	5 to 10 jobs	11 to 25 jobs	26 to 49 jobs	50+ jobs
Tax Revenue Impact	Up to $50,000	$50,001 to $150,000	$150,001 to $300,000	Over $300,000
Construction Value (Approx. $100/sq ft) (Assessed Value)	Up to $1,000,000	$1,000,001 to $5,000,000	$5,000,001 to $10,000,000	Over $10,000,000
Servicing Status	n/a	Minor upgrades required	Major upgrades required	New servicing extension / catalyst project
Size of Project (Gross Floor Area)	10,000 to 25,000 sq ft	25,001 to 50,000 sq ft	50,001 to 100,000 sq ft	Over 100,000 sq ft
Site Condition / Clean-Up	n/a	ESA studies required	n/a	Remediation required
Green Development & Sustainability	n/a	Exceeds OBC with energy-efficient features	n/a	Achievement of measurable energy performance or sustainability certification from a recognized third-party program (e.g., LEED, Zero Carbon, BOMA BEST, ISO 14001, or equivalent).

The TIEG Program

Program	Locational Criteria	Eligibility Trigger	Tiering (by Score)	Intended Results
Tax Increment Equivalent Grant (TIEG)	Industrial Areas Town-wide CIPA (Schedule A)	≥7 points; strongest weight on job creation, capital investment, and location in priority employment areas	7–13 pts: 40% rebate (5 yrs) 14–17 pts: 60% rebate (5 yrs) 18–21 pts: 80% rebate (10 yrs, tapering) 22–24 pts: 100% rebate (10 yrs, tapering)	Supports redevelopment / expansion projects that significantly increase assessment and create new jobs

The DC Program

Program	Locational Criteria	Eligibility Trigger	Tiering (by Score)	Intended Results
Development Charge Reduction	Industrial Areas Town-wide CIPA (Schedule A)	≥7 points; emphasis on projects with strong job creation and/or major capital investment	7–13 pts: 25% rebate 14–17 pts: 50% rebate 18–21 pts: 75% rebate 22–24 pts: 100% rebate	Supports large industrial/ employment projects; additional weighting for green standards (LEED, Net Zero)

The DC Program

Program	Locational Criteria	Eligibility Trigger	Tiering (by Score)	Intended Results
Development Charge Reduction	Industrial Sub-Area 1 (Schedule B)	≥7 points; emphasis on projects with strong job creation and/or major capital investment	Maximum 25% rebate (No Scores Applied)	Supports new industrial/employment projects

A Feasibility Study Incentive and Application Fee Incentive

Permit & Application Fee Rebates	Industrial Areas Town-wide CIPA (Schedule A)	≥7 points	7–13 pts: 25% rebate (max $5k) 14–17 pts: 50% rebate (max $10k) 18–21 pts: 75% rebate (max $15k) 22–24 pts: 100% rebate (max $20k)	Reduces upfront costs of planning and building approvals; ensures financial accessibility for SMEs
Feasibility & Design Study Grants	Industrial Areas Town-wide CIPA (Schedule A)	≥7 points	7–13 pts: 25% (max $5k) 14–17 pts: 50% (max $10k) 18–21 pts: 75% (max $15k) 22–24 pts: 100% (max $20k)	Encourages early-stage investment readiness, including brownfield remediation and innovative design

Financial Implications

A TIEG Total average grant over 8 years:
~45% of the total increment.

Year	Grant (% of incremental municipal taxes granted back)
1	80%
2	70%
3	60%
4	50%
5	40%
6	30%
7	20%
8	10%

Financial Implications

For a 100% TIEG (22–24 pts):

→ *Total average rebate over 10 years:*
~55% of the total increment.

Year	Grant (% of incremental municipal taxes granted back)
1	100%
2	90%
3	80%
4	70%
5	60%
6	50%
7	40%
8	30%
9	20%
10	10%

Financial Implications

Assumes 2024 municipal rate = 1.72% (IT class).

Assessment Increase	Municipal Taxes / yr	80% TIEG (10 yrs)	100% TIEG (10 yrs)	20-Year Net Municipal Gain
$1M	$17,200	$76K rebate	$95K rebate	$172K
$5M	$86,000	$380K rebate	$475K rebate	$860K
$10M	$172,000	$760K rebate	$950K rebate	$1.72M
$25M	$430,000	$1.9M rebate	$2.4M rebate	$4.3M

Financial Implications

Sample Cumulative Municipal Benefit (post TIEG Program)

Scenario	Total 10-Year Rebate	Municipal Revenue (During Grant)	Municipal Revenue (Post-Grant Years 11–20)	Net 20-Year Municipal Return	Benefit Summary
Small (40%)	$34,400	$51,600	$172,000	$223,600	Keeps SME expansion local
Medium (60%)	$258,000	$344,000	$860,000	$1.2M	Encourages mid-tier growth
Large (80%)	$758,000	$962,000	$1.72M	$2.68M	Supports major new employer
Catalyst (100%)	$2.37M	$2.15M	$4.3M	$6.45M	Triggers regional job investment & servicing infrastructure

What This Means

Project Score (CIP Matrix)	Indicative Project Scale	Rebate Level	Duration / Taper	Typical Development Size / Tax Impact
7 – 13 pts (Entry)	Small retrofit / SME expansion (< $1 M build)	40% TIEG	5 yrs, flat	< $40K annual increment
14 – 17 pts (Moderate)	Mid-scale build ($1 – $5 M; 25 jobs)	60% TIEG	5 yrs, flat	$50K – $150K annual increment
18 – 21 pts (Strong)	Large facility ($5 – $15 M; 50 jobs)	80% TIEG	10 yrs (taper 8% / yr)	$150K – $300K annual increment
22 – 24 pts (Maximum)	Major/catalyst investment ($15 M +; 100 + jobs)	100% TIEG	10 yrs (taper 10% / yr)	>$300K annual increment

Financial Forecasting (Applications)

Scenario	Total Applications (5-Year)	Project Size Breakdown	TIEG Applications	DC Incentive Applications	Estimated Annual Incentive Range*
Low Scenario	5	4 Small–Medium, 1 Large	3	5	$100K–$150K/year*
Moderate Scenario	10	8 Small–Medium, 2 Large	6	10	$200K–$300K/year*
High Scenario	15	12 Small–Medium, 3 Large	9	15	$300K–$450K/year*

* An Implementation Plan, with detailed financial impacts for various scenarios, return on investment opportunities, potential funding source options, and resource requirements will be brought to Council in a future report for further consideration and direction.

Program Summary

- A comprehensive engagement process
- A strategic Industrial CIP Program for consideration
- A tiered program
- A tax rebate and targeted DC program
- Non-financial incentives recommended
- A competitive Incentive Program

Next Steps

- **Today:** Receive the Draft Industrial CIP and supporting documentation for information only. Gather feedback.

- **Winter 2026:** Follow up report and implementation plan for direction. Revise Draft CIP where required. Report to include potential funding source options, financial impacts for various scenarios, ROI considerations, and resource requirements.


TOWN OF ESSEX
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DRAFT

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SECTION 1.0 – BACKGROUND

1.1 Rationale for an Industrial CIP

The Town of Essex has prepared this Industrial Community Improvement Plan (CIP) to stimulate private investment, expand employment opportunities, and modernize its industrial areas. The Town has long recognized that its central location, affordability, and established industrial employers provide a strong foundation to attract new businesses. At the same time, persistent barriers such as un-serviced lands, outdated facilities, and approval timelines have hindered competitiveness and resulted in missed opportunities.

The Town's Industrial CIP has been developed as a direct response to these challenges. It introduces a suite of financial tools intended to reduce upfront costs, bring industrial lands to a shovel-ready state, and support de/redevelopment of newly designated, vacant, and underutilized industrial sites. Just as importantly, it has been designed to balance economic growth with community well-being by protecting farmland and green space, requiring high standards of design and buffering, and tying incentive values to job creation and green practices, for example.

1.2 Industrial Land Context

Essex's industrial land supply includes both designated greenfield areas and vacant or underutilized parcels along major corridors. While affordability is a competitive advantage — with land prices lower than many surrounding municipalities — most parcels require servicing, site preparation, or modernization to meet current market needs. Consultation with local businesses has made clear that the lack of shovel-ready land places Essex at a disadvantage in attracting time-sensitive investments.

The Industrial CIP responds to what we have heard from the local business and development community by prioritizing programs that supported pre-servicing, environmental/engineering/other technical studies, and adaptive reuse of vacant or underutilized sites. Stakeholders also identified opportunities in specific sectors where Essex's location and assets aligned: such as agri-tech, light manufacturing, and logistics. By focusing on locally important clusters and leveraging existing employers as anchors, the Town is using municipal planning tools to help capture wins that will expand the tax base and create jobs while reinforcing Essex's role in the regional economy.

There is also an opportunity to align incentives and encourage County participation in the Town's locally defined industrial focused incentive programs, as outlined in this CIP.

1.3 Municipal Authority

The authority for the Town of Essex to prepare and adopt a Community Improvement Plan (CIP) is set out in Section 28 of the Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990. Under this authority, the Town may:

- Designate a Community Improvement Project Area (CIPA).
- Acquire, hold, clear, grade, or otherwise prepare lands within the CIPA.
- Construct, repair, rehabilitate, or improve buildings on lands it owns within the CIPA.
- Sell, lease, or otherwise dispose of any buildings or lands within the CIPA.
- Provide grants or loans to registered owners, assessed owners, or tenants of land and buildings within the CIPA for eligible costs.
- Fund the costs of environmental site assessments, remediation, development or redevelopment, and energy-efficient or green infrastructure improvements.

In addition, Section 365.1 of the Municipal Act, 2001 enables municipalities to provide tax assistance to eligible properties that are being remediated from contamination. This tool complements the financial assistance programs available under the Planning Act and supports the need for financial assistance for brownfield redevelopment.

The Development Charges Act, 1997 provides municipalities with the authority to exempt, reduce, defer, or cancel development charges by by-law. This tool is particularly important in the context of an Industrial CIP, as development charge (DC) reductions can significantly reduce upfront costs for new industrial development or expansions, making Essex more competitive in attracting and retaining employers. A CIP is not required to implement DC reductions; however, municipalities often include this tool in a CIP as part of a package of incentives.

Note on Implementation of DC Reductions: The Industrial CIP provides strategic direction for potential DC reductions or rebates to support industrial investment. However, implementation of these measures requires additional financial and legal review.

1.4 Role of Lower- and Upper-Tier Municipalities

In Ontario, lower-tier municipalities such as the Town of Essex are the primary leaders in preparing and implementing CIPs. They hold the authority to designate project areas, adopt CIPs, and deliver grants and loans directly to property owners and tenants.

Upper-tier municipalities (counties and regions) have a more limited role. Only eight prescribed regions under provincial regulation may prepare their own CIPs, and only for prescribed matters such as infrastructure, transit-supportive development, and affordable housing. Essex County is not a prescribed upper-tier municipality and therefore cannot directly prepare or implement industrial CIPs. However, under Section 28(7.2) of the Planning Act, counties may provide grants or loans to lower-tier municipalities to support local CIP programs.

This means that Essex County acts as a strategic partner and funder, aligning county-wide economic development objectives with local CIP implementation. The County's updated Official Plan enables it to participate when a local CIP is in place.

1.5 Town of Essex Opportunities

The Town of Essex remains the lead authority in establishing and implementing an Industrial CIP. This includes:

- Setting community improvement project area boundaries, including industrial lands within Essex Centre, Harrow, and elsewhere in the Town.
- Preparing and adopting the Industrial CIP with incentive programs tailored to local needs.
- Using Planning Act, Municipal Act, and Development Charges Act authorities to implement a full range of grants, loans, tax assistance, and DC reductions.
- Partnering with Essex County to leverage county participation in local incentive programs.
- Aligning CIP objectives with the Town's Official Plan, which emphasizes industrial growth, agri-food and green economy opportunities, Highway 3 corridor development, and sustainability.
- Designating an Industrial Areas Town-wide CIPA and recognizing Industrial Sub-areas that may be implemented with a distinct focus area and specialized program criteria.

Through this combined framework, this Industrial CIP ensures that Essex has the full legislative and policy authority to create effective incentives at the local level, while also positioning the Town to benefit from County participation and alignment with regional economic development priorities.

1.6 Official Plan Directions

Industrial development in the Town of Essex is historically centered in Essex Centre and Harrow, with additional opportunities along the Highway 3 corridor. The Town's Official Plan identifies industrial employment as a critical driver of growth, supported by agriculture and tourism as complementary sectors.

Both the current and draft Official Plans recognize the need for additional industrial land. Essex is planning for an employment target of over 11,000 jobs by 2051, with a mix of traditional industries, agri-food processing, logistics, advanced manufacturing, and emerging green economy businesses. Highway 3 is identified as a strategic corridor for industrial expansion, leveraging its connectivity to Windsor, Leamington, and the broader regional market.

Permitted industrial uses include manufacturing, warehousing, materials handling, transportation services, research, and related support uses. The draft Official Plan also adds new opportunities such as small-scale power generation, agri-food value-added processing, and cannabis cultivation and processing. To ensure compatibility, industrial zoning continues to distinguish between light, general, and heavy industrial areas, supported by buffering, site plan control, and subdivision or business park models for orderly development.

The Town's policies emphasize that industrial land conversions to non-employment uses will only occur through comprehensive review and where employment needs are not compromised. At the same time, intensification and reuse of existing vacant or underutilized sites are encouraged to maximize efficient use of land and infrastructure.

The County of Essex plays a strategic role in supporting local industrial development. Its Official Plan encourages job creation close to where residents live, supports brownfield redevelopment, and requires full municipal services for new employment uses. In 2023, the County adopted new policies allowing it to co-fund local Community Improvement Plans by rebating the County's portion of property taxes through Tax Increment Equivalent Grant (TIEG) programs. This provides Essex with an opportunity to layer County participation on top of Town incentives to attract major industrial investments.

The Town's industrial lands are guided by a framework that emphasizes growth in Essex Centre, Harrow, and along Highway 3; supports both traditional and emerging sectors; prioritizes site readiness and compatibility; and enables both Town- and County-level incentives to strengthen investment competitiveness.

SECTION 2.0 – CIP PROGRAM STRATEGY

2.1 Goals of the Industrial CIP

The CIP is designed to:

a. **Stimulate industrial investment** – attract and retain employers through reduced financial barriers.
b. **Advance site readiness** – fund pre-servicing and technical studies.
c. **Support strategic sectors** – agri-tech, logistics, advanced manufacturing, and green economy.
d. **Deliver measurable community benefit** – jobs, training, sustainability, and compatibility.
e. **Enhance approvals and transparency** – fast-track processing and clear guidance.

These goals link each grant or rebate to economic performance outcomes, not entitlement.

2.2 Objectives of the Industrial CIP

The Industrial Community Improvement Plan (CIP) for the Town of Essex is intended to:

a. **Stimulate Industrial Investment:** Attract and retain employers by reducing financial barriers and encouraging investment in new, expanded, modernized industrial facilities for defined employment targets and/or job growth potential.
b. **Advance Site Readiness:** Support the preparation of industrial land development through supporting technical studies (servicing, environmental, design, transportation, etc.) and development applications to create a supply of shovel-ready sites.
c. **Support Strategic Sectors:** Encourage strategic sectors and investment in agri-tech, food processing, logistics, advanced manufacturing, and green economy businesses that align with Essex's strengths. The CIP program is designed to prioritise strategic sectors based on target-based criteria, while also supporting overall industrial growth.
d. **Deliver Economic Benefits:** Tie incentives to outcomes such as job creation, workforce training, energy efficiency, environmental sustainability, and compatibility with surrounding land uses.
e. **Enhance Approvals and Service (Non-financial Incentives):** Improve predictability, timeliness, and transparency for industrial investors through streamlined approvals, marketing of available sites, and dedicated business support. This is supported by municipal initiatives outside of the Industrial CIP.

Together, these objectives ensure the CIP not only attracts private investment but also delivers broader economic development benefits in line with Council's priorities.

2.3 Clarifications

Acknowledgement Agreement means that all property owners making application(s) for grants are required to enter into a grant agreement with the Town of Essex. The grant agreement will specify such items as, but not be limited to, the specific purpose and amount of the grant applicable, the duration of the grant, if of the type spread out over time, and, in the event of a default of the agreement, the owner's obligation to repay through taxes or in such payment acceptable to the Town of Essex any monies received. The agreement is intended to encapsulate all of the terms and conditions included in the specified grant guidelines. It may be registered on title and applicable to present and subsequent owners of the property should the property be sold within a stated period of time.

Brownfield site means undeveloped or previously developed properties that may be contaminated. They are usually, but not exclusively, former industrial or commercial properties that may be underutilized, derelict or vacant.

Final Inspection and Approval means that the work as described in the Acknowledgment Agreement has been completed in the manner approved by the Town of Essex and has received final inspection and approval from the Town.

Highway means all roads dedicated for public use. Municipal Wide Services Component of Development Charges means the municipal wide service component of the development charges fees, as set out in the Town of Essex Development Charges By-law for current rates and fees.

Industrial Use means any main use involving the following activities: assembly; communications; industrial research; industrial training; manufacturing; processing; repairing; servicing and maintaining, shipping; storing; transporting; warehousing; wholesaling (and any other uses as defined and permitted by the Town of Essex By-law, in-effect)**.**

Industrial Areas Town-wide Community Improvement Project Area means any area of the Town of Essex that is defined as and permitted for Industrial Uses by by-law, as may be amended from time to time and as shown on Schedule A (Industrial Areas Town-wide CIPA).

Industrial Sub-Area 1 Community Improvement Project Area means the lands identified as Industrial Sub-Section A, Part 12 in the Town of Essex Development Charge Bylaw as shown on Schedule B (Industrial Sub-Area 1 CIPA).

Property Owner means the owner of the land and or building zoned for and permitting Industrial Uses in the Town of Essex. A person having signing authority and lawfully

designated by the owner to make a program application on behalf of the property owner will also be deemed to be the property owner for the purposes of this Plan.

Tiered means that the grant value declines gradually over the duration of the grant term rather than remaining constant each year. This applies to the Tax Increment Equivalent Grant and details regarding the tapering applied is provided in program-specific details (Section 5.1.1).

2.4 Program Start Date

All grant and incentive programs under this CIP come into effect on the date of Council approval of the CIP and the annual allocation of program funding through the municipal budget. No program funds are committed until such approval is granted.

2.5 Retroactivity

Incentives are not retroactive. Applications must be approved by Council (or its designate) prior to the commencement of eligible works. Projects that begin prior to program approval will not be eligible, unless specifically authorized by Council in extraordinary circumstances.

2.6 Allocation of Grants

The following rules govern the allocation of funds under this CIP:

a. **Annual Budget Approval:** Funding for all CIP programs is subject to annual approval by Council and may vary based on municipal budget priorities.
b. **First-Come, First-Served:** Applications will be considered in the order in which they are deemed complete, subject to funding availability.
c. **Evaluation Criteria:** Applications will be assessed against the general eligibility requirements, project evaluation criteria, and Council priorities outlined in this Plan. A scoring matrix may be used to rank projects when demand exceeds available funding.
d. **Partial Approvals:** Council may approve a lesser amount than requested or set conditions for phased funding.
e. **County Participation:** Where Essex County participates, the Town will coordinate funding allocations so that municipal and county portions of incentives are administered through a streamlined approach for applicants.

SECTION 3.0 – QUALIFICATION CRITERIA FOR ALL PROGRAMS

3.1 General Submission Criteria

All owners of properties within the designated Industrial Community Improvement Project Area (CIPA) are eligible to apply for funding, subject to meeting the following eligibility criteria and the availability of funding as approved by Council. Applications will be reviewed, evaluated, and approved by the Town of Essex on a site-specific basis.

a. **Eligible Applicants:** The applicant must be the registered owner of the property or an agent authorized in writing by the owner. Tenants may apply with the written consent of the property owner for certain programs only, excluding the Tax Increment Equivalent and the Development Charges Program.
b. **Location:** The subject property must be located within the boundaries of the Industrial CIPA as adopted by by-law.
c. **Tax and Financial Standing:** A property owner who is in arrears of property taxes, development charges, water/wastewater charges, or any other municipal financial obligation cannot participate in a program.
d. **Compliance with Orders:** Any outstanding work orders or contraventions under municipal by-laws, the Building Code Act, or property standards must be satisfied prior to application, unless fulfillment of such orders is part of the proposed work.
e. **Conformance with Policy and Regulations:** Proposed work must conform to the Town of Essex Official Plan, Zoning By-law, Urban Design Guidelines (where applicable), and all other relevant municipal and provincial policies, standards, and development requirements. Required planning and building approvals must be obtained under the Planning Act and Building Code Act.
f. **Application Timing:** A complete application, including plans, cost estimates, contracts, and other details sufficient to evaluate the project, must be submitted prior to the commencement of any works for which funding is sought. Retroactive applications are not permitted unless otherwise authorized by Council.
g. **One Application per Program:** Only one application per property per program is permitted, unless:
   • the project is phased and approved by the Town, or
   • the Town determines a subsequent application is merited.
h. **Supporting Materials:** Applicants may be required to submit professional design drawings, architectural renderings, technical studies (e.g., traffic impact, environmental site assessment), or a business/development plan to demonstrate feasibility and alignment with CIP objectives.
i. **Acknowledgement Agreement:** Successful applicants must enter into an Acknowledgement Agreement with the Town of Essex specifying:
   • the purpose, scope, and amount of the grant;

• terms and conditions of participation; and
• repayment provisions in the event of default.

The Agreement may be registered on title and will bind future owners for the duration of the agreement.

j. **Stacking of Incentives:** Applicants must disclose all sources of government or agency funding. Total assistance from all levels of government cannot exceed the total eligible costs of the project.

k. **Audit and Compliance:** The Town reserves the right to audit eligible works and costs. Any audit costs may be deducted from the approved grant amount. All completed works must comply with the description set out in the Acknowledgement Agreement.

l. **Forfeiture and Transfers:** Unless otherwise approved by Council, if a property improved through a program is demolished, sold, or transferred prior to the expiry of the agreement period, the grant or services are forfeited and the Town may recover funds through property taxes or lump-sum repayment.

m. **Program Discontinuation:** The Town may discontinue a program at any time; however, applicants with an executed Acknowledgement Agreement prior to program termination will continue to receive approved funding, subject to compliance with program terms.

3.2 Project Specific Evaluation Criteria

Because municipal resources are limited, every application is reviewed to ensure that the Town invests in projects that deliver the greatest benefit to the community. The evaluation system is designed to be fair, transparent, and easy for applicants to understand.

Projects are scored against clear, measurable factors such as jobs created, investment value, and location. This ensures that support is directed toward projects that strengthen the local economy, improve employment lands, and align with the Town's long-term planning goals.

a. How Scoring Works

- Each project is scored out of **24 points**.
- To qualify for incentives, a project must score at least **7 points**.
- The higher the score, the larger the percentage of eligible costs that may be covered by the Town's programs:
    - **7–13 points** → entry-level support.
    - **14–17 points** → moderate support.
    - **18–21 points** → strong support.
    - **22–24 points** → maximum support.

This approach rewards projects that provide the most significant economic and community benefits, while still ensuring that smaller projects have access to meaningful support.

b. What We Look At

Applications are assessed using seven criteria. Each criterion is scored on a scale of 1–4 points, depending on the level of benefit the project provides.

c. Industrial CIP Scoring Matrix

Criteria	1 Point	2 Points	3 Points	4 Points
Job Creation	5 to 10 jobs	11 to 25 jobs	26 to 49 jobs	50+ jobs
Tax Revenue Impact (Annual Assessment Increase)	Up to $50,000	$50,001 to $150,000	$150,001 to $300,000	Over $300,000
Construction Value (Approx. $100/sq ft)	Up to $1,000,000	$1,000,001 to $5,000,000	$5,000,001 to $10,000,000	Over $10,000,000
Servicing Status	n/a	Minor upgrades required	Major upgrades required	New servicing extension / catalyst project
Size of Project (Gross Floor Area)	10,000 to 25,000 sq ft	25,001 to 50,000 sq ft	50,001 to 100,000 sq ft	Over 100,000 sq ft
Site Condition / Clean-Up	n/a	ESA studies required	n/a	Remediation required
Green Development & Sustainability	n/a	Exceeds OBC with energy-efficient features	n/a	Achievement of measurable energy performance or

Criteria	1 Point	2 Points	3 Points	4 Points
				sustainability certification from a recognized third-party program (e.g., LEED, Zero Carbon, BOMA BEST, ISO 14001, or equivalent).

This evaluation system gives businesses a clear picture of how their project will be assessed and ensures that incentives are awarded in a transparent and consistent way.

SECTION 4.0 – ADMINISTRATION

The administration of this Community Improvement Plan (CIP) is overseen by the Town of Essex. All financial incentive programs are subject to annual budget approvals of Council, and applications are processed on a first-come, first-served basis until program funds are exhausted.

4.1 Application Process

The application process follows these steps:

1. **Pre-Consultation:** Applicants meet with Town staff before submitting an application to confirm eligibility, required supporting materials, and alignment with the CIP objectives.
2. **Submission of Application:** A complete application form, including supporting documentation such as cost estimates, concept plans, and studies, must be submitted to the Town prior to the commencement of work.
3. **Review and Evaluation:** Town staff review the application for completeness and eligibility.
4. **Applications** are evaluated using the scoring matrix outlined in Section 3.2 to determine the level of support.
5. **Where County participation is available**, the Town coordinates with Essex County staff to align approvals.
6. **Approval:** Town Council, or its delegated authority, approves eligible applications and authorizes agreements with applicants.
7. **In some cases**, approval may be conditional on securing official plan, zoning amendments, building permits, or site plan approval.
8. **Agreement:** Successful applicants enter into a formal agreement with the Town specifying the terms, duration, and financial value of support.
9. **Agreements** may be registered on title to ensure compliance and continuity in the event of ownership changes.
10. **Project Implementation:** Applicants will proceed with the project as approved. Any deviations from the approved scope must be reported to and approved by the Town.
11. **Payment of Incentives:** Incentives are provided after the completion of works, submission of final invoices, site inspection, and confirmation that all program requirements have been met.

12. For the Tax Increment Equivalent Grants, all taxes must be paid in advance for which the municipal portion will be reimbursed by the Town subject to application approval, completion of the project, and reassessment of the property. The County may contribute in accordance with the programs set out in Section 5 of this CIP.

4.2 Resource Implications

The delivery of the Industrial CIP requires dedicated staff and budget resources. The Town of Essex will:

a. Allocate an annual budget to support financial incentive programs, subject to Council approval.

b. Dedicate staff from Development Services and support from Finance to administer programs, monitor performance, and report annually to Council.

c. Coordinate with Essex County where County participation in local programs is available, ensuring that property owners receive a streamlined process.

d. Maintain flexibility to adjust program funding, eligibility criteria, or evaluation processes as needed, subject to Council approval, to reflect market conditions and community priorities.

The Town is committed to transparent, accountable administration. An annual CIP Monitoring Report will summarize information such as:

a. Number of applications received and approved.

b. Value of private-sector investment leveraged.

c. Number of jobs created or retained.

d. Total value of incentives granted by the Town and County.

e. Overall assessment growth in designated industrial areas.

This framework ensures that the CIP is administered fairly, efficiently, and in a way that maximizes the return on municipal investment.

SECTION 5.0 - PROGRAM DETAILS

5.1 Financial Incentive Programs

The Town's Industrial Focused CIP also establishes a suite of financial incentive programs designed to stimulate investment, reduce upfront barriers to development, and ensure that new projects deliver measurable community and economic benefits. All programs are awarded through a transparent scoring system, where projects are evaluated against clear criteria such as job creation, capital investment, environmental sustainability, and strategic location.

Projects must achieve a minimum score of 7 points to qualify, with higher-scoring projects receiving proportionally greater support.

This approach ensures fairness, consistency, and alignment with the Town's long-term growth and sustainability objectives. The following table provides a summary of the financial incentive programs and are followed by more detailed program descriptions.

Financial Incentives				
Program	**Locational Criteria**	**Eligibility Trigger**	**Tiering (by Score)**	**Intended Results**
Tax Increment Equivalent Grant (TIEG)	Industrial Areas Town-wide CIPA (Schedule A)	≥7 points; strongest weight on job creation, capital investment, and location in priority employment areas	7–13 pts: 40% rebate (5 yrs) 14–17 pts: 60% rebate (5 yrs) 18–21 pts: 80% rebate (10 yrs, tapering) 22–24 pts: 100% rebate (10 yrs, tapering)	Supports redevelopment / expansion projects that significantly increase assessment and create new jobs
Development Charge Reduction	Industrial Areas Town-wide CIPA (Schedule A)	≥7 points; emphasis on projects with strong job creation and/or major capital investment	7–13 pts: 25% rebate 14–17 pts: 50% rebate 18–21 pts: 75% rebate 22–24 pts: 100% rebate	Supports large industrial/ employment projects; additional weighting for green standards (LEED, Net Zero)
	Industrial Sub-area 1 (Schedule B)	Maximum 25% rebate (no scoring applies)		Supports new industrial/ employment projects

Financial Incentives				
Program	**Locational Criteria**	**Eligibility Trigger**	**Tiering (by Score)**	**Intended Results**
Permit & Application Fee Rebates	Industrial Areas Town-wide CIPA (Schedule A)	≥7 points	7–13 pts: 25% rebate (max $5k) 14–17 pts: 50% rebate (max $10k) 18–21 pts: 75% rebate (max $15k) 22–24 pts: 100% rebate (max $20k)	Reduces upfront costs of planning and building approvals; ensures financial accessibility for SMEs
Feasibility & Design Study Grants	Industrial Areas Town-wide CIPA (Schedule A)	≥7 points	7–13 pts: 25% (max $5k) 14–17 pts: 50% (max $10k) 18–21 pts: 75% (max $15k) 22–24 pts: 100% (max $20k)	Encourages early-stage investment readiness, including brownfield remediation and innovative design

5.1.1 Tax Increment Equivalent Grant (TIEG)

The TIEG is one of the most powerful financial tools available under the CIP, as it provides an ongoing rebate of the incremental increase in property taxes resulting from a major development or redevelopment project. By offsetting these new taxes, the Town can directly encourage projects that would otherwise be financially challenging due to high upfront costs, site remediation, or infrastructure upgrades.

- **Purpose:** To support significant capital investment and job creation that increases the long-term assessment base.
- **Eligible Costs:** Includes site preparation, construction, expansions, brownfield remediation, and large-scale retrofits.
- **Evaluation Criteria:** Emphasis on job creation, capital investment levels, and strategic location within designated employment areas.
- **Tiered:** Grant values are tiered associated with project score (40–100%) and duration (5–10 years), ensuring the most impactful projects receive the greatest support. The following tables define how grant values will be tiered:

For an 80% TIEG (18–21 pts):

Year	Grant (% of incremental municipal taxes granted back)
1	80%
2	70%
3	60%
4	50%
5	40%
6	30%
7	20%
8	10%

→ *Total average grant over 8 years: ~45% of the total increment.*

For a 100% TIEG (22–24 pts):

Year	Grant (% of incremental municipal taxes granted back)
1	100%
2	90%
3	80%
4	70%
5	60%
6	50%
7	40%
8	30%
9	20%
10	10%

→ *Total average rebate over 10 years: ~55% of the total increment.*

- **Outcome:** Projects supported under this program are expected to generate significant tax revenue over the long term, ensuring municipal benefit continues beyond the grant period.

5.1.2 Development Charge (DC) Rebates

Development charges can represent a significant upfront cost to industrial investment. This CIP provides a strategic framework recommending that the Town consider a Development Charges Rebate Program for eligible industrial development.

The CIP program could provide a partial or full rebate from the full Development Charge fee. By reducing early capital requirements, the Town can encourage transformative projects that deliver measurable economic benefits.

- **Purpose:** To position the Town towards future DC rebates for eligible properties.
- **Implementation:** Future DC rebates may be provided for areas of industrial development (e.g., new greenfield industrial sites and existing brownfield/retrofit sites).
- **Legislative Authority:** The Ontario Planning Act and the recommended Industrial CIP Program govern how DC incentives may be enacted. Additional financial and administrative work—including policy analysis, by-law amendments, and Council approval—may be required before implementation.
- **Tiering:** DC rebates may range from a 25% to 100% reduction within the Industrial Areas Town-wide CIPA (Schedule A), and a maximum 25% rebate in Industrial Sub-area 1 (Schedule B). The DC tiers for the Town-wide CIPA depend on the project score and alignment with economic objectives, with maximum support reserved for the most impactful projects.
- **Outcome:** This program is targeted to employers who deliver substantial long-term job creation and environmental leadership, positioning the Town as a competitive location for large-scale industrial investment.

5.1.3 Permit and Application Fee Rebates

This program directly reduces the **regulatory and administrative costs** associated with development approvals. By rebating a portion of planning and building permit fees, the Town ensures that businesses—particularly small and medium enterprises (SMEs)—can advance projects with less upfront financial strain.

- **Purpose:** To reduce financial barriers for employers seeking to expand or establish new facilities.
- **Eligible Costs:** Includes fees related to Official Plan Amendments, Zoning By-law Amendments, Site Plan Approvals, Minor Variances, Building Permits, and

associated engineering reviews. To be eligible, The Permit and Application Fee Rebates funding will be made available upon issuance of a building permit.

- **Tiering:** Grant values range with dollar caps that increase in line with project score.
- **Outcome:** This program is particularly effective at ensuring SMEs and local processors can pursue development opportunities without being disproportionately burdened by municipal fees.

5.1.4 Feasibility and Design Study Grants

Many investment opportunities falter at the feasibility stage, where high costs of technical studies prevent businesses from advancing promising projects. This program addresses that gap by covering a portion of study costs, helping employers move from concept to investment readiness.

- **Purpose:** To de-risk early-stage projects and encourage exploration of innovative or challenging sites.
- **Eligible Costs:** Environmental site assessments, engineering and servicing studies, market analysis, architectural or urban design concepts, and remediation plans. To be eligible, The Feasibility and Design Study Grant funding will be made available upon issuance of a building permit.
- **Tiering:** Grant values range based on study costs, capped at $20,000.00, with higher support for projects that demonstrate strong alignment with community priorities.
- **Focus Areas:** Brownfield remediation, advanced manufacturing feasibility, and innovative site design that supports sustainability and long-term competitiveness.
- **Outcome:** This program ensures that good ideas are not abandoned prematurely, supporting a pipeline of future industrial and employment projects.

5.1.5 County Large Scale Industrial Grant Matching Program

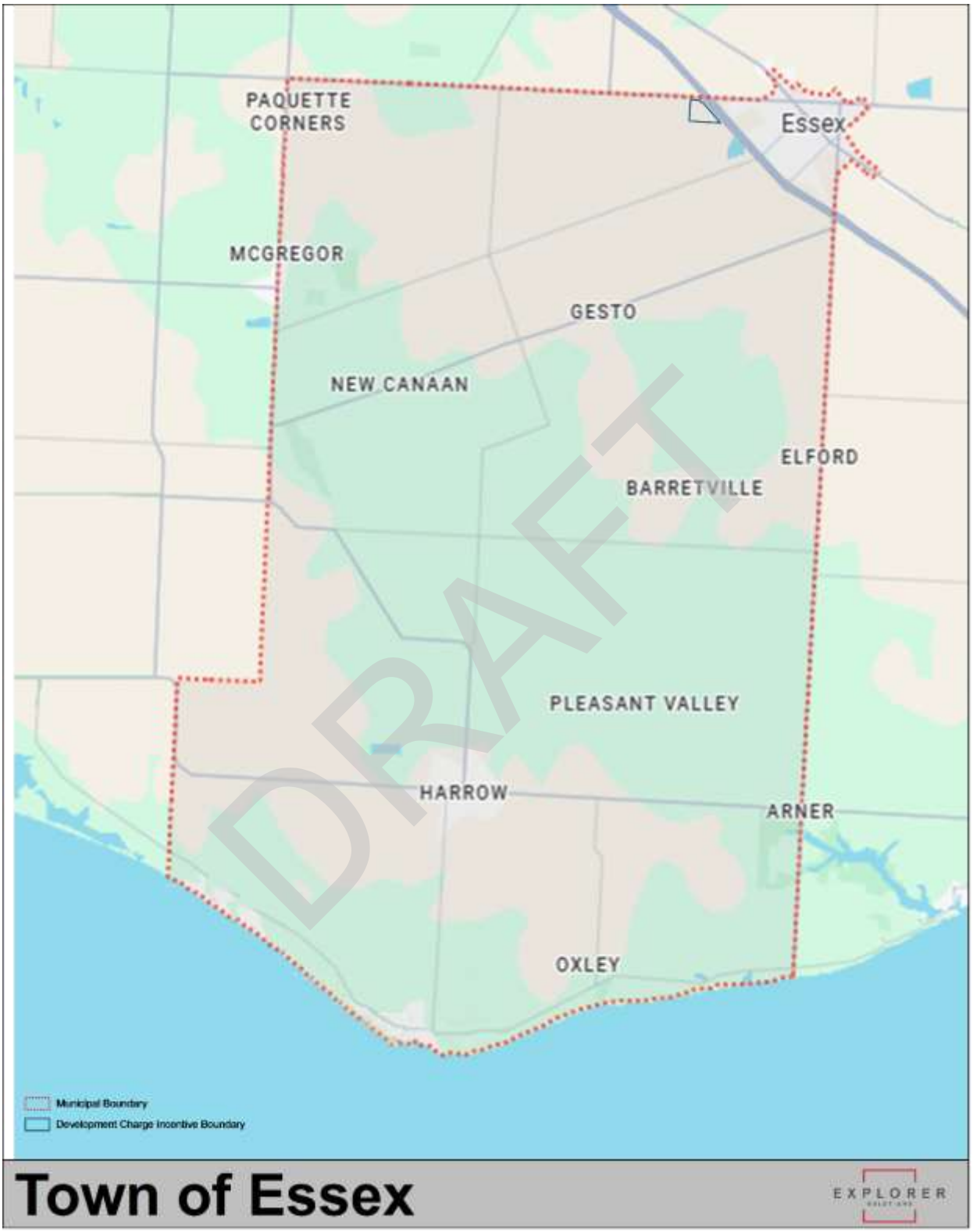
This section is reserved for a future County Large Scale Industrial Grant Matching Program developed by the County of Essex. The County has established authority under Section 28(7.2) of the Planning Act to contribute funding toward local CIP programs. Once final, this section of the CIP will outline eligibility, participation criteria, and administrative arrangements for County contributions to Town-approved industrial TIEGs. The Town will update this section following confirmation of the County's funding structure, eligibility criteria, and process for co-administered grants.

SECTION 6.0 - COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT AREA

The Industrial Areas Town-wide CIPA applies to all lands within the Town of Essex zoned for industrial uses in accordance with the Zoning By-law in effect, as shown on Schedule A for reference.

The Town also recognizes a need for special treatment of an area identified as the Industrial Sub-area 1 CIPA, which includes all land identified as Industrial Sub-Section A, Part 12 in accordance with the Town of Essex Development Charge Bylaw, as shown on Schedule B for reference. This area may be eligible for specialized or adjusted program criteria, as determined by the Town through on-going program implementation.

Schedule A – Town Wide Industrial CIP AREA



Schedule B: Area-Specific CIP Boundary - Industrial Sub-Section A, Part 12 in the Town of Essex Development Charge Bylaw

Schedule B includes the following properties within Industrial Sub-Section A, Part 12 in the Town of Essex Development Charge Bylaw:

- 0 County Road 8 (North)
- 0 County Road 8 (South)
- 14028 Pinkerton Sideroad
- 14016 Pinkerton Sideroad
- 14978 14th Concession

Town of Essex
Engagement Report

Executive Summary/Purpose:

The Town of Essex engaged councillors, employers, landowners, business support groups, regional partners, and residents to inform the development of its first Industrial Community Improvement Plan (CIP). The engagement process, led by Durrell Communications in partnership with Urban Insights and Explorer Solutions, took place in Summer 2025 and included surveys, focus groups, and interviews with a broad cross-section of stakeholders.

The feedback revealed a community that sees significant opportunity for industrial growth but also expects that growth to be pursued strategically, sustainably, and with clear community benefit.

Stakeholders also underscored the financial and regulatory hurdles faced by both existing industrial operators and landowners interested in transitioning surplus lands into employment uses, pointing to the need for incentives that reduce upfront costs, support relocation where appropriate, and simplify complex approvals.

Key Findings:

- Strengths: Essex's central location, affordability, established industrial employers, and access to a strong regional labour pool provide a solid foundation for growth.
- Barriers: The absence of shovel-ready land, servicing gaps, slow and siloed approvals, and perceptions of "red tape" remain major obstacles to investment.
- Opportunities: Building a reputation for speed-to-shovel approvals, pre-servicing industrial lands, adaptive reuse of vacant sites, targeted cluster development (agri-tech, food processing, digital infrastructure, light manufacturing), and a strong branding strategy can set Essex apart in a competitive regional market.
- Community Concerns: Residents want assurances that growth will protect small-town character, balance industrial expansion with farmland and green space, and provide transparent, measurable community benefits.

The purpose of this report is to present these engagement findings and translate them into actionable insights for the Town's Industrial CIP.

1. Stakeholder Engagement Overview

Throughout the engagement process, a broad range of stakeholders were consulted, including major employers, business support groups, property developers, Town staff, members of council and the general public. The engagement took place over the Summer 2025 (July-August) and included a variety of tactics including surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one discussions. This report summarizes the key themes, priorities, and feedback collected, which will help inform the next steps in the planning and development process.

Engagement Summary:

Stakeholder	Format
Essex Centre BIA President	One-on-one Interview
Windsor Essex Chamber of Commerce	One-on-one Interview
Harrow & Colchester South Chamber of Commerce	Focus Group
Invest WindsorEssex	Focus Group
Windsor Essex Small Business Centre	Focus Group
Industrial Employers	Focus Group
Real Estate Professionals	Focus Group
Property Developers & Landowners	Focus Group + One-on-one interviews
Members of Council	One-on-one Interviews
Chief Administrative Officer	One-on-one Interview
General Public	Public Survey

2. Key Themes from Engagement

2.1 Competitive Advantages

Participants consistently identified Essex's location as its single greatest asset. The Town is centrally positioned within Essex County, just 20–30 minutes from the Gordie Howe International Bridge, Highway 401, Windsor, and Leamington. This makes Essex an attractive hub for companies that need access to both regional and cross-border markets without the congestion and higher costs of Windsor.

Affordability is another strength. Industrial land and tax rates are significantly lower than in Windsor or London, allowing businesses to operate on a more competitive cost base. Some employers also highlighted that Essex offers an accessible labour pool: while the Town itself is small, its central location allows employers to draw workers from across the county.

Finally, Essex has a base of established industrial employers that anchor employment and demonstrate that industry can thrive in the community. These companies provide a platform for growth and potential clustering opportunities in manufacturing, logistics, and agri-tech.

2.2 Barriers & Challenges

The most common barrier cited was the lack of shovel-ready industrial land. While industrial parcels exist, they are not serviced, approvals take too long, and landowners are not always motivated to sell. Employers described waiting years after acquiring land with no clear timeline for when development could proceed.

The planning and approval process was repeatedly described as slow, siloed, and unpredictable. Businesses spoke of delays of 12–18 months for permits or studies, and many suggested that Essex needs a single "concierge" point of contact to navigate approvals. Without faster approvals, companies risk losing federal/provincial funding windows or moving elsewhere.

Infrastructure and servicing are also seen as major gaps. Developers questioned whether Essex has the necessary electricity capacity, servicing networks, and drainage to support industrial growth. In Harrow, distance from major highways further reduces competitiveness.

From the public's perspective, barriers also include concerns about industrial expansion eroding Essex's "small town charm." Residents worry about farmland loss, incompatible land uses, and the need for more trees, buffering, and green space

Some landowners described uncertainty around rezoning and servicing requirements as a major deterrent to bringing surplus lands into industrial use. Without clear timelines or cost-sharing options, property owners are reluctant to invest in studies, servicing, or applications without confirmed tenant demand. Existing industrial operators in areas now surrounded by residential growth also noted the high cost and complexity of relocating, particularly environmental remediation, licensing continuity, and new site readiness, which can trap businesses in unsuitable locations and slow redevelopment.

2.3 Incentives & Programs

There was strong support across most stakeholder groups for tax increment grants (TIGs) and development charge (DC) relief, described as “table stakes” for competing with Windsor and Lakeshore. Employers emphasized that these programs reduce upfront costs and create long-term payoffs without draining municipal resources.

Beyond these basics, businesses suggested more creative incentive structures:

- Grants tied to job creation milestones.
- Training subsidies or municipal support for in-house workforce development programs.
- Site readiness or study grants to help landowners bring sites to shovel-ready status.
- Loan-bridging programs through Community Futures to cover upfront CIP costs.

The public emphasized that incentives should also support green and community-friendly practices, for example, offering grants to companies that minimize emissions or invest in green infrastructure.

Stakeholders further recommended targeted support for early-stage costs such as rezoning, servicing extensions, and infrastructure upgrades, as well as programs to offset the expense of relocating industrial uses from intensifying residential areas. Simplified, low-administration programs were viewed as essential to encouraging participation.

2.4 Desired Role for the Town

Most stakeholders expressed a strong desire for the Town of Essex to take a more proactive role in enabling industrial growth. This includes:

- Faster approvals: Moving at “business speed” rather than municipal timelines.
- Proactive servicing and rezoning: Getting lands shovel-ready before opportunities arrive.
- Dedicated staff capacity: Adding a concierge or business development lead to coordinate across departments.

- Marketing and branding: Positioning Essex as central, affordable, and investment-ready.

At the same time, council and administration also recognized that the Town must balance growth with community quality of life. The administration stressed the importance of aligning industrial expansion with infrastructure capacity and avoiding industries that would overwhelm the servicing capabilities. Some councillors and the community also stressed the value of smart, gradual growth and ensuring decisions are viewed through an environmental lens to maintain long-term sustainability. The public called for more transparency and regular reporting so residents can see the benefits of growth.

2.5 Community Concerns

Community voices emphasized balance. While many residents want to see more jobs and redevelopment of vacant sites, they also worry about industrial growth clashing with Essex's identity as a small, livable town.

Key concerns included:

- Compatibility of land uses: Industrial parks located too close to residential subdivisions risk complaints about noise, traffic, and lighting.
- Protection of farmland and green space: Residents want industrial expansion to avoid prime agricultural lands where possible.
- Infrastructure and amenities: Concerns about drainage, transportation links, and the need for more workforce housing.
- Environmental standards: Expectation that new industries will minimize emissions and support sustainability.

Many residents also see opportunity in adaptive reuse — turning underused and vacant lands (old Peavy, Bennigans, former Harrow High School, Hwy 3 corridor sites) into productive, job-creating spaces

3. Opportunities Identified

3.1 Speed to Shovel Advantage

Businesses and regional partners were clear that speed is money. Companies often have narrow investment windows, and Essex risks losing opportunities when approvals drag on for months or years. A major opportunity lies in creating a concierge-style approvals system, where a single point of contact guides projects through the entire process. This would reduce confusion across siloed departments and demonstrate that Essex is committed to moving "at business speed."

Stakeholders also suggested the Town should track and publish permit and servicing timelines. Transparent reporting would hold the Town accountable while marketing Essex as a community where businesses can get to work faster. Branding Essex as the "fastest place to build" in the county could differentiate it from Windsor and Lakeshore

3.2 Pre-serviced, Shovel-ready Lands

One of the most consistent themes across all engagement was the need for shovel-ready land. Industrial parcels exist in Essex, but most lack servicing, environmental studies, or motivated landowners. Stakeholders indicated that some properties could be converted to industrial use if there were predictable rezoning timelines, cost-sharing for servicing extensions, and incentives to reduce upfront risk. The CIP can address these gaps by funding servicing, pre-zoning, and required studies, while supporting cost-sharing and clearer rezoning timelines to reduce upfront risk.

Creating a land readiness database would allow the Town to market available properties along with their servicing timelines, helping site selectors quickly assess viability. By partnering with landowners and offering grants for design and study work, Essex could ensure that when opportunities arise, sites are immediately buildable — positioning the Town as the next natural site after Windsor fills up

3.3 Adaptive Reuse & Redevelopment

The public identified a wide range of underused and vacant properties — from the old Peavey Mart store and Bennigan's site to former schools and multiple parcels along Highway 3. Many residents called for these properties to be repurposed before expanding into new farmland.

Transitioning long-established but increasingly out-of-place industrial operations to modern employment areas was seen as a way to unlock redevelopment, reduce land-use conflict, and maintain local jobs — provided relocation and remediation costs can be feasibly supported.

The CIP could help unlock these opportunities by supporting the relocation and remediation of outdated industrial sites and incentivizing the redevelopment of brownfields and long-vacant lots. This approach would reduce land-use conflict, preserve local jobs, and transform underused properties into productive, employment-generating spaces.

3.4 Cluster & Sector Development

Essex cannot — and should not — try to compete head-to-head with Windsor for mega-projects like battery plants. Instead, the Town has the opportunity to define its niche sectors, focusing on industries that complement existing anchors and Essex's strengths.

Engagement highlighted opportunities in:

- Agri-tech and food processing, building on Essex's agricultural base.
- Light manufacturing, which fits Essex's scale and labour pool.
- Digital infrastructure and data centres, if sufficient hydro capacity can be secured.
- Niche EV supply chain opportunities, such as tool and die or autonomous farm equipment.

This approach would allow Essex to target mid-sized wins — sustainable projects that create jobs, expand the tax base, and reinforce Essex's industrial identity without overextending servicing capacity.

3.5 Balanced Incentives & Creative Programs

While standard incentives such as tax increment grants (TIGs) and development charge (DC) relief are expected in today's competitive market, Essex has the chance to go further with innovative incentive models.

Suggestions included:

- Support for relocation and remediation of select industrial sites
- Job-linked grants, rewarding businesses for meeting hiring milestones.
- Training subsidies, such as support for in-house workforce development systems.
- Loan-bridging programs through Community Futures to cover upfront CIP costs.
- Incentives tied to green practices or community contributions — for example, companies that invest in landscaping, energy efficiency, or local hiring.

By offering flexible, creative incentives, Essex can stand out as a community that not only reduces costs but also aligns business growth with community goals.

3.6 Industrial - Community Integration

Businesses and residents alike noted the risk of industrial lands abutting residential subdivisions, creating conflict over noise, lighting, and traffic. To mitigate this, Essex can use the CIP to invest in buffers, landscaping, and road/laneway upgrades, ensuring industrial growth is compatible with neighbourhood quality of life.

Industrial growth also presents an opportunity to strengthen downtown vitality. More workers in Essex means more people visiting local restaurants and shops. Public survey respondents emphasized the importance of linking industrial growth to community benefits like jobs, beautification, and accessible amenities.

Finally, ensuring transportation and housing strategies align with industrial workforce needs — such as exploring transit links or encouraging workforce housing — will be critical for long-term integration.

3.7 Branding & Marketing

Right now, Essex risks being seen only as “cheaper than Windsor.” To attract investment, the Town needs a clear industrial identity. Branding Essex as “Central, Affordable, Ready” reflects its location advantage, cost competitiveness, and commitment to shovel-readiness.

A strong marketing strategy should showcase shovel-ready sites, CIP incentives, and Essex’s industrial success stories, working in partnership with Invest WindsorEssex, the Chamber, and the BIA. By telling a consistent story, Essex can position itself as the next logical choice for industry in the region.

3.8 Regional Collaboration

Stakeholders repeatedly emphasized that Essex cannot operate in isolation. Competing municipalities like Windsor, Lakeshore, and Tecumseh already offer aggressive incentive packages. Essex’s opportunity lies in collaborating regionally to ensure complementarity rather than undercutting.

This includes:

- Aligning with county-wide CIP initiatives.
- Leveraging Windsor’s mega-projects (EV battery plant, new hospital) by attracting suppliers and spinoffs.
- Exploring shared infrastructure or servicing partnerships to reduce costs and accelerate readiness.

By positioning itself as a partner in regional growth rather than a competitor, Essex can punch above its weight.

3.9 Sustainability & Long-term ROI

Finally, engagement underscored that incentives must demonstrate a clear return on investment for taxpayers. Council and administration emphasized that the CIP must prioritize industries that fit Essex’s servicing capacity and generate sustainable tax revenue.

Residents added an expectation that growth be environmentally responsible, with incentives linked to energy efficiency, emissions reduction, and green practices.

Success should be measured not only in terms of square footage built, but also in jobs created, housing demand stimulated, tax base expanded, and community improvements delivered.

4. Recommendations for CIP Development

4.1 Invest in Servicing and Site Readiness

The single most consistent message across all engagement was the need for shovel -ready land. The Town should prioritize CIP tools that help landowners and the municipality bring sites to market quickly. This could include:

- Grants for design, environmental, and archaeological studies to prepare lands.
- Cost-sharing programs for extending servicing into industrial areas.
- Creation of a land readiness database that markets available sites and provides transparent timelines for servicing.

By doing so, Essex can build a reputation as a community where industrial investors can get building immediately, reducing the risk of losing projects to faster -moving municipalities.

4.2 Create a Competitive Incentive Mix

Essex must match regional competitors on the basics — tax increment grants (TIGs) and development charge (DC) relief — to stay on the short list for investors. However, the Town should also consider more creative programs that reflect community priorities:

- Job-linked incentives, rewarding businesses for local hiring.
- Training subsidies, supporting workforce development and retention.
- Loan-bridging partnerships with Community Futures, ensuring businesses can access CIP benefits without prohibitive upfront costs.
- Incentives linked to green practices, such as landscaping, energy efficiency, or carbon reduction measures.

This balanced approach ensures that CIP programs not only attract business but also deliver measurable community benefits.

4.3 Strengthen Administrative Capacity

Many stakeholders expressed frustration with slow, siloed approvals. To address this, the Town should:

- Create a dedicated industrial concierge role to guide businesses through the process and break down departmental silos.
- Increase planning and engineering capacity to handle industrial projects at business speed.
- Track and report approval timelines to Council and the public, reinforcing accountability.

This investment in people and processes is as important as financial incentives in shaping Essex's competitiveness.

4.4 Define and Market Essex's Industrial Identity

Essex risks being seen simply as a lower-cost alternative. The Town must actively brand itself as "Central, Affordable, Ready". Marketing efforts should:

- Highlight shovel-ready lands and CIP incentives.
- Showcase Essex's location advantages (20 minutes from everywhere in the county, direct access to Hwy 3 and the Gordie Howe Bridge).
- Tell success stories of existing employers and clusters, positioning Essex as the logical next site after Windsor.
- Partner with Invest WindsorEssex, the Chamber, and the BIA to ensure consistent regional messaging

4.5 Target Strategic Sectors

While all industrial investment would undoubtedly benefit the Town of Essex, there should be a more overarching strategy focused on attracting industries that align with its competitive strengths and servicing capacity:

- Agri-tech and food processing, leveraging Essex's agricultural base.
- Light manufacturing, which fits the available labour pool and infrastructure.
- Digital infrastructure and data centres, provided hydro capacity can be secured.
- Niche EV supply chain opportunities, including tool and die and autonomous farm equipment.

This cluster approach avoids direct competition with Windsor for mega-projects while creating sustainable, mid-sized wins that grow the tax base and workforce.

4.6 Integrate Industrial and Community Development

Industrial growth should not be pursued in isolation. The CIP should explicitly link business incentives to community improvements:

- Require landscaping, buffering, and design features that reduce conflict with residential areas.
- Encourage redevelopment of vacant and underused properties before greenfield expansion.
- Connect industrial growth to workforce housing, transportation options, and downtown vitality.
- Explore programs that encourage industries to contribute to community amenities or green infrastructure.

By embedding integration, Essex can reassure residents that industrial growth will enhance — not erode — the community's quality of life.

4.7 Ensure Transparency & Accountability

The Town should commit to public accountability in CIP implementation. Residents and businesses alike asked for clearer communication and regular updates. Essex can strengthen confidence in the program by:

- Publishing annual reports on CIP uptake, jobs created, tax growth, and community benefits.
- Maintaining open channels with businesses through roundtables, surveys, and direct engagement.
- Demonstrating return on investment for taxpayers, tying incentives to measurable outcomes

5. Conclusion

The engagement process for the Town of Essex's Industrial Community Improvement Plan (CIP) revealed both strong support for industrial growth and clear expectations for how that growth should unfold. Stakeholders consistently emphasized the importance of r eadiness, competitiveness, sustainability, and accountability.

The CIP represents an opportunity to position Essex as the next logical site for industrial investment in the region — a community that is central, affordable, and ready to welcome business. To achieve this, Essex must act decisively: preparing shovel -ready lands, streamlining approvals, offering competitive yet balanced incentives, and defining a strong industrial identity.

At the same time, the Town must ensure that industrial growth enhances community well - being. This means prioritizing adaptive reuse of vacant lands, protecting farmland and natural areas where possible, integrating industrial and residential uses through t houghtful design, and requiring transparency in reporting benefits back to taxpayers.

If these recommendations are implemented, the Industrial CIP will not only attract new employers and expand the tax base, but also reinforce Essex's identity as a community that grows responsibly, creating jobs, strengthening its downtown, and protecting the quality of life that residents value.

Town of Essex

Industrial Community Improvement Plan:

Industrial Trends Analysis

EXPLORER SOLUTIONS

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1.0 Industrial Trends Analysis: Town of Essex

1.1 Introduction

The Town of Essex ("Essex") is developing an Industrial Community Improvement Plan ("CIP") to encourage targeted investment, job creation, and industrial intensification. To support this effort, this Industrial Trends Analysis identifies key economic, demographic, and industrial shifts that should inform the structure and priorities of the CIP. The analysis was prepared by Urban Insights Inc. and Vitality Planning, with Explorer Solutions serving as a core member of the project team and leading the industrial trends research. Explorer Solutions brings specialized expertise in economic development and industrial growth strategy to ensure the CIP is grounded in real-world market conditions and aligned with regional opportunities. This work is also supported by Durrell Communications, who are leading stakeholder engagement and public outreach as part of the broader CIP initiative.

1.1.1 Regional Industrial Development Trends

Agricultural-Agribusiness Integration

Essex's industrial base is closely tied to the agri-food and value-added agriculture sector. Proximity to producers and access to agricultural land creates opportunities for food processing, greenhouse technology, logistics, and equipment servicing. Across Essex County, there is increasing demand for:

- Clean-tech-enabled food production
- Cold storage and controlled-environment processing
- Integrated logistics and packaging services

Incentivizing infrastructure upgrades and allowing greater flexibility in industrial zoning can help the CIP support long-term economic growth, particularly in accommodating agri-tech and agri-logistics sectors.

Regional Supply Chain Reshoring and Diversification

Global trade disruptions, reshoring trends, and Buy North American mandates are shifting manufacturing and logistics patterns. Windsor-Essex is experiencing new interest from firms seeking lower-cost industrial land near key trade corridors, including Highway 401 and the future Gordie Howe International Bridge.

Essex can position itself as a competitive alternative for light manufacturing and warehousing by implementing site readiness programs, extending servicing, and streamlining permitting processes—key actions to be considered in the CIP.

1.1.2 Local Industrial Land and Infrastructure Capacity

Serviced Land Availability

While there is a supply of designated industrial land within Essex, much of it remains unserviced. This is a key barrier to investment and site selection for industrial tenants who seek development-ready parcels with access to roads, water, wastewater, and high-speed internet.

To encourage private investment in site servicing and intensification, Essex should consider introducing financial tools such as tax increment grants, development charge rebates, or servicing cost offsets

Facility Modernization and Adaptive Reuse

Many industrial buildings in Essex are aging and may not meet modern requirements for logistics, manufacturing, or energy efficiency. Retrofitting and adaptive reuse present an opportunity, especially in areas close to residential or mixed-use zones.

Targeted incentives to modernize or repurpose older industrial structures—focusing on green building standards, automation readiness, and workforce proximity—should be considered as part of the CIP.

1.1.3 Labour Market and Workforce Trends

Skilled Labour Shortages

Across the region, employers face difficulty recruiting and retaining skilled trades and industrial workers. This trend is intensified by an aging workforce and growing competition from urban centres.

The CIP can be used to encourage the co-location of training facilities, support the development of industrial hubs with ride-sharing or transit access, and attract employment-intensive sectors that offer quality-of-life benefits.

Youth and Newcomer Integration

There is opportunity to align industrial development with broader goals of youth retention and immigration. Encouraging inclusive hiring and entrepreneurship in industrial sectors can align with community well-being goals.

Partnering with regional economic development and workforce agencies can help align industrial attraction efforts with talent development as part of the CIP strategy.

1.1.4 Investment Climate and Economic Resilience

Clean Economy and Net-Zero Commitments

Governments at all levels are encouraging transition toward lower-emission industries. Clean manufacturing, green construction materials, and circular economy business models are increasingly important in site selection and funding eligibility.

To support sustainability goals, developments that demonstrate environmental innovation, energy efficiency, or waste reduction should be prioritized through eligibility criteria or bonus incentives in the CIP.

Digital Infrastructure and Automation

Digital adoption is a key enabler for competitiveness. Automation, robotics, and Industry 4.0 applications are expected to reshape small and medium-sized industrial firms in the next decade.

To enhance competitiveness, the CIP should encourage broadband expansion and promote the tech-readiness of industrial areas, including grant incentives for process modernization and innovation.

Conclusion

Essex stands at a strategic moment to align its Industrial CIP with emerging economic and industrial trends. By focusing on readiness, modernization, and sustainable growth, the CIP can position Essex as a regional leader in job creation, investment attraction, and industrial innovation.

2.0 Industrial Market Analysis: Southwestern Ontario

2.1 Overview of the Regional Industrial Economy

Southwestern Ontario is a key contributor to Ontario's industrial output, with Windsor-Essex serving as a strategic manufacturing, logistics, and agri-business hub. The region benefits from:

- Proximity to the U.S. border and major trade corridors (Highway 401, Highway 3);
- An established automotive and advanced manufacturing cluster;
- A growing agri-food and greenhouse production base; and
- Access to a skilled workforce through local colleges and training centres.

The industrial sector is undergoing a significant transformation as global trends—including reshoring, automation, green energy transition, and climate resilience—reshape where and how industrial activity occurs.

2.2 Key Sub-Sectors Driving Industrial Growth

Automotive and Advanced Manufacturing

Windsor remains Canada's automotive capital. With the construction of the NextStar Energy EV battery plant, the region is expected to attract a wave of Tier 1 and Tier 2 suppliers in:

- Battery components;
- Electric vehicle (EV) systems;
- Lightweight and composite materials; and
- Robotics and automation systems.

This is creating significant demand for industrial land within 30- to 60-minute proximity of Windsor.

Essex is amongst the municipalities in Essex County ("**County**") that can attract support industries by offering competitively priced, development-ready industrial land and workforce proximity.

Agri-Food Processing and Agri-Tech

The County is home to one of the largest concentrations of greenhouse operations in North America. This is creating strong downstream industrial demand for:

- Food processing and packaging;
- Cold storage and distribution centres; and

- Agricultural technology (AgTech) innovation.

The sector is expected to grow with rising global demand for food security and sustainable local production.

Essex's industrial zoning and CIP programs should support flexible, food-grade facilities and integration with transportation logistics.

Logistics, Warehousing, and Cross-Border Trade

The completion of the Gordie Howe International Bridge (expected in September 2025) is transforming Southwestern Ontario's logistics landscape. The bridge is forecast to increase cross-border freight flows and reduce bottlenecks, especially for time-sensitive goods.

Key industrial areas in Windsor and Leamington are nearing capacity, driving interest in emerging industrial nodes such as:

- Essex (central location, Highway 3 access);
- Lakeshore (proximity to Highway 401 and CP Rail); and
- Kingsville and Harrow (close to greenhouse clusters).

Invest in serviced, zoned land and improved transportation links can help capture spillover logistics and light industrial demand.

Green Energy and Clean Tech Manufacturing

Ontario's industrial sector is undergoing a significant transition as federal and provincial programs increasingly prioritize clean manufacturing, renewable energy generation, and energy storage. The Windsor-Essex region, situated in Ontario's 'solar belt', is emerging as a clean-technology cluster due to its established manufacturing base, strong cross-border logistics network, and proximity to major energy infrastructure. This cluster is becoming a competitive location for:

- Solar component assembly and distribution;
- Electrolyzer, hydrogen, and advanced biofuel technologies; and
- Battery storage and clean energy systems integration.

Table 1 provides examples of emerging clean-energy and low-carbon industrial sectors in Southwestern Ontario that reinforce these trends.

Table 1. Emerging clean-energy industrial sectors in Southwestern Ontario.

Sector Focus	Example Company / Project	Location	What They Do	Relevance to Essex
Solar component assembly and distribution	Canadian Solar Manufacturing and Distribution Hub	Guelph, ON	Manufactures and distributes solar PV modules for North American markets.	Demonstrates ongoing demand and viability for Ontario-based solar component manufacturing and warehousing. Essex can market land with access to Highway 3 and the U.S. border for similar supply-chain firms.
Hydrogen, electrolyzers, biofuels and clean fuel systems	Hydrogen Optimized (large-scale water electrolyzers)	Owen Sound, ON	Designs and manufactures electrolyzers for clean hydrogen production.	Relevant to positioning Essex industrial land for future green energy hubs, especially where grid upgrades are planned.
	Greenfield Global Biofuel Production Campus	Chatham, ON	Produces ethanol and industrial biofuels for transportation and industry.	Demonstrates growing agri-energy integration, strongly relevant in Essex County due to the greenhouse and agri-food sector.
Battery storage and clean-energy systems integration	NRStor Grid-Scale and Community Storage Projects	Multiple sites across Southwestern Ontario	Develops and operates battery storage installations supporting industrial and community energy resilience.	Essex can pair solar or high-load users with storage to manage peak demand and attract net-zero-oriented industrial users.
	NextStar Energy EV Battery Plant Supply Chain (emerging ecosystem)	Windsor, ON (under construction)	$5B EV battery manufacturing facility creating supplier and logistics demand across the region.	Creates a regional clean-technology cluster. Essex can target suppliers needing 20 to 50 acre serviced industrial sites at competitive land costs.

These projects signal that Southwestern Ontario is already attracting high-value clean-technology investment, and communities positioned with ready industrial land and flexible zoning frameworks stand to benefit.

Data Centres

Ontario's industrial landscape is continuing to evolve, with traditional manufacturing consolidating and investment shifting toward technology-enabled sectors. One significant areas of growth is the data centre market, which has expanded rapidly across Southwestern Ontario as businesses adopt cloud computing, artificial intelligence, automation, and real-time digital logistics systems. As these technologies scale, the demand for reliable and secure data storage infrastructure continues to rise.

Notably, data centre operators are increasingly seeking sites outside major metropolitan areas. As a result, secondary markets are becoming preferred locations due to their:

- Lower industrial land acquisition and development costs;
- Lower electricity delivery and operating costs;
- Increased separation from residential uses, reducing land-use conflict; and
- Proximity to advanced manufacturing and logistics clusters that rely on low-latency data connectivity.

Emerging patterns across Southwestern Ontario show growing interest from mid-sized data centre developments, typically requiring 10 to 50 acre sites with:

- Three-phase electrical capacity;
- Access to fibre backbone networks;
- Stable soil and ground conditions for large-footprint builds; and
- Convenient access to provincial highway corridors.

For example, BMO's 320,000 sq. ft. data centre campus in Barrie sits on a 25-acre site and includes a 60,000 sq. ft. data hall (expandable to 100,000 sq. ft.) along with administrative space, mechanical and electrical infrastructure, and parking for approximately 660 vehicles. This development illustrates that mid-sized data centres can be successfully developed outside the GTA when suitable land, servicing, and accessibility conditions are in place. Essex is well-positioned to offer comparable, if not more cost-competitive, industrial land options to attract similar-scale projects.

Building on this advantage, Essex's central location within Southwestern Ontario, combined with competitive land pricing and ongoing servicing and infrastructure planning, aligns closely with the core siting requirements sought by data centre operators. Establishing data centres as a permitted use within appropriate industrial zones would further enable Essex to capture emerging demand, diversify its industrial

base, and signal that the community is ready to support next-generation digital infrastructure investment.

2.3 Industrial Land Demand and Pricing Trends

Land Absorption Trends (2021–2024)

- Windsor's Industrial vacancy remains below 3 per cent, with limited shovel-ready parcels.
- Lakeshore/Tecumseh has significant absorption for large-format warehousing and battery supply chain users.
- Leamington has high interest from agri-food processors and cold storage.
- Essex and Amherstburg are emerging as value-based alternatives for mid-sized users (10,000–50,000 sq ft).

Table 2. Industrial Land Pricing (2024–2025 Estimates).

Location	Serviced Land Price (per acre)	Unserviced Land Price
Windsor	$700,000–$900,000	$450,000–$600,000
Lakeshore	$600,000–$800,000	$400,000–$550,000
Essex	$250,000–$400,000	$150,000–$250,000
Leamington	$300,000–$500,000	$200,000–$350,000

Essex offers one of the lowest land costs per acre in the region, making it attractive for cost-sensitive users if infrastructure and servicing can be assured.

2.4 Industrial Investment Drivers and Constraints

Drivers

- Proximity to U.S. border and major trade corridors;
- Lower industrial land costs in secondary markets (e.g., Essex);
- Access to agri-food and automotive ecosystems; and
- Federal/Provincial clean tech incentives and EV supply chain support.

Constraints

- Limited inventory of fully serviced industrial parcels;
- Labour force shortages in trades and technical occupations;
- Infrastructure lags (e.g., wastewater, broadband, three-phase power); and
- Complex site plan approvals and inconsistent zoning policies.

2.5 Opportunities for the Town of Essex

As regional growth drives industrial users to seek alternative locations outside of Windsor, Essex is uniquely positioned to:

- Offer cost-effective land options;
- Build niche capacity in agri-processing and light manufacturing;
- Attract value-chain businesses linked to greenhouse and battery sectors; and
- Utilize its central location for regional logistics/distribution.

2.6 Recommended Priority Actions:

- Invest in infrastructure and servicing of priority industrial lands.
- Implement CIP incentives targeting building upgrades, servicing costs, and permit fee reductions.
- Promote shovel-ready lands through regional site selectors and the Windsor-Essex Economic Development Corporation.
- Support land-use flexibility for mixed-industrial users, especially agri-food and logistics.
- Create a development concierge service to guide investors through approvals and fast-track site readiness.

Conclusion

The industrial market in Southwestern Ontario is entering a growth phase, driven by global supply chain changes, food security, and EV innovation. By aligning land-use policy, infrastructure investment, and targeted incentives, Essex can position itself as a competitive destination for the next generation of industrial investment.

3.0 Competitive Advantages of the Town of Essex

Essex offers a compelling value proposition for industrial investment relative to competing jurisdictions in Southwestern Ontario. Its central location within the County, proximity to major transportation routes, and cost-effective land base position the municipality to attract a diverse range of industrial users—from agri-food and logistics to advanced manufacturing support services.

3.1 Strategic Location and Transportation Access

Essex is centrally located within Essex County and lies within a 30-minute drive of major industrial employment areas in Windsor, Leamington, Lakeshore, and Amherstburg. It offers:

- Direct access to Highway 3, a key corridor linking Leamington to Windsor and the Gordie Howe International Bridge;
- Close proximity to Highway 401 via County Roads 8 and 23;
- Access to regional rail lines, enhancing future intermodal potential; and
- Short-haul freight proximity to the U.S. border (30 km to Detroit-Windsor crossing).

Essex offers strategic connectivity without the congestion or high land costs of Windsor and Lakeshore.

3.2 Affordable Industrial Land Base

Compared to nearby municipalities, Essex provides among the lowest industrial land costs in the region, both for serviced and unserviced parcels. This price differential allows businesses to:

- Reduce up-front capital investment;
- Secure larger footprints for expansion; and
- Maximize return on infrastructure investments.

Table 3. Comparison of Average Services Land Costs.

Municipality	Average Serviced Land Cost (per acre)
Windsor	$700,000–$900,000
Lakeshore	$600,000–$800,000
Leamington	$300,000–$500,000
Essex	$250,000–$400,000

Essex is ideal for cost-sensitive firms, particularly in logistics, fabrication, and food processing seeking scalable, long-term locations.

3.3 Available Workforce and Talent Proximity

Essex is located within commuting distance of a regional labour force of over 300,000 people. While some neighbouring jurisdictions are experiencing acute labour shortages, Essex can attract workers from:

- Rural and small-town Essex County communities;
- Nearby urban centres (Windsor, Kingsville, Leamington);
- Young trades and tech talent from St. Clair College and University of Windsor;

The town's quality of life, housing affordability, and rural character are appealing to both employers and employees seeking to avoid urban pressures.

Essex offers employers access to a skilled labour pool at lower housing and commute costs for workers.

3.4 Agri-Food and Greenhouse Cluster Synergies

Essex is a key link in the region's agri-food value chain, with opportunities to capitalize on:

- Proximity to major greenhouse production (Leamington, Kingsville);
- Existing agri-servicing and equipment supply businesses; and
- Market demand for cold storage, agri-logistics, and food-grade facilities.

Essex's central location enables it to serve as a staging point or consolidation centre for perishable goods distribution across the region and into the U.S.

Essex can serve the greenhouse economy while offering space for processing, packaging, and innovation not feasible in higher-cost nodes.

3.5 Pro-Investment Local Government and CIP Tools

Essex is actively developing an Industrial CIP to:

- Streamline the development process;
- Offer financial incentives (e.g., tax increment grants, development charge offsets); and
- Reduce risk and delays for industrial investors.

Essex's collaborative approach, modest permitting fees, and faster approval timelines provide a clear advantage compared to larger, more bureaucratic municipalities.

Essex offers a "business concierge" approach to investment attraction that prioritizes responsiveness and certainty.

3.6 Untapped Development Potential

While many nearby jurisdictions are experiencing industrial land shortages, Essex has:

- A supply of designated industrial lands in key locations (e.g., Essex Centre, Harrow);
- Flexibility for adaptive reuse and redevelopment; and
- Potential to extend servicing to unlock new development areas.

Essex can offer “room to grow” for firms facing space constraints or escalating land costs elsewhere.

3.7 Summary of Competitive Advantages

Table 4 summarizes the competitive factors detailed above and highlights Essex’s advantage.

Table 4. Summary of Competitive Advantages.

Competitive Factor	Essex Advantage
Land Cost	Among lowest in region
Transportation Access	Proximity to Hwy 3, 401, U.S. border
Workforce Availability	Access to regional talent, rural affordability
Industry Clusters	Greenhouse-adjacent, food & ag services
Investment Support	In-progress CIP, streamlined approvals
Future Growth Potential	Undeveloped land, servicing opportunities

4.0 Alignment with Town of Essex Priorities

Essex has several resources and strategic initiatives that collectively support its competitiveness in attracting industrial development and investment, which can inform and guide the development of its Industrial CIP.

The following represents a summary of how Essex's various reports and studies lend themselves to supporting its competitiveness:

Strategic Vision and Goals for Economic Development

The Town of Essex explicitly prioritizes economic growth and job creation in its strategic planning documents.

The Town's Strategic Action Plan 2023-2027 indicates that a key goal is to "leverage our Town's competitive advantages to promote jobs and economic investment".[1] Residents have indicated that attracting "local jobs and economic development" is extremely important. The plan also identifies a need to find ways to bring new local jobs and investment to the Town.

Essex's Draft New Official Plan (July 2024) conveys a vision for "the Town (Tomorrow)" by 2051 is described as a "vibrant community with a diversity of people, industries, and activities," with its economy anchored by "agriculture and industrial employment". A guiding principle for the Plan is "leveraging our location for employment," emphasizing planning for future jobs in Essex. The Plan aims to achieve a balance between residential and employment growth and attract land uses that provide employment opportunities for existing and future residents.

Essex's Official Plan (August 2017) aims to further enhance Essex as a desirable place for living, working, and leisure by helping to create healthy, safe, attractive, and vibrant communities, and to maintain and attract manufacturing, agricultural, and agri-tourism activities that can provide employment opportunities.

4.1 Land Availability and Optimization for Employment

Essex is actively working to identify and optimize land for industrial and employment uses.

The Town's Strategic Action Plan 2023-2027 indicates that one strategic priority involves "optimizing land to increase employment opportunities". An action item is to

[1] StrategicPlan_TownOfEssex_FINAL_June6.pdf

"complete a land review with the objective of optimizing opportunities for future jobs and investment" by Spring 2026, which indicates is 70 per cent complete.

Essex's Draft New Official Plan (July 2024) states that industrial development within the Town is centred in Essex Centre and Harrow. It outlines that Primary Settlement Areas (Essex Centre and Harrow) will be the focus of the majority of forecasted growth, including employment growth. It also commits to maintaining designated Industrial lands as large and continuous areas for clusters of business activities, including manufacturing and warehousing, and ancillary retail and office uses. A variety of lot sizes are permitted for industrial uses to support diverse employment opportunities. The plan also designates "Future Development" lands within the Primary Settlement Areas for the future expansion of industrial employment lands, requiring further study for phasing and development nature.

Essex's Official Plan (August 2017) acknowledges the need for additional industrial lands, especially in Essex Centre and Harrow, where existing supply has been fully absorbed. It commits to providing employment opportunities by designating employment lands in appropriate locations. It also states that consideration will be given to establishing a knowledge-based business park. The plan notes that lands immediately west of Highway 3 are potentially suitable for industrial and business park uses if proper services and controlled access points are available.

4.2 Infrastructure and Servicing

Robust infrastructure is a cornerstone of attracting industrial development.

Essex's Strategic Action Plan 2023-2027 emphasizes "safe and reliable infrastructure" as a goal, aiming to "embrace asset management best practices to build, maintain and continuously improve our municipally owned infrastructure". Actions include completing a water/wastewater servicing plan to establish a prioritized list of required projects to accommodate growth.

Essex's Draft New Official Plan (July 2024) indicates that planning for municipal servicing infrastructure will be integrated with land-use planning to accommodate expected growth, protect human health, optimize existing infrastructure, and appropriately phase new development. The plan states that most of the Town's settlement areas are fully serviced with municipal water and sanitary sewage treatment facilities, including Essex Centre, Harrow, Colchester, and McGregor, with upgrades to Essex and Harrow completed in 2005 to accommodate anticipated development. All new development must be adequately serviced. Industrial development will be coordinated with road, active transportation, and infrastructure planning.

Essex's Official Plan (August 2017) ensuring new development proceeds with efficient public services based on reasonable and sound standards. It details that Essex Centre

receives water from the Union Water System, and Harrow from the Harrow/Colchester South Water System, both having capacity for future development. It states that upgrades to sewage treatment capacity for Essex and Harrow Urban Centres were completed in 2005 and can accommodate anticipated development.

4.3 Economic Incentives and Community Improvement Plans (CIPs)

CIPs are a direct tool Essex uses to stimulate private investment and development.

One of the actions under "optimizing land to increase employment opportunities" within Essex's Strategic Action Plan 2023-2027 is to "explore using targeted Community Improvement Plan (CIP) incentives to attract new businesses".

Essex's Draft New Official Plan (July 2024) states that "Community Improvement Plans allow for the Town to provide financial support (including grants, tax deferrals, and other incentives) to public and private initiatives that serve to maintain, rehabilitate and redevelop the existing physical environment in certain areas of the Town". The Official Plan identifies strategic areas for community improvement including:

- Prime Agricultural areas throughout the Town, but especially along the County Road 50 corridor, where the expansion of value-added agriculture-related uses and on-farm diversified use can support the growth of the Town's farming industry.
- It also notes that a CIP may be used to support the development of small- and medium-scale renewable and alternative energy facilities.

While specific to Colchester, the Colchester CIP outlines the Town's commitment to using CIPs to foster economic rejuvenation and enhancement, inclusive of financial incentive programs to assist private sector investment. It details various mechanisms like making grants or loans for eligible project costs. Eligibility criteria for grants typically require the applicant to be the registered owner or authorized agent, and the proposed work must conform to all municipal policies, standards, and procedures.

The Downtown Harrow CIP (DHCIP) states that the Town is "committed to working in public/private partnerships for the economic prosperity of Harrow and the Town of Essex" and uses the DHCIP to "help stimulate its enhancement and attractiveness". It details grant programs offered by Council for site-specific improvements.

The Essex Centre CIP (ECCIP) focuses on stimulating development, redevelopment, and revitalization in the downtown core through various programs. It offers financial incentives to those projects that will achieve goals like rehabilitation of existing buildings, development of vacant lands, and promoting support uses and incentives which enhance visitor accommodation and encourage new businesses.

The Harrow CIP (HCIP) was developed to help implement the objectives of the Strategic Plan and the wishes of residents and the business community. It focuses on stimulating new economic development downtown and elsewhere in the community, particularly to generate new and expanded industrial and commercial uses that provide employment opportunities. It outlines financial incentives for property improvements, facade renewal, and new/expanded land uses.

4.4 Regulatory Framework (Zoning & Official Plan)

Essex's by-laws and Official Plans establish the legal framework that accommodates and guides industrial development.

The Town's Zoning By-Law 1037 regulates the use of land and the character, location, and use of buildings and structures within the Town. It defines specific "Manufacturing Districts" which permit various industrial activities. They include:

- M1.1 Light Industrial/Limited Commercial
- M1.2 Business Park
- M1.3 Light Industrial and Business Park
- M2.1 General Industrial Uses
- M2.2 Heavy Industrial Uses

It also outlines general land use provisions, lot regulations, and building regulations applicable to all zoning districts.

The Town's amended By-Law 2063 updates the comprehensive zoning by-law, demonstrating Essex's ability to adjust its regulations to meet planning needs. This flexibility is crucial for adapting to industrial development requirements.

Essex's Official Plan (August 2017) details policies for lands designated "Industrial", stating that it is intended to accommodate businesses providing employment opportunities. It outlines permitted uses (manufacturing, fabrication, warehousing, etc.) and provisions for minimizing conflicts with surrounding land uses through mitigation, site plan control, and managing traffic flow away from residential areas. It also encourages industrial development to proceed based on industrial park plans or registered plans of subdivision.

Essex's Draft New Official Plan (July 2024) further refines the approach to industrial lands, emphasizing the need for flexibility in lot sizes and supporting innovative and green industries. It reiterates that industrial uses, particularly manufacturing, will continue to be the primary employment sector and encourages diversification. It also mandates that designated industrial lands will not be converted to non-employment uses except through a comprehensive review, reinforcing their protection for industrial purposes.

4.5 Location and Transportation Advantages

Essex leverages its geographic position and transport network to attract businesses.

Essex's Strategic Action Plan 2023-2027 highlights "safe and well-maintained roads" as the most important service to residents. It includes actions to "complete a Roads Master Plan (includes active transportation) to establish future transportation network requirements" and "complete a 10-Year Roads Forecast with a prioritized list of required future roads projects and projected costs".

Essex's Draft New Official Plan (July 2024) aims to "leverage our location for employment" by taking advantage of the expansion of Provincial Highway 3 and promoting the Town's central location as a hub within the Windsor-Essex region, leveraging industrial and commercial opportunities arising from the Windsor-Detroit border. Industrial development is directed to lands with good access near Provincial Highways or Arterials to facilitate goods movement and minimize truck traffic impacts. The Town's road network, including Provincial Highway 3, is recognized as critical for carrying high volumes of interurban and regional traffic.

Essex's Official Plan (August 2017) indicates that Essex Centre's central position in the County and location along King's Highway No. 3 are noted as attractive features for commercial development. Essex works with the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) to determine areas along Highway 3 best suited for industrial development and access.

4.6 Support for Green Economy and Sustainability

Essex aims to attract industries aligned with its sustainability goals.

One of the guiding principles within Essex's Draft New Official Plan (July 2024) is to become "a sustainable and resilient town," which includes applying a climate change mitigation and adaptation lens to all infrastructure and land use policies. The Town explicitly fosters the growth of the green economy by supporting investment in job creation initiatives and skill development, and job training to support growth in the green economy. It encourages innovative industries like advanced manufacturing and green or sustainable industries, especially those that provide services and products promoting environmentally responsible practices, respond to climate change realities, and reflect environmental/sustainability objectives in their operations. The Official Plan indicates that Essex may use a CIP to support small- and medium-scale renewable and alternative energy facilities.

These resources collectively demonstrate Essex's commitment to creating an attractive environment for industrial development and investment through strategic planning, infrastructure improvements, flexible land use regulations, and targeted economic incentives. This comprehensive approach provides a strong foundation for an industrial CIP.

5.0 Insights from Industrial CIP Benchmarking

To support the development of targeted and effective incentives for Essex's CIP, the project team conducted a benchmarking review of comparable CIPs across Ontario. Table 5 summarizes relevant findings from municipalities that have implemented CIP tools specifically aimed at supporting industrial development, land readiness, and investment attraction. These insights will be used to help guide and inform the structure of Essex's future incentive programs, with a focus on enabling industrial land development, job creation, and long-term economic growth.

Table 5. Insights from Industrial CIP benchmarking.

Municipality	Relevant Focus	Key Incentive Tools	Insights for Essex
Town of Lakeshore	Employment lands and industrial development	Tax Increment Grants (TIGs), Development Charge (DC) rebates, Planning Fee refunds.	Demonstrates a strong link between CIP and regional investment strategy; incentives tied to industrial growth targets.
City of Brantford	Brownfield and industrial redevelopment	TIGs, Environmental Study Grants, DC reductions.	Flexible CIP structure supporting both new industrial builds and intensification of existing sites. Strong alignment with Official Plan.
City of Woodstock	Industrial park development and employment growth	TIGs, DC exemptions, Fast-tracked approvals.	Proactive incentive model to drive manufacturing investment; emphasizes readiness and servicing.
Town of Tillsonburg	Industrial land readiness and job creation	Land sale discounts, Servicing support, TIGs.	Direct support for development-readiness; useful precedent for Essex where unserviced lands are a barrier.
Municipality of Leamington	Industrial intensification and sector targeting (e.g., agri-food)	TIGs, CIP-linked servicing policies, sector-based targeting.	Strong integration of industrial strategy with sector growth (e.g., greenhouse/agri-food supply chains).
City of Sarnia	Advanced manufacturing and	TIGs, Façade/Building Improvement grants (for small-scale industries).	Mix of large-scale incentives and small-business supports; flexible CIP design

Municipality	Relevant Focus	Key Incentive Tools	Insights for Essex
	industrial cluster development		accommodates various investment scales.
County of Essex (Draft)	Large-scale industrial (>500,000 sq. ft.)	County-level TIG match (if local CIP exists).	Critical regional layer—Essex must align thresholds and tools to leverage County support where eligible.

Key takeaways Table 5 highlight several best practices that should guide the development of Essex's CIP. Tax Increment Grants (TIGs) and Development Charge (DC) rebates emerged as the most common and effective tools used by municipalities to attract industrial investment and support development. In addition, readiness incentives—such as support for servicing, expedited planning approvals, or brownfield remediation—are essential for unlocking the development potential of underutilized or unserviced industrial lands. Many municipalities also use sector-specific targeting, focusing on industries such as agri-food and advanced manufacturing, to align incentive programs with local economic strengths. Finally, aligning Essex's CIP with the County of Essex's draft industrial CIP framework will be critical to unlocking regional support, accessing matching funds, and maximizing the overall impact of the Town's incentive strategy.

6.0 Industry Intelligence from Developers and Real Estate Professionals

Consultation with industrial land developers and real estate professionals highlighted a consistent set of pragmatic considerations shaping investment decisions in Essex. Stakeholders noted that Essex is cost-competitive and well-located, but lacks the servicing readiness and streamlined approvals needed to translate interest into projects. Developers emphasized that land without servicing is effectively “off-market,” regardless of how it is zoned or priced.

Participants stressed the importance of predictability and speed, explaining that companies often work within short investment timelines and will select communities that move quickly and provide clear guidance. Approval and rezoning processes were described as slow, fragmented, and unclear, leading to uncertainty and increased holding costs. Several developers recommended a development concierge or single point of contact within the town to simplify navigation through planning, engineering, and servicing requirements.

Real estate professionals also highlighted a shortage of shovel-ready industrial land. While Essex has designated land, parcels require servicing extensions, environmental and drainage studies, staged road improvements, or land consolidation before they can be brought to market. Without support to reduce these upfront risks and costs, landowners are often reluctant to initiate development.

Developers were aligned in their view that TIGs and DC relief are now baseline requirements to remain competitive in the regional market. However, they encouraged Essex to go further by offering site readiness grants, servicing cost-sharing, or incentives for early-stage due diligence (e.g., studies, design, and engineering). These tools would increase the number of viable, market-ready industrial sites and signal that the town is serious about investment attraction.

Finally, industry participants expressed that Essex has the right fundamentals: central location; competitive land pricing; and an available workforce, but must focus on execution and readiness. By moving at “business speed,” enabling pre-serviced industrial lands, and clarifying development processes and timelines, Essex can position itself as a compelling alternative to higher-cost, higher-congestion markets in Windsor and Lakeshore.

7.0 SWOT Analysis

As Essex moves forward with developing a new Industrial CIP, it is essential to have a clear understanding of the current industrial landscape—both locally and within the broader regional context. The following Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis draws on recent industrial trends research to help identify the key factors that may influence the success of the CIP.

This summary highlights Essex's competitive advantages, internal challenges, external opportunities, and emerging risks. It is intended to guide the development of a targeted, practical, and investment-ready CIP that supports industrial growth, job creation, and long-term economic resilience. The SWOT analysis offers balanced overview of what Essex is doing well, where there are gaps, and how the Town can position itself for future industrial investment in an increasingly competitive regional market.

7.1 Strengths

- Centrally located in Essex County, the Town benefits from its proximity to Highway 3, Highway 401, and the future Gordie Howe International Bridge.
- Essex's low industrial land prices in the region ($250K–$400K per acre serviced), make Essex very cost-competitive.
- Industry can access a regional labour force of greater than 300,000. Additionally, rural affordability supports worker attraction and retention.
- Essex's proximity to North America's largest greenhouse cluster enables downstream opportunities in food processing and agri-logistics.
- Essex's pro-investment municipal government actively supports industrial development with CIP tools, streamlined approvals, and a willingness to adopt flexible zoning.
- Essex benefits from its availability of designated and potentially serviceable industrial lands for new and expanding businesses.

7.2 Weaknesses

- Many industrial parcels remain unserviced, posing a barrier to investment attraction.
- While Essex is in proximity to a large labour force, there are shortages in skilled trades and industrial workers, particularly as the workforce ages.
- There are gaps in critical infrastructure like high-speed broadband, wastewater capacity, and three-phase power in some areas.
- With multiple CIPs that exist across the town (Essex Centre, Harrow, Colchester), and now the County developing its own, there is the potential of causing confusion or duplication unless integrated effectively.

7.3 Opportunities

- If the town positions itself as an affordable alternative, Essex can capture industrial demand spilling over from high-cost, capacity-constrained areas like Windsor, Lakeshore, and Leamington.
- Essex can support key growth sectors by attracting EV supply chain businesses, agri-tech and food processors, logistics hubs, and clean tech firms.
- Essex can use the CIP to encourage building retrofits, servicing upgrades, and adoption of green technologies.
- Essex should leverage regional collaboration through alignment with Windsor-Essex Economic Development Corporation and Invest WindsorEssex to promote shovel-ready sites.
- Essex should offer financial tools like tax increment grants, DC rebates, and expedited permitting to reduce developer risk.
- Essex should use industrial growth as a platform for newcomer integration, youth employment, and training partnerships.
- Introducing data centres as a permitted use in appropriate M1 (Business Park) and M2 (General Industrial) zones—subject to buffering, noise, and energy infrastructure considerations, would broaden Essex's industrial attraction profile and signal readiness to emerging, high-growth technology operators.
- Designating select industrial lands for co-located solar energy generation, or allowing solar facilities as ancillary uses in industrial zones, can:
    - Reduce operating costs for local employers;
    - Support net-zero manufacturing objectives;
    - Strengthen Essex's sustainability brand; and
    - Align with the Town's Official Plan direction to support green, resilient growth.

7.4 Threats

- With intensifying regional competition, other municipalities (e.g., Lakeshore, Leamington, Amherstburg) are also targeting industrial growth with strong incentive packages.
- Delays in extending infrastructure could deter investors looking for immediate development opportunities.
- Complex zoning or unclear permitting processes may frustrate developers and site selectors.
- External factors like U.S. tariffs, interest rate volatility, or supply chain disruptions could impact investor confidence.
- If not carefully coordinated, overlapping incentives or goals with the draft County of Essex Industrial CIP could dilute program effectiveness or confuse potential applicants.

Appendix A: List of Abbreviations

This document uses the following abbreviations and acronyms.

AGTECH: Agricultural technology
CIP: Community Improvement Plan
COUNCIL: Town of Essex Council
COUNTY: County of Essex
DC: Development Charges
DHCIP: Downtown Harrow Community Improvement Plan
ECCIP: Essex Centre Community Improvement Plan
ESSEX: Town of Essex
EV: Electric Vehicle
HCIP: Harrow Community Improvement Plan
HWY: Highway
KM: Kilometre(s)
MTO: Ministry of Transportation Ontario
OP: Official Plan