



Economic Development Strategic Action Plan

2026–2030



Executive Summary

This document presents a four-year strategic action plan that provides a foundation and guide for economic planning for the Municipality of Chester (MOC). It is intended to align with MOC Strategic Priorities and other current municipal initiatives.

It is designed to capitalize on MOC's strengths and opportunities, which include:

- **conveniently located and well connected**
- **strong and developing key industry sectors**
- **access to talent and highly skilled workers**
- **high quality of life**

The Plan focuses on six key themes to ensure sustained economic success, including securing investment, supporting business, planning for growth, workforce attraction and retention, enhancing the area's quality of life, and developing a strong network of partners who share our vision and desired outcomes.

The local economy in MOC is greatly impacted by provincial, national, and international events. Local businesses are navigating a challenging economic landscape that includes shifting consumer behaviors, staffing shortages, and increasing costs. Our aim is to build an economic development plan that is resilient and flexible – one that can be adapted as needed to ensure we are providing the tools and resources that will help our economy thrive.

The Municipality's investment in infrastructure development and commitment to growth has been recognized and well-received by the business community. The ongoing twinning of Highway 103 is anticipated to facilitate new growth and opportunities for businesses in the area. MOC is an ideal location for new businesses adjacent to Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) and for people looking for a rural quality of life close to Atlantic Canada's largest city.

The plans outlined in this document are designed to achieve our objectives:

1. Plan & Support Targeted Growth Areas

Ensure infrastructure, services, and zoning accommodate housing, commercial, and industrial growth.

2. Be Open For Business

Encourage business, retention, expansion, and investment, fostering economic resilience and job creation

3. Position MOC as a Destination of Choice

Establish the municipality as a premier location on Nova Scotia's South Shore for residents, businesses, and tourists, enhancing its reputation locally & internationally

Vision

We will make the Municipality of Chester an attractive place to visit, live, invest, and do business.

Our approach is intentional, focusing on areas anticipated to attract growth while ensuring we can support development and enhance the vibrancy and unique character of our communities.



Background

The Municipality of Chester has experienced significant growth in recent years, and is well-positioned to continue to have significant opportunities to attract people and businesses. Its location is centered between the key economic hubs of Halifax, Bridgewater, and Kentville. Improved transportation networks, such as the twinning of highway 103, further increase the attraction of MOC as a place to live or build a business.

The population of MOC has grown steadily since 2015 and was estimated to be 11,848 in 2024.

This has been growing steadily since 2015 and includes increases of 1.8% annually since 2021. While this growth has increased the total number of working-aged residents, MOC continues to have an older population compared to the provincial average.



In 2021, the median age in MOC was 56 years, significantly higher than Nova Scotia's median of 46. Children (aged 0-14) comprised 11.5% of the population, while 30.6% were 65 years or older. The working-age group (15-64) continues to decrease as a proportion, while the retirement-age population (65+) continues to increase. Environics (2025) estimates MOC has a Labour Force Replacement Ratio (LFRR) of 0.46, which means a significant labour shortfall as the older population retires. As has been identified by the Growth Plan and past studies, attracting working-aged residents to MOC is crucial to ensure the local economy continues to grow and thrive.

The total labour force population for the year-end 2023/2024 in MOC was 5,180, approximately 46.4% of the estimated total population 2023 (estimates from Manifold Data). This includes permanent employees, temporary employees, and those self-employed. MOC has a slightly higher percentage of self-employed workers (20.39%), compared to the Provincial and the Lunenburg County average (11.30% and 17.37% respectively).

The 2021 Census provides insights into MOC's workforce. The top three occupational categories and top three industry sectors were:

What People Do For Work:

1. Sales and service occupations: 1,050 jobs (21.7% of the labour force)
2. Trades, transport, and equipment operators: 995 jobs (20.6%)
3. Business, finance, and administration occupations: 645 jobs (13.3%)

Where People Work:

1. Health care and social assistance: 650 jobs (13.4%)
2. Construction: 530 jobs (11%)
3. Manufacturing: 520 jobs (10.8%)

Current estimates from both Manifold Data and Environics indicate that these percentages are largely unchanged since 2021.

Relative to the Province, MOC labour force specializes in certain industries. This indicates that MOC is likely a net-exporter of those goods in the Nova Scotia. MOC specializes the most in the following industries (1 being the most specialized):

1. Manufacturing
2. Information and cultural industries
3. Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting
4. Construction

Looking closer at the business community within MOC, it is estimated there are approximately 500 businesses operating with 390 currently listed in our Business Directory. The top categories of businesses in MOC include:

1. Retail (71) – 18.2%
2. Building & Construction (71) – 18.2%
3. Community Agencies/Associations (34) – 8.7%
4. Artisans (33) – 8.5%
5. Attractions & Activities (29) – 7.4%
6. Restaurants (29) – 7.4%
7. Health & Wellness (28) – 7.2%
8. Automotive (26) – 6.7%
9. Home & Garden (24) – 6.2%
10. Professional Services (21) – 5.4%



This data has contributed to MOC identifying five sectors – Arts, Culture, and Recreation; Business Services; Construction; Green Industries; and Niche Manufacturing / Value-Added – as key targets for growth and investment. Additionally, tourism-related businesses are of special interest and plans include active marketing, promotion, and further development of this sector.

In addition to businesses operating locally, the MOC has an above-average number of people who commute outside the municipality for work. Our proximity to major economic hubs along with fast and reliable transportation networks has significant advantages for the region, while also creating some challenges for workforce development. Approximately 31.5% of workers commute outside MOC for employment, with 12.2% commuting within Lunenburg County and an additional 18.9% commuting outside the county but within Nova Scotia. These commuting patterns highlight that MOC is conveniently located within commuting distance to key employment hubs and should give attention to ensuring we build on our strength as an ideal place to live while continuing to work to attract businesses to setup locally.



Strengths & Opportunities:

- Conveniently located and well connected.
- Strong and developing key industry sectors.
- Access to talent and highly skilled workers.
- High quality of life.
- Demonstrated investment in infrastructure needed to support business success.
- Available land for development.
- Strong tourism assets.
- Rich in arts, culture, and heritage assets.
- Land available for industrial development within KMIP that is well-serviced.
- InvestChester and TourismChester websites provide important landing pages for economic development and accompanying marketing materials.
- Flexible and accommodating zoning.
- Twinning of Highway 103 provides improved transportation connections to Halifax and beyond.
- Low tax rates and attractive quality of life combined with our well-connected destination provide an incentive for businesses to locate in MOC.
- Growing population and planning for anticipated future growth nodes is well underway.



Weaknesses & Threats:

- Economic development resources within Lunenburg County and the South Shore are not well connected and often work in silos.
- Minimal local statistics on the impact of Federal and Provincial economic development efforts in the region.
- Business supports, including creating a “One-stop-shop” for business resources, could be improved.
- KMIP industrial lands are not ideally located next to Highway 103, which may limit their attractiveness to some businesses.
- Attractiveness of MOC as a great place to live can result in a significant portion of the population commuting outside the municipality for employment, which could lead to the area increasingly being a bedroom community.
- Proximity to major tourism centres can lead to fewer overnight visitors in MOC.
- At the current rate MOC’s population is aging, there may not be sufficient young people to take their place when they leave the workforce.
- Increasing housing costs is resulting in less availability of attainable housing for the local workforce.
- Export-focused businesses currently face a significant challenge from global economic uncertainty, including from potential US tariffs.
- Lack of a central water supply impacts the scale of development possible in some areas of MOC.



Desired Outcomes & Strategic Actions

To accomplish Council's strategic priorities and support the long-term, sustainable development of the local economy, MOC will undertake the following strategic actions, which can be grouped into six main themes:

1. Ensuring our community and businesses are investment ready and working to attract business.
2. Supporting the growth and success of businesses in the municipality.
3. Planning for growth.
4. Working with partners to support workforce attraction and retention.
5. Creating and enhancing MOC's reputation as a great place to live and work.
6. Building a network of engaged partners to support economic development in MOC.

The pages that follow present actions we anticipate undertaking within the current Council term along with key measures we will use to determine success. These are expected to be adjusted over time as Council's priorities evolve.



1.1 Strengthening our Communities for Investments & Attraction

Actions	Measurements
1.1.1 Continue industrial park land sales.	Total acreage/lots sold
1.1.2 Implement the Kaizer Meadow Industrial Park Marketing & Development Plan.	Land Sales Advertising Engagement InvestChester Website Traffic Total Inquiries
1.1.3 Promote and grow commercial zones to increase commercial activity	Changes to commercial zoning
1.1.4 Take a complete communities approach to development that supports walkability and livability	Implementation of Growth Plan recommendations
1.1.5 Leverage regional and national partnerships to better understand and capitalize on investment inquiries our region receives	Number of networking events with partners (Invest NS & regional partners)
1.1.6 Infrastructure and asset planning to support growth and development	
1.1.7 Reduce barriers to commercial development	Implementation of Growth Plan recommendations
1.1.8 Consider development of a surplus land banking policy to support attainable housing supply and commercial business park opportunities	
1.1.9 Maintain and update commercial land and building inventory	Project completed and regularly maintained

1.2 Define & Refine the Municipality's Competitive Advantage

Actions		Measurements
1.2.1	Prepare and update our value proposition	Updated value proposition
1.2.2	Produce and share data with businesses and partners	Data updated annually
1.2.3	Implement ongoing business attraction marketing and promotion	InvestChester website traffic Marketing reach
1.2.4	Participate in networking events targeting investors and developers	Number of events attended
1.2.5	Serve as the primary point of contact for business, provide support, and access to resources that support business development	Total inquiries Referrals to partner resources

1.3 Identify & Support Key Sector Development

Actions		Measurements
1.3.1	Identify key sectors & clusters within the municipality	BR+E survey results Labour survey data (Statistics Canada)
1.3.2	Stay up to date on potential emerging industries and their potential to thrive in MOC	
1.3.3	Conduct a supply chain analysis and identify "leakage" and servicing, including retail gaps within the local economy (subject to confirming regional partners participation)	Completion of project

1.4 Continuous Learning & Improvement

Actions		Measurements
1.4.1	Work with partners to provide training on being investment & export ready	Training sessions provided Number of attendees
1.4.2	Coordinate with Planning & Development and Public Works to support business needs	

2.1 Support Existing Businesses	
Actions	Measurements
2.1.1 Create a single point of contact to assist businesses in navigating available resources	Total inquiries Resources provided Referrals made
2.1.2 Update and improve local business directory	Business directory data
2.1.3 Promote existing supports and regularly communicate with businesses and partners	Social media data Business Breakfast with Council data Other engagement details
2.1.4 Implement a shop local program and promote successes of local businesses	Number of businesses promoted Other data TBD as tactics are implemented
2.1.5 Host quarterly "Breakfast with Council" events and other engagement opportunities	Attendance data
2.1.6 Work with the Planning Department to create educational materials designed to assist with navigating MOC's regulatory environment.	Materials developed

2.2 Business Retention & Expansion

2.2 Business Retention & Expansion	
Actions	Measurements
2.2.1 Implement a consistent BR+E program	BR+E survey data
2.2.2 Assist local businesses in process improvement, future planning, resiliency, business expansion and transition, and succession planning.	Total businesses supported
2.2.3 Work with partners to provide training opportunities and business-focused events	Number of events held
2.2.4 Identify local procurement opportunities and actively work to support businesses in taking advantage of opportunities	Local procurement data

2.3 Support the Development of Arts & Culture

2.3 Support the Development of Arts & Culture	
Actions	Measurements
2.3.1 Implement the Arts & Culture Strategy	Action items completed

2.4 Increase Tourism Visitation

Actions	Measurements
2.4.1 Develop & implement a tourism strategy	Strategy completed
2.4.2 Support a regional approach to tourism marketing and explore creation of a regional DMO.	Data on success of the regional organization
2.4.3 Prepare and implement tourism marketing campaigns	Campaign engagement
2.4.4 Administer licensing of short-term rentals	Number of STRs licensed Occupancy rates (as available) Revenue details (as available)
2.4.5 Implement the Municipal Marketing Levy	Marketing campaign engagement Revenues collected Industry engagement
2.4.6 Work with partners to support & promote Mi'kmaq tourism development	Partnership details and data
2.4.7 Work with partners to further develop heritage tourism	Partnership details and data
2.4.8 Create an inventory of tourism infrastructure assets	Inventory created and data shared
2.4.9 Work with businesses and entrepreneurs on tourism product/experience development	Increased tourism products
2.4.10 Work with partners to develop small/medium-size events and festivals	Number of festival/events hosted in MOC Number of partners engaged
2.4.11 Collect and distribute local tourism statistics	Tourism statistics Distribution data

2.5 Support & Promote Local Entrepreneurship & Innovation

Actions	Measurements
2.5.1 Support and promote organizations providing services for entrepreneurs as well as other available resources	Outreach data Support provided Referrals made
2.5.2 Collect and share data on local entrepreneurship	Data produced Distribution details
2.5.3 Promote entrepreneurship resources available to students	Number of students engaged
2.5.4 Explore development of a regional incubator and/or co-working spaces (subject to regional participation)	Project implemented
2.5.5 Work with partners to provide training and events focused on entrepreneurship	Number of training sessions and events held

3.0 Planning for Growth

3.1 Strategic Growth

Actions	Measurements
3.1.1 Implement a Growth Plan Communication Strategy	Action items implemented
3.1.2 Adopt a Surplus Land Banking Policy	Policy Adopted
3.1.3 Align the boundaries of Hamlet Designations with the Sewer Service Boundaries	Work completed as part of Municipal Land-Use Bylaw (MLUB) review
3.1.4 Establish Growth Share Targets for Serviced Development	Targets Established
3.1.5 Maintain Sewer Capacity within each of the Hamlet Areas	Data on wastewater service availability
3.1.6 Prioritize the Development of Potable Water Supply Systems in Areas with Sewer Service Expansion	

3.2 Missing Middle Housing

Actions	Measurements
3.2.1 Develop a Design Guideline Document for Development Agreements and Comprehensive Development Areas	Guidelines developed
3.2.2 Introduce Design Requirements for Site Plan Approval Developments in the Hamlet Zones	Requirements Introduced
3.2.3 Increase the Number of Units Permitted by Site Plan Approval where water and sewer service is provided	Increase in number of allowable units

3.3 Complete Communities

Actions	Measurements
3.3.1 Adopt a Complete Communities Approach to Public Investments in Hamlet Areas	
3.3.2 Reduce regulatory barriers to the development of commercial uses in Hamlet Areas	Recommended changes implemented
3.3.3 Conduct Streetscaping Visioning Work for sections of Highway 3 and Highway 12 within the Hamlet Areas	Engagement data Infrastructure work completed
3.3.4 Create a Commercial Building Facade Improvement Program	Number of grants issued Details of improvements made
3.3.5 Explore Housing Development Incentive Options	

3.4 Identify & Plan for Growth in "Future Growth Nodes"

Actions	Measurements
3.4.1 Develop and implement a comprehensive community plan for Exit 6 (Hubbards)	Completion of project
3.4.2 Explore development of a comprehensive community plan for Exit 9 (Chester Basin) and Exit 7 (East Chester/East River)	Decision made Completion of project
3.4.3 Identify additional future growth nodes	Additional future growth nodes identified

3.5 Implement Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) Initiatives

Actions	Measurements
3.5.1 Review and draft revised subdivision by-law, sewer by-law, and Municipal specifications	By-laws and specifications revised
3.5.2 Develop a plan for Municipally owned land	Completion of plan
3.5.3 Implement E-permitting	Online permitting implemented Number of permits issued
3.5.4 Implement a marketing and sales campaign for residential development	Campaign engagement data
3.5.5 Update and refine our housing infrastructure plan (municipal services)	Updated plans
3.5.6 Review and adopt pre-approved or fast-tracked building plans	Fast-tracked building plans adopted Permitting data
3.5.7 Develop incentives to encourage the creation of affordable housing	Incentives developed Data on program uptake

4.1 Workforce Attraction	
Actions	Measurements
4.1.1 Develop a resident attraction program	Program engagement data Population data (Statistics Canada)
4.1.2 Work with the local business community to identify skill gaps and training	Number of training sessions held by partners
4.1.3 Focus on business investment attraction efforts in sectors that support population growth	
4.1.4 Maintain regular communications with all levels of government to ensure awareness of programs, funding, and challenges related to the workforce	Number of connections made
4.1.5 Explore workforce attraction programs for new immigrants and support South Shore Multi-Cultural Association's work to develop the South Shore Local Immigration Program (SSLIP)	SSLIP launched Data from partners
4.1.6 Explore participation in a local, provincially funded connector program (subject to regional partnership and outside funding)	
4.1.7 Work with partners to promote employment of equity deserving groups	
4.1.8 Support local organizations in physician/health care worker recruitment efforts	Recruitment data Data on resources provided

4.2 Workforce Retention

Actions	Measurements
4.2.1 In collaboration with partners, develop a succession planning program for local businesses	Program developed Data on succession planning
4.2.2 Develop a "Workforce Action Group" comprised of local partners	Action Group formed
4.2.3 Work with partners to identify local employment opportunities for youth	Number of connections made Partnerships formed
4.2.4 Collect and distribute local workforce data, including updating growth projections/scenarios	Workforce data Distribution details
4.2.5 Work with partners to support programs to upskill local workers	Programs offered Programs uptake

5.1 Invest in Community Beautification & Public Spaces

Actions	Measurements
5.1.1 Implement a Community Beautification Plan	Partnerships formed Details on plans developed and implemented Events & festivals hosted Activation and usage data (as available)
5.1.2 Implement public space/place making projects in high potential spaces, including the Tancook Ferry relocation and Chester Volunteer Fire Dept Building	Project implementation
5.1.3 Explore traffic calming and streetscaping projects that will improve walkability and activation within public rights of way (e.g unopened roads)	
5.1.4 Explore opportunities for increased public art	Number of projects supported
5.1.5 Explore vendor licensing options to both support local businesses and entrepreneurship as well as creating vibrant public spaces	

6.1 Create Strong Partnerships & Networks to Support & Coordinate Local & Regional Economic Development	
Actions	Measurements
6.1.1 Support the development of a local Chamber of Commerce and actively participate	Data on collaborative projects supported
6.1.2 Support the Lunenburg Queens Business Awards	Total nominations, finalists and winners
6.1.3 Work with local and regional tourism partners including South Shore Tourism Cooperative, Tourism NS, and Discover Halifax	Details on networking and partnership outcomes
6.1.4 Coordinate with regional partners and businesses on workforce attraction	Number of projects undertaken
6.1.5 Engage and regularly communicate with provincial, federal, and municipal governments to support local and regional economic development projects and initiatives	Engagement details
6.1.6 Work with partners to host and support industry events	Events attended Events funded
6.1.7 Explore opportunities to share resources and avoid duplication of efforts within Lunenburg and Queens Counties	Collaboration details
6.1.8 Connect regularly with funding partners to more fully understand available resources for local economic development	Engagement details

Additional Resources

- **Arts & Culture Strategy**
<https://www.engagechester.ca/arts-culture-strategy>
- **Growth Plan**
<https://www.engagechester.ca/charting-a-course-for-growth>
- **KMIP Marketing & Development Plan**
<https://chester.ca/kmip-marketing-development-plan>
- **Community Beautification & Revitalization Plan/Public Spaces Plan**
<https://chester.ca/community-beautification-revitalization-plan>

