

CANDIDATE BRIEFING

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Best Practices and the Roles of Council and the Mayor

Prepared for municipal candidates, members and the public | September 29, 2026

The central distinction

Economic development involves more than promotion or attracting a major employer. It connects business retention, entrepreneurship, investment, infrastructure, skills and quality of life. Council and the Mayor are **active participants, not owners, of this ecosystem**. Their legal authority, budget choices and working relationships affect what other participants can accomplish. ^{1,4,5,20}

1. What the practice guides emphasize

The International Economic Development Council (IEDC) describes economic development through employment, wealth creation, the tax base and community well-being. Its guide covers business retention, business climate, finance, redevelopment and workforce connections. The rural-development review by Hayes and Krawchenko similarly emphasizes place-specific strategies, implementation capacity, partnerships and monitoring. Neither provides a universal formula for every municipality. ^{1,2}

For Chatham-Kent, the practical question is how public decisions connect with the needs of businesses already here, prospective investors and the people who work and live in its communities. This briefing brings those connections together with the earlier Chamber briefings on budgets, revenue, infrastructure financing and the entrepreneurial ecosystem. ^{4,17,20}

2. The connection to CK Plan 2035

The supplied community plan, approved in 2017, sets four interconnected areas of strategic focus. Its Economic Prosperity objectives are to improve infrastructure, grow agri-industries, cultivate business and develop skills. The Municipality explains that business planning and budgeting translate the community plan into implementation. ⁴

Strategic focus	Connection to economic-development decisions
Economic Prosperity	Infrastructure capacity; business attraction, retention and expansion; agriculture and skills.
Healthy & Safe Community	Housing, transportation, accessibility, safety and services that support participation and quality of life.
People & Culture	Community belonging, cultural activity, the creative economy and resident attraction and retention.
Environmental Sustainability	Natural heritage, water resources, energy conservation and climate-related planning.

Reading note: The practices below summarize the supplied guidance. CK examples and review questions are applications for discussion, not findings about current Council performance, an adopted workplan or endorsements of particular policies. Current governance and funding notes are identified separately in the references.

3. Distinct roles: Council, Mayor, councillors and staff

Ontario law assigns different functions to elected representatives and administration. Economic-development work does not remove those boundaries. The table combines the statutory roles with practical applications to business and investment matters. ^{5,6}

Role	Economic-development contribution	Boundary and accountability
Council collectively	Develops and evaluates policy; determines municipal services; makes decisions on resources, land use and lawful agreements; monitors implementation.	Considers the public interest and financial integrity of the whole municipality. Budget decisions operate within the applicable strong-mayor process. ^{5,6,8}
Mayor	Leads Council, represents and promotes the municipality, encourages public involvement, and fosters economic, social and environmental well-being. May convene investors, community partners and other governments.	Represents municipal decisions and uses only powers legally assigned to the office. A meeting or expression of support is not itself an approval or funding commitment. ^{5,7,8}
Individual councillor	Brings local knowledge and concerns forward; asks questions, proposes motions, votes, and examines results and impacts across communities.	Is not Council acting alone. Referrals and requests must follow authorized channels; individual support does not bind the municipality. ^{5,6}
CAO, economic-development and other staff	Provide professional advice, coordinate files, administer programs and implement authorized decisions. Finance, planning, engineering and other specialists retain their assigned functions.	The CAO manages administration where appointed. Staff also carry statutory duties; an economic-development contact cannot replace required technical or regulatory decisions. ^{5,6,9}

Chatham-Kent: account for strong-mayor powers

CK identifies additional mayoral powers under Part VI.1 of the Municipal Act, including proposing the budget, specified appointment and organizational powers, and certain powers connected to provincial priorities. Council amendments, mayoral vetoes and Council overrides form part of the budget framework. Some powers can be delegated. Directions to staff under these powers must follow the statutory written process. These provisions do not create a general exemption from planning, procurement or other legal requirements. ^{7,8}

What the distinction means in an investor conversation

A Mayor or councillor can listen, explain the community context and connect the proponent with the responsible staff. The municipal team can then clarify requirements, dependencies, costs and decisions still needed. Political support, technical feasibility, legal approval and private financing are separate matters; communication should identify which stage a project has actually reached. ^{5,9,11,20}

4. Practices across the business lifecycle

Listen to existing businesses and follow through

IEDC describes business retention and expansion (BRE) as relationship-building, early identification of risks and opportunities, and connection to relevant services. Ontario's model moves through preparation, business interviews and analysis, action planning, and implementation with monitoring. The value lies in what is learned and acted upon, not simply the number of visits. ^{1,10}

CK application: Use the Chamber-led BRE process and other business evidence to identify recurring issues such as succession, staffing, servicing or approval coordination. Council can examine the issues within municipal responsibility; other partners retain their own actions. Individual business information stays within the authorized, consent-based process. Survey participants are not automatically representative of every CK business. ^{10,20}

Include entrepreneurship, reinvestment and succession

Ontario's rural strategy includes support for businesses to start, expand and plan for succession. In a local program, these are different needs: a start-up may require planning advice, an established employer may need equipment and workforce support, and a retiring owner may need a successor and professional advice. A referral system can connect those needs without making the municipality the lender, business adviser or owner in every case. ^{9,13,20}

Match investment promotion with verified readiness

Ontario's site-readiness guidance emphasizes evidence about property availability, utilities, transportation access and environmental conditions. CK Economic Development and the Small Business Centre already describe a concierge service offering one point of contact and access to municipal specialists. This is an existing service to understand and evaluate, rather than an automatic case for a new approval office. ^{9,11}

CK application: An investment file can identify permitted uses, available capacity, connection timing, due-diligence gaps, workforce needs and the full cost of proceeding. A listed site is not proof that all these conditions are satisfied. Coordinated service clarifies requirements; it does not predetermine an approval. ^{11,20}

Connect markets, productivity and people

IEDC places skills, finance, infrastructure, suppliers and customers within the business-climate discussion. Ontario's rural strategy links business development with workforce and community capacity. Applied locally, this means examining training, technology, management, export or supplier opportunities alongside the practical ability of workers and households to live in the community. ^{1,13}

Illustrative example - not a reported CK project

A food processor considering expansion may need wastewater capacity, reliable power, an approval pathway, equipment finance and trained employees. Economic-development staff can coordinate the information. Council and the Mayor address municipal decisions within their roles; utilities, lenders, educators and the business make their own decisions. A grant or a promotional visit does not resolve every dependency.

5. Rural, agricultural and community partnerships

Treat agriculture as a system

OMAFRA's guide connects a protected agricultural land base with the agri-food network: regional and on-farm infrastructure, inputs, services and agriculture-supportive communities. Its **Plant, Grow and Harvest** structure moves from readiness and organizing, through sector analysis and engagement, to objectives, action and measurement. This is broader than farm promotion alone. ³

CK application: Examine how roads, bridge access, drainage, water, energy, processing, storage, agricultural services and land-use decisions interact. Assess opportunities across the value chain and identify conflicts between uses, rather than assuming every rural area needs the same development. Current planning requirements must be checked for each proposal; the 2017 guide is a practice resource, not a substitute for current law. ^{3,4}

Use regional relationships without erasing local identity

The CRRF review emphasizes regional strengths, supply chains and rural-urban relationships. The federal rural strategy also uses a places, people and partnerships framework. For CK, an assessment can follow where employees live, firms buy inputs, products move and services are accessed, while examining how benefits and costs fall across distinct communities. These relationships extend beyond ward and municipal boundaries. ^{2,14,20}

Recognize First Nations as governments and partners

The First Nations Community Economic Development Guide describes community-led planning, institutional capacity, feasibility assessment and negotiated collaboration. It also explains community-owned businesses and economic-development entities. These are First Nations' own governance and economic choices, not municipal functions to take over. ¹²

For potential relationships with Walpole Island First Nation or Delaware Nation at Moraviantown, the discussion starts with each government's priorities and willingness to participate. Possible agreements can define scope, resources, decision rights, benefits and accountability. A partnership is not a substitute for applicable consultation requirements or for each party's independent approvals. No agreement is presumed by this briefing. ^{12,20}

The Chamber and other participants have distinct mandates

The Chamber's documented role is a business-led connector, convener and collective voice. Its Engage, Empower, Inspire and Impact pillars support listening, access to expertise, leadership and follow-through. Municipal Economic Development, the Small Business Centre, lenders, educators, utilities and professional providers retain their specialist roles. Community organizations contribute services, experience and relationships without becoming extensions of the municipality. ^{9,20}

An inclusive local assessment can examine whether rural enterprises, Indigenous and Black entrepreneurs, women, young people, newcomers and people with disabilities can access opportunities and support. It should identify actual barriers and work with the people affected, rather than assume that one program fits every group. ^{4,13,20}

6. Infrastructure, revenue and finance are connected

The earlier briefings considered the same investment decision from different perspectives: **infrastructure establishes capacity; revenue policy allocates costs; financing determines timing; the budget provides resources; and administration implements the decision.** Economic-development analysis brings those perspectives together. ^{4,17,20}

Tool or decision	What an economic-development review examines
Infrastructure and services	What capacity exists, what needs renewal, what additional investment would enable, and the ongoing operating, maintenance and replacement costs. Compare new assets with reuse or more efficient use of existing capacity. ^{3,11,17}
Taxes, user fees and development charges	The full business cost alongside service value and affordability for other users. Development charges recover eligible growth-related capital costs; they are not unrestricted revenue. A reduction may affect feasibility, but also changes the infrastructure funding requirement. ^{18,19}
Debt and reserves	Borrowing changes when costs are paid; it does not remove them. Compare repayment costs, asset life, future budget pressure and risk. Reserve use requires clarity on purpose, restrictions, commitments and replenishment. ¹⁷
Grants and partnerships	Identify confirmed contributions, timing, conditions and public obligations. A loan or private financing commitment is not the same as a grant. Partnership assessment includes lifecycle cost, risk allocation and delivery responsibilities. ^{12,15,17}

Development charges and incentives: examine both sides

The development-charge literature contains differing views on who ultimately bears charges and how they affect investment and housing supply. A local review needs evidence on project type, market demand, servicing requirements and the timing of payment. Neither a blanket reduction nor the maximum recoverable charge can be assumed to produce the same result in every location. This is not an allegation of misuse in Chatham-Kent. ^{18,19}

Ontario generally prohibits municipal bonusing of industrial and commercial enterprises, subject to statutory exceptions and specific authorizations. Community Improvement Plans are one lawful route in appropriate circumstances. U.S. tax incentives and business-financing tools described in IEDC's guide should not be treated as Ontario municipal powers. ^{1,6}

Delivery capacity includes funding and partnership work

The rural-development sources emphasize resourcing implementation. The supplied ROD application asks applicants to connect an identified need to activities, budget, outcomes and sustainability. A municipal capacity review can therefore examine who prepares business cases, maintains project readiness, coordinates partners, submits applications and reports results. It does not automatically require a new department. ^{2,15,16}

Current ROD caution: The Community Development guidelines prohibit stacking other provincial funding for the same project, and payments are generally reimbursement-based. Any funding package must check eligibility, matching resources, cash flow and the contribution agreement before commitments are made. ¹⁵

7. From strategy to implementation and evidence

The practice guides connect planning to assigned responsibilities, resources, delivery and monitoring. The following is an illustrative review sequence for Council and the Mayor, not an adopted CK workplan or a prescribed policy choice. ^{2,3,16}

Review point	Evidence to bring forward
Understand the starting point	Existing strategies, legal powers and delegations, approved budgets, contractual commitments, business evidence and unresolved infrastructure or service issues.
Translate priorities into work	A defined problem; responsible decision-maker and delivery lead; partners; alternatives; cost and funding; timing; and a measurable result.
Review delivery and adjust	Progress against the workplan, reasons for delays, business feedback, spending and future obligations. Distinguish municipal action from partner-dependent results.
Revisit the community outcome	Whether evidence supports continuing, modifying or ending an initiative, and how results relate to CK Plan 2035 and affected communities.

Measure activity, delivery and outcomes separately

IEDC and OMAFRA distinguish different types of performance evidence. The measures below are a synthesis for local discussion; targets require a baseline, staff capacity and a clear method. ^{1,3}

Measure	Interpretation and limitation
Business visits and referrals	Show reach and follow-through; not proof that jobs or investment were caused by the program.
Response and processing times	Show service performance. Separate complete from incomplete files and municipal from external waiting time.
Site and infrastructure readiness	Report verified capacity, due-diligence gaps and delivery dates, not simply land advertised.
Investment, employment and community results	Separate interest, commitments, construction and operating investment. Record actual versus expected jobs, costs and benefits; recognize other contributors.

Questions for candidates and future Council

What is the evidenced need? Who has the authority and responsibility? What capacity or connection is missing? What will it cost over its life, and who pays? How will the public know what was delivered? These questions apply to attracting a new employer, retaining an existing firm, agricultural development and community-led initiatives alike. ^{1,2,3,4}

The connection to "Leadership is the work"

Council and the Mayor do not own the entrepreneurial ecosystem, but municipal decisions affect its operation. Policies influence requirements; budgets resource services; infrastructure determines capacity; and processes affect how information, people and capital connect. The wider result emerges through businesses, workers, investors and community partners making their own decisions. Public accountability therefore concerns both the municipality's own delivery and credible evidence of its contribution to community prosperity. ^{4,5,20}

Sources and references

Superscript numbers identify the source basis. Source guidance, current Ontario governance notes and illustrative CK applications are kept distinct. This is a public education briefing, not legal, financial or project-approval advice.

1. International Economic Development Council. Economic Development Reference Guide (undated supplied edition).

Pages 3-6 and 10-12: scope, business retention, business climate and measurement. U.S. examples and historical statistics are not presented as current CK evidence or Ontario legal powers.

2. Hayes, B. and Krawchenko, T. Rural Economic Development Strategies (2024), Canadian Rural Revitalisation Foundation.

Supplied DOCX: executive summary and Identification of Leading Practices. The report states that its searches extended to March 2022; it is a comparative practice review, not a current ranking or evaluation of CK.

3. Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Agriculture Economic Development: A Resource Guide for Communities (2017).

Supplied PDF: agriculture-system framework (printed p. 5), Plant/Grow/Harvest structure and Measuring and Reporting Outcomes (printed pp. 50-51). Historical sector statistics are not reused as current facts.

4. Municipality of Chatham-Kent. CK Plan 2035.

Supplied one-page framework, approved January 23, 2017; strategic areas and objectives. Official explanatory webpage consulted September 29, 2026 for the relationship between community planning, business planning and budgeting.

5. Ontario. The Ontario Municipal Councillor's Guide, chapter 1: Role of council, councillor and staff.

Current official guidance consulted September 29, 2026; roles under Municipal Act sections 224, 225, 226.1, 227 and 229, including the strong-mayor qualification.

6. Ontario. Municipal Act, 2001, S.O. 2001, c. 25.

Current official legislation consulted September 29, 2026. Particularly sections 106-106.1 (business assistance), 224-229 (roles), and Part VI.1 (strong-mayor framework). Project-specific legal advice remains necessary.

7. Municipality of Chatham-Kent. Mayoral Powers.

Official description and public decisions register, consulted September 29, 2026. The briefing does not assume that a particular power has or has not been delegated.

8. Ontario. The Ontario Municipal Councillor's Guide, chapter 10: Strong mayor powers and duties.

Official guidance consulted September 29, 2026. Budget process, appointments, written staff directions, accountability and powers relating to provincial priorities.

9. Chatham-Kent Economic Development. Relocate & Expand in CK.

Official description of the Economic Development and Small Business Centre concierge service, consulted September 29, 2026. Promotional rankings and undated workforce claims on the page are not relied upon.

10. Ontario. Business Retention and Expansion program.

Official program framework: prepare, collect and analyze, develop an action plan, implement and monitor. Consulted September 29, 2026.

Sources and references - continued

11. Ontario. Site Readiness Program for your industrial property.

Official guidance on site due diligence, availability, utilities, transportation and environmental information, consulted September 29, 2026. No program funding approval is assumed.

12. Ontario. First Nations Community Economic Development Guide for Ontario (2018).

Supplied PDF, developed with First Nations input: planning and community priorities (pp. 5-8), capacity and entities (pp. 12-14), collaboration and agreements (pp. 26-31). Its First Nations context is retained; municipal authority over First Nations is not inferred.

13. Ontario Ministry of Rural Affairs. Enabling Opportunity: Ontario's Rural Economic Development Strategy (2025).

Supplied PDF, pp. 7-15: three pillars, community capacity, business development, succession and workforce. Strategy content is distinguished from the eligibility and availability of individual funding programs.

14. Government of Canada. Rural Opportunity, National Prosperity: An Economic Development Strategy for Rural Canada.

Supplied PDF carries a 2024 copyright/catalogue entry but contains 2019 ministerial and program material. Used only for its places, people and partnerships framework; not as evidence of current office-holders, funding or commitments.

15. Ontario. Rural Ontario Development Program (ROD) Guidelines - Community Development.

Supplied guidelines plus the current official guidelines, including Project funding and costs. Consulted September 29, 2026 for reimbursement and provincial stacking restrictions. Eligibility, intakes and agreements must be checked for each project.

16. Ontario. Rural Ontario Development Program - Community Development Application Form (supplied January 16, 2026 version).

Sections 2.4-2.6 and 3: rationale, outcomes, performance measures, sustainability, workplan and budget. Illustrates application discipline; current submission requirements may differ.

17. Slack, E. and Tassonyi, A. T. Financing Urban Infrastructure in Canada: Who Should Pay? (2017).

IMFG Papers on Municipal Finance and Governance, No. 34; supplied earlier in this series. Printed pp. 4-6 explain matching tools to assets and distinguish financing from underlying funding. Used for concepts, not current borrowing rates.

18. Sancton, A. Reassessing the Case for Development Charges in Canadian Municipalities (2022).

Canadian Planning and Policy, pp. 137-150; supplied earlier in this series. A critical literature review, not a new empirical CK study. Used to identify differing views and questions about incidence and investment.

19. Ontario. Development Charges Act, 1997, S.O. 1997, c. 27.

Current official legislation consulted September 29, 2026, including eligible growth-related capital costs and calculation rules. Applicable regulations and local by-laws also require review.

20. Chatham-Kent Chamber of Commerce. Positioning Chatham-Kent to Compete: Briefing for Rotary Members (September 24, 2026).

Supplied earlier in this series, pp. 2-4. Local ecosystem framing, the Chamber's role, business needs, distinct community relationships and BRE follow-through. Project descriptions do not establish new partner commitments.