

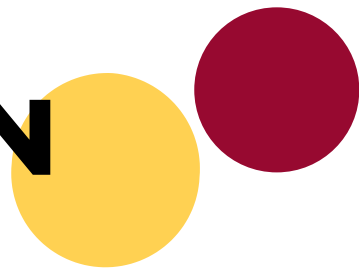


PROVINCIAL ADVOCACY PLAN

2023



INTRODUCTION



The City of St. Thomas is eager to work with Ontario over the mandate of the elected provincial government to make positive strides for everyone who calls St. Thomas home.

To do this, we must collaborate with the Province to realize our strategic plan goals of being a **compassionate, vibrant, and thriving community**.

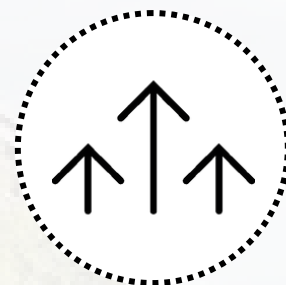
Building on our existing relationships, we will continue to strengthen our municipal-provincial partnership and advance our key priorities to create a community where local industry, residents, and businesses succeed- now and into the future.



**Compassionate
Community**



**Vibrant
Community**



**Thriving
Community**

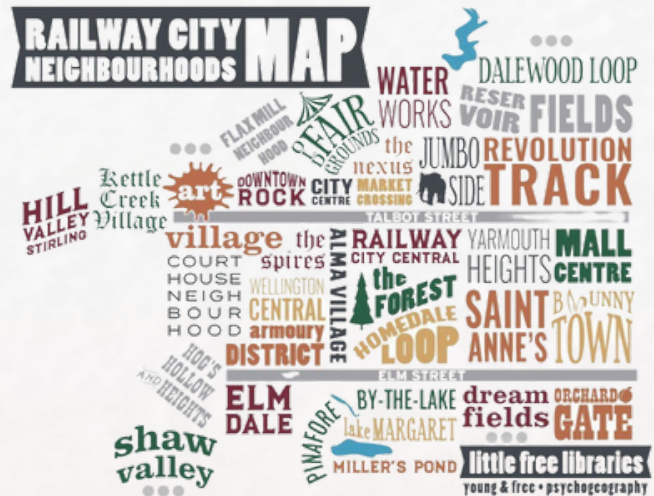
ST. THOMAS ONTARIO

St. Thomas is located in the heart of Southwestern Ontario in beautiful Elgin County. As a small urban community, we are surrounded by numerous picturesque towns, lakeside villages and prime agriculture land. St. Thomas is home to a vibrant art and tourism industry, strong local businesses, and major manufacturing employers.

No city is more strategically located; just moments from the 401 corridor and halfway between Detroit and the shores of Lake Huron to the west, and Toronto, Niagara Falls and Buffalo to the east.

With forecasted growth estimated at **50,600 people and 23,800 jobs by 2041**, the City of St. Thomas remains focused on being a manufacturing leader; showcased by the quality and skills of the local workforce and the geographic advantages of St. Thomas' location for both access to materials and distribution of finished products. Many of our major employers are well-known world leaders. Our community is enthusiastic, able, skilled and caring.

St. Thomas' platform focuses on various priorities that, through collaboration with the Provincial Government over the course of this administration, will make a positive difference in our community and help us grow and prepare for the future.



These priorities include:

- 1. Increase regional transit connections;**
- 2. Deliver on affordable/supportive housing;**
- 3. Continue mitigation funding for Public Health;**
- 4. Enhance mental health supports;**
- 5. Support brownfield remediation;**
- 6. Repair airport infrastructure; and**
- 7. Address WSIB issues.**
- 8. Support for improved school board & municipal relations**
- 9. Improve bail system to reduce recidivism rates and increase community safety**



PRIORITY AREA

INCREASE REGIONAL TRANSIT CONNECTIONS



Connecting the City of St. Thomas and the City of London via accessible and convenient transit is vital to the ongoing success and growth of our region. As locations of major employers in the area, including the addition of large employers such as Amazon (located between London and St. Thomas), providing meaningful transit options for employees is critical. Enhancing our interregional connectivity will improve the movement of people, goods and services between St. Thomas and surrounding areas. For too long, our residents, businesses, and visitors have had to rely on inefficient and expensive transportation options.

While work has been done to increase travel opportunities in the region, including rural inter-community services, GO Train extension, and other endeavours including the development of a regional transit hub in Downtown London, there is still a large gap to be filled in providing accessible transportation connections between our cities.

Provincial support is necessary to leverage our communities forward and enable connected, accessible, and future-ready transit in the region. St. Thomas calls on the Ontario government to deliver increased support for inter-community transit initiatives.



PRIORITY AREA

DELIVER ON AFFORDABLE/ SUPPORTIVE HOUSING



St. Thomas has experienced a significant spike in housing costs including rental rates. Additionally, the vacancy rate has decreased significantly from 3.4% in 2020 to 1.9% in 2021. These changes have put substantial pressure on both housing access and housing affordability, especially for households with low income or who live in poverty. The pressures and the need for affordable housing are demonstrated through the dramatic increase in applications to the community's Centralized Housing Waitlist which has more than doubled in the last two years with wait times for housing being up to ten years, depending on number of bedrooms required.

To respond to these needs, the City of St. Thomas has successfully:

- implemented a Coordinated Access System and By-Name List, and joined the Built For Zero – Canada movement to achieve a Quality By-Name List as a first step in its community efforts to drive down homelessness to Functional Zero.
- partnered with Indwell – Hope and Homes to build supportive and affordable housing in St. Thomas. In 2021, through this partnership, sixteen (16) highly supportive micro-units were created within a city-owned asset for high acuity vulnerable people experiencing chronic homelessness – a first of its kind in Ontario.



PRIORITY AREA

DELIVER ON AFFORDABLE/ SUPPORTIVE HOUSING



- established a second partnership with Indwell to create an additional 45 units of mid to highly supportive units, co-located with a new city fire station. All tenant selection for these units will occur through the municipal Coordinated Access System and Quality By-Name List, also a first of kind for this partnership between the City and Indwell. This project has been made possible by the investment of provincial funding in addition to the donation of city owned and remediated land.

In July of 2022, the City received confirmation from Built for Zero Canada that St. Thomas-Elgin reached a 10% or greater reduction in chronic homelessness in April 2022 and sustained this reduction in May and June. Furthermore, based on the most recent data submission, St. Thomas-Elgin has reduced chronic homelessness by 25% below baseline

To continue this progress, the City of St. Thomas calls on the Ontario government's support to acquire additional funding to establish a third partnership with Indwell, intended to create an additional 68 units, again on city-owned land, as well seek funding for other projects being contemplated in partnership with the YWCA / Sanctuary Homes and Canadian Mental Health Association Thames Valley Addictions and Mental Health Services.



PRIORITY AREA

CONTINUE MITIGATION FUNDING FOR PUBLIC HEALTH



Like all municipalities, the City of St. Thomas allocates funding from its annual operating budget to cover its portion of community public health costs. While supportive of the services provided through its local public health provider, Southwest Public Health, and appreciative of its leadership, especially throughout the COVID pandemic, the City remains concerned about the impact it has on the municipal operating budget.

The City acknowledges the magnitude of provincial support that has been provided directly to Public Health Units (PHUs) and to municipalities since early 2020. Notwithstanding, with the exception of a 1% increase in Public Health base funding in 2022, funding has remained constant for many years. Additionally, pre-COVID decisions amended cost sharing models between PHUs and Municipalities, with some previously 100% provincially funded and all previously 75/25 % cost shared funded programs being changed to 70/30 funding.

The City appreciates mitigation funding that has been provided to PHUs since the funding allocation changes were made but is concerned about any possible impacts and/ or shortfalls for the municipal budget if that funding is not provided in 2023.

St. Thomas calls on the Minister to provide an update on mitigation funding and the review of Public Health services.



PRIORITY AREA

ENHANCE MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS SUPPORTS



Through local experience and observing national and international best practice, it is known that affordable housing alone is not the full solution to achieving housing stability when working with vulnerable populations. Individuals and families that find themselves in precarious housing or experiencing homelessness are often living with complex social needs and inequities like mental health, addiction, trauma, discrimination and deep poverty, which may be further compounded by inter-generational experiences.

In recent years, with growing mental health and addiction challenges in the St. Thomas/ Elgin County community, there has been

- a lack of a comprehensive treatment continuum for those suffering from addiction and mental health issues; a fragmented approach to care for individuals;
- a delayed response to expressed needs for support, and difficulty to access suitable services. An untimely response to treatment needs creates a missed opportunity for individuals to engage in services and supports. Moreover, it exacerbates the acuity of presentations and contributes to chronic homelessness, inappropriate hospitalization and police apprehension. These impacts have a detrimental effect on the people in need and increase the costs to the healthcare system over time.



PRIORITY AREA

ENHANCE MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS SUPPORTS



Current collaboration between CMHA Thames Valley Addiction and Mental Health Services, the City of St. Thomas, the County of Elgin, St. Thomas-Elgin Social Services, the Downtown Business Board, St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital, YWCA Elgin, Central Community Health Centre, and the St Thomas Police has identified the critical need to enhance the continuum of treatment that will provide timely, co-ordinated and seamless provision of care for those with addiction and mental health issues.

This enhanced continuum of treatment could include Street Outreach Workers (Phase I), a 15-bed Crisis Stabilization and Withdrawal Management Centre (Phase II) and a 10-bed Residential Treatment Centre (Phase III). This proposed model could deliver a spectrum of treatment, responding effectively to the range of acuity and complexity evident in the community and will transform the experience of those in need of support for their addiction and mental health issues.

The City calls on the Minister to support and provide resources to create new and augment existing mental health supports which are essential in the community and for those most in need.



PRIORITY AREA

SUPPORT BROWNFIELD REMEDIATION EFFORTS



Brownfield sites are common in all municipalities across the province. The City of St. Thomas is somewhat distinctive, however, from other municipalities in that its brownfield sites are located throughout the municipality. Occupying and encumbering some very large and strategically located vacant parcels of land, mostly outside of the industrial area of the City, they consist primarily of abandoned rail lands. These lands offer significant potential for residential infill and intensification opportunities for a growing municipality that is approaching its municipal boundary limits.

St. Thomas does have a new Community Improvement Plan (CIP) that supports funding for brownfield sites but restricts incentives for redevelopment of brownfield sites to employment lands only (industrial development). This is a generally common incentive utilized by most municipalities in the province that are looking to promote new investment opportunities for their industrial land supply. The brownfield sites in St. Thomas go well beyond just typical industrial designated lands at the edges of municipal boundary, and include the abandoned rail lands, as noted above, that are located in the heart of the City's core area and at other key locations throughout the City, in proximity to parks, schools, established neighbourhood and major transportation corridors.



PRIORITY AREA

SUPPORT BROWNFIELD REMEDICATION EFFORTS



The existing brownfield sites offer a significant opportunity for community growth, including needed housing of all forms, and recreational facilities. The current CIP does not provide incentives for brownfield site redevelopment for residential purposes. Although the City has completed and anticipates additional completion of remediation for sites for affordable housing developments including those being created in partnership with Indwell, additional remediation efforts would create new and enhanced growth and housing development.

The City could and would like to consider amending its current CIP to incentivise the remediation of brownfield sites for Residential and Community Facility type uses. However, this change would result in significant cost to the Municipality. Assistance and support from the Province, to this end, is needed.

The City calls on support from the Ontario Government for a provincial incentive program and / or direct funding to assist with the costs of environmental remediation to support residential development on former rail lands. This would include a request for funding for all remediation activities including site cleaning and safe transportation of contaminated soils to appropriate waste deposit areas.



PRIORITY AREA

INVEST IN AIRPORT INFRASTRUCTURE REPAIRS



The City of St. Thomas acquired the St. Thomas Municipal Airport, a former flight training operation during WWII, from the federal government in the 1970s. Until the 1990s, government funding was available for runways, taxiways, lighting, and aprons. The Airport is not eligible for such safety-related project funding under the (ACAP) Airport Capital Assistance Program because the program is based on year-round scheduled passenger flights.

The City has maintained this historical airport property through agricultural, commercial and general aviation leases, fuel sales, and aviation services and has invested prudently in selected capital projects, as finances have allowed.

Commercial tenants within the airport complex currently include:

- commercial/recreational flight training
- small aircraft maintenance, restoration, and sales
- helicopter aerial application forestry & agriculture, heavy lift service, fixed wing charter, and piston & turbine maintenance
- heavy maintenance regional commuter jets and commuter turbo props, corporate aircraft maintenance
- business aviation
- growing and cultivation of cannabis
- growing and cultivation of food stuffs



PRIORITY AREA

INVEST IN AIRPORT INFRASTRUCTURE REPAIRS



At present, approximately 70 individuals are employed by companies within the airport complex with a projected total of 91 (21 additional) within the next year. In addition to being a base to several local industries, the airport also acts as a transportation hub to support regional air transportation which helps to generate continued economic investment and growth opportunities in the broader St. Thomas and Elgin County community.

The most significant capital expense at the airport relates to its three runways. One runway has not been used since 2016 because of safety concerns relating to failed infrastructure. A second requires an overlay of asphalt to safeguard the base construction. With increased commercial and agricultural activity, a runway reconstruction reserve has been established but it will require several years of investment to the reserve before sufficient funds will be available to reconstruct a single runway.

The City calls on support from the Province for resources to complete needed infrastructure repairs to the runways at the municipal airport.



PRIORITY AREA

ADDRESS WSIB ISSUES



The City of St. Thomas employs over 500 staff across many employment categories (administrative, long term care, environmental services, fire services) and works in partnership with local police services (under the leadership of a local police services board). Although effective safety and oversight protocols have been implemented by the City and its related boards, given the nature of municipal work, work related injuries occur. The City is a Schedule 2 employer meaning all claims costs are self-funded, with no funding from the Province or pooling with other employers.

Over the last several years, employer costs of managing the WSIB system have increased to be cost prohibitive, delays in the adjudication and appeals system have grown, and affected employees are facing increased and unnecessary stress. In addition, the cost of presumptive claims for post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and cancers, especially for those employed within fire and police services, continues to rise.



PRIORITY AREA

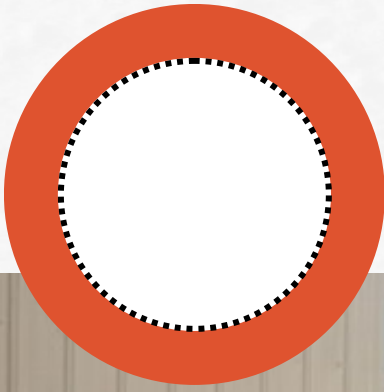
ADDRESS WSIB ISSUES



WSIB issues are a top priority for the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police (OACP). There is a working group of relevant stakeholders, including the OACP, the Police Association of Ontario/Toronto Police Association, the Ontario Senior Officers Association, the Ontario Association of Police Services Boards, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, Fire Services, Paramedics, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, and Centre for Addiction and Mental Health that meets to discuss concerns.

In addition to increase costs, employers have also raised concern about the proposed increased costs. Currently, the WSIB provides injured workers with payments equal to 85 per cent of their pre-accident take-home pay. The government and the Workplace Safety Insurance Board are exploring raising this compensation up to 90 per cent.

The City calls on the Province to listen to these concerns and provide their assistance and support to address ongoing issues.



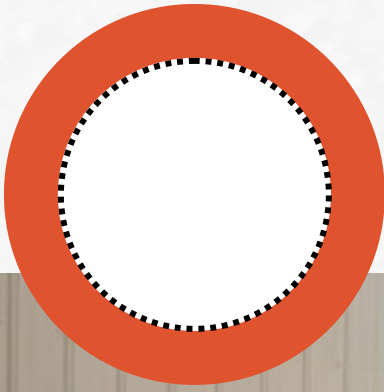
PRIORITY AREA

SUPPORT FOR IMPROVED SCHOOL BOARD & MUNICIPAL RELATIONS



The population size and growth rate of municipalities are key indicators to help municipal policy makers and administrators plan the direct services and infrastructure to meet their population needs, including emergency services, schools, hospitals, roads, social services, and parks. One of the strengths of the Census of Population is that it provides reliable data on these topics at the community level. With that being said, it is important to augment census data with Official Plan information, and more broadly with current municipal level information gleaned from conversations with municipal and local stakeholders.

The City of St. Thomas has a projected 20-year residential forecast of 50,600 people by 2041. Additionally, the London Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), which includes the City of London, the City of St. Thomas, and areas within Middlesex and Elgin Counties, recorded the 5th highest growth rate in Canada between July 1, 2019 and July 1, 2020 at 1.6%. As a result of this significant migration and immigration to urban centres across the region, local school boards are changing. Growth, demographic shifts, and residential development have resulted in system-wide imbalances between available space, student enrollment, and projected needs.



PRIORITY AREA

SUPPORT FOR IMPROVED SCHOOL BOARD & MUNICIPAL RELATIONS



Current data indicates increasing pressure at schools in areas where student population is growing, creating significant immediate and short-term needs that must be addressed. At St. Anne's Catholic Elementary School in St. Thomas alone, there are currently 14 portables, with two additional portables recently proposed to deal with issues of overcrowding.

Support for construction of new school capacity in advance of new developments being fully occupied, as well as the construction of flexible space to address growth needs over time can help to alleviate the overcrowding that schools in our region are facing. The City requests support for increased opportunity for collaboration and information sharing with local school boards and the Province in order to work together and assess the impact of new developments on long-term student accommodation and capacity planning.

The City calls on the Province to listen to these concerns and provide their assistance in increasing collaboration and information sharing between municipalities and school boards.



PRIORITY AREA

IMPROVE BAIL SYSTEM TO REDUCE RECIDIVISM RATES AND INCREASE COMMUNITY SAFETY

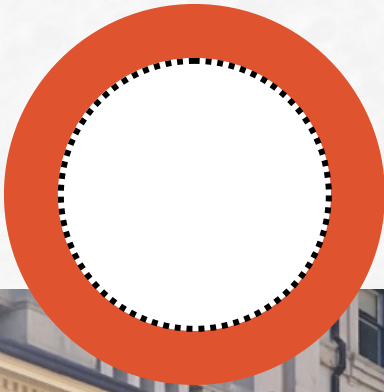


Police Services across Ontario, including the City of St. Thomas Police Service (STPS), are exhausting precious time and resources having to manage the repeated arrests of the same offenders because of “catch and release” policies. This in turn, is impacting their morale, and ultimately law-abiding citizens who are paying the often significant financial and emotional toll of this broken system. The current trends and increased workload have resulted in a decrease of charges in other areas such as road safety related charges. Certainly, the community would be better served if STPS Staff could allocate their time to the core functions of policing.

As an example, in St. Thomas, a local prolific offender has been charged with 108 counts of breach of release conditions. Of the 108 charges laid, there were 3 convictions, 47 withdrawn, and 58 still before the courts.

STPS Statistics (not all 2022 Statistics have been finalized)

- 73% increase in thefts and possession of stolen property occurrences in 5 years (2017-472 / 2022-817) 2022 Q4 Stats not included.
- 125% increase in break & enters in 5 years (2017-118 / 2022-265) 2022 Q4 Stats not included.
- 121% increase in drug related charges in 5 years (2017-56 / 2022-125).
- 42% increase in criminal charges in 5 years (2017-1529 / 2022-2175).
- 59% increase in arrests in 5 years (2017-1250 / 2022-1988).



PRIORITY AREA

IMPROVE BAIL SYSTEM TO REDUCE RECIDIVISM RATES AND INCREASE COMMUNITY SAFETY



Long-term reductions in crime require that both upper levels of government invest significantly in addressing the systems-level issues that contribute to offending including poverty, inadequate health services for mental health and substance use, food insecurity, and housing affordability.

The decriminalization of simple possession of illicit drugs requires a more robust investment in evidence-based treatment, as well as recovery/rehabilitation options. Individuals with a SUD need to be diverted into treatment programs that are comprehensive, immediately available, and funded by provincial and federal governments – not municipally. Those who refuse treatment should face sanctions that escalate each time they are found in possession of drugs. Investment in treatment programs that provide help before an offender is driven to problematic recidivism should also be supported. For example, innovative sublocade programs are currently operating in our community and have had success.

The current 911 system needs to be enhanced to include Fire, Police, EMS, AND CRISIS. There is an urgent need to add specialized interventions to the continuum of care for people with complex mental health (MH) and substance use disorder (SUD) needs. Currently, the majority of mental health related crisis response in Ontario is primarily left to the police and hospital ED's.



PRIORITY AREA

IMPROVE BAIL SYSTEM TO REDUCE RECIDIVISM RATES AND INCREASE COMMUNITY SAFETY



As an example, the St. Thomas Mobile Outreach and Support Team (2 MH Clinicians) provide support to approximately 40% of the 2,000+ MH related calls for service in St. Thomas resulting in a nearly 60% gap being dealt with by STPS members. Police responding to these types of crisis related calls have been shown to contribute to adverse outcomes. We need a broader and more creative set of solutions including non-police mental health response teams triaged through police communication centers.

The City calls on support from the Attorney General's Office to respond to the concerns of our local police by imposing more substantive and effective consequences for continued breaches of a judicial interim release order. Collaboration with police, the Crown and corrections, along with health and social services sector is necessary in order to reduce recidivism rates and maintain a sense of safety in the community.




ST. THOMAS
THE RAILWAY CITY