

CANDIDATE BRIEFING

QUALITY OF LIFE, WORKFORCE AND INVESTMENT

How lifestyle, recreation, sport, arts, culture and inclusion connect to business attraction and growth

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

A place to build a business. A place to build a life.

Municipal investments in community life can strengthen the conditions for attracting people, retaining workers and supporting business reinvestment. Their contribution depends on whether people can actually access and use them, whether essential services and employment opportunities are available, and whether the long-term public cost is sustainable. This is a connection to examine, not a guarantee that every project generates growth. ¹

1. Why quality of life belongs in the economic-development discussion

The OECD describes regional attractiveness as a combination of economic opportunity, quality of life and environmental sustainability that helps places attract and retain people, talent and investment. Applied to Chatham-Kent, this means looking at the community around the workplace as well as the site on which a business operates. ¹

A firm considering a new location needs a credible business case. An existing employer considering another production line faces a similar question: can the operation attract, develop and keep the people it needs? Workers and business owners, in turn, consider where they can afford to live, participate in community life and build a future. The following is an analytical framework for those linked decisions, not a forecast of a particular project.

Decision	The connected question
Business investment and reinvestment	Can the community support a dependable workforce, customers, suppliers and operations over time?
People and households	Is there suitable work, an affordable daily life, access to services, and a place to participate and belong?
Municipal investment	Which service or asset addresses a documented need, who benefits, and what can be delivered and sustained?

The possible amplification: if community conditions help an employer attract or retain employees, it may face less repeated recruitment, onboarding and operating disruption. More dependable staffing can strengthen the case for additional capacity or keeping an operation in CK. This is a potential business mechanism, alongside wages, skills, customer demand, infrastructure and costs, rather than an assured return from amenity spending.

CK Plan 2035 already connects these subjects: infrastructure, business attraction and expansion, skills, quality of life, accessibility, cultural participation, diversity and the creative economy. These are related community objectives, not proof that any individual spending proposal will achieve them. ²

Scope: This briefing combines local plans, published research and clearly identified applications to CK. It does not endorse a candidate, spending level or specific facility proposal.

THE WORKFORCE CONNECTION

2. Attraction, retention, development and participation are different

Recruiting someone to accept a job is not the same as helping that person remain in the community. Developing skills is different again. A community can offer attractive amenities yet lose people because housing, job quality, transport or essential services do not meet their needs.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's (IRCC) 2023 settlement report describes earlier Atlantic and rural immigration-pilot respondents who linked staying to their community, employment, affordability and social connections. These findings concern particular newcomer cohorts; they do not estimate the effect of CK municipal spending or establish that amenities alone cause retention.³

Workforce pathway	How community investment can contribute	What needs testing locally
Attraction	Usable recreation, cultural activities and welcoming public spaces add to the information available to prospective residents.	What do candidates for local jobs and their households actually need? Why are offers declined?
Retention	Repeated participation can create relationships and reasons to remain beyond the original job offer.	Which community and workplace factors appear in voluntary stay and exit interviews?
Development	Supervised recreation, arts and event roles can provide work experience, references and routes into further training.	Are there paid placements, relevant certifications and demonstrable progression?
Participation	Accessible venues, manageable fees, transport and usable program hours can open opportunities to more existing residents.	Who is unable to participate, and which barrier can the service actually address?

Table: practical pathways for assessment, drawing on recreation access principles and place-based settlement evidence; not measured CK results.^{3,4}

The whole household matters

The relevant household may be a single person, a couple, a family with children, a newcomer household or someone with caregiving responsibilities. A partner's employment, school and care arrangements, transport, accessibility, social networks and cultural connections can influence whether a move is workable. No single recreation program resolves all of these requirements.

Development starts with people already here

Illustrative pathways include lifeguard training linked to paid shifts; supervised theatre production and digital-media work; event logistics and customer-service placements; and library-based learning linked to qualified training providers. These require supervision, access and resources. Participation is not equivalent to a credential, and volunteering is not a replacement for paid employment.

Statistics Canada's 2026 youth participation article reports an association between organized-group participation and stronger community belonging. That supports examining opportunities to connect, but does not prove that participation causes better employment outcomes or prevents out-migration.⁵

Workforce attraction is only one part of the return.

The same facilities, programs and relationships also serve current residents and existing employers. Their public value is not limited to attracting newcomers or persuading a company to relocate.

WHAT THE DIFFERENT INVESTMENTS CONTRIBUTE

3. Recreation, sport, arts and culture work through different channels

Lifestyle, parks and recreation: the everyday experience

Trails, parks, waterfront access, libraries, community spaces and recreation programs can provide places for regular activity and connection. The Canadian recreation framework emphasizes active living, inclusion and access, connection with nature, supportive environments and sustainable delivery capacity. The local question is not just how many assets exist, but whether they are maintained, available and usable. ⁴

Sport: participation, skills and the visitor economy

Community sport can connect participants, families, coaches and volunteers. Tournaments and spectator events also create purchasing and visitor opportunities. These are distinct purposes: a facility designed for occasional large events is not automatically the most accessible option for routine resident use. Bookings, fees, travel, staffing and scheduling determine who can participate. ^{4,8}

Arts and culture: businesses and workers, not only amenities

The OECD identifies cultural and creative activity as a source of employment, income, creative skills and connections with innovation in other industries. Cultural participation also has social value. Relevant local possibilities include performance, design, digital media, heritage interpretation and event production, alongside spaces where people experience and create culture. ⁶

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce's Business Data Lab reported **\$65 billion in direct Canadian arts-and-culture GDP in 2024** in its Artworks research, commissioned by Business / Arts with the Canada Council for the Arts. This describes the scale of a national sector. It is not a multiplier for a municipal grant, nor evidence that a particular CK project will pay for itself. ⁷

4. Diversity has to connect with inclusion and practical access

Diversity describes differences among people; inclusion concerns whether they can participate and feel respected. Canadian Heritage's sport guidance distinguishes these concepts and recognizes barriers experienced by under-represented groups. An attractive building or a welcoming slogan does not, by itself, remove such barriers. ⁸

In CK, the Local Immigration Partnership's 2026-2028 plan explicitly links employment and entrepreneurship, positive attitudes toward immigrants, and access to appropriate services. Its objectives include better use of skills, stronger belonging and easier service navigation. These are locally stated objectives, not completed outcomes. ⁹

Practical considerations include affordability, disability access, rural travel, language, religious and cultural needs, and experiences of discrimination. Black cultural organizations and entrepreneurs can inform participation and enterprise opportunities. Relationships with First Nations need to reflect their own governance, cultural authority and priorities. Inclusion is broader than festivals, and residents' dignity and cultural expression have value independent of their economic contribution.

Access turns an asset into an opportunity.

A program cannot contribute to participation if its intended users cannot afford it, reach it, register for it or find a time that fits work and care responsibilities. The appropriate response depends on the barrier, not simply on adding more floor space.

APPLYING THE CONNECTIONS IN CHATHAM-KENT

5. Connect the existing plans rather than create another silo

Local framework	Connection to this briefing
CK Plan 2035	Economic Prosperity connects infrastructure, business growth and skills; Healthy & Safe Community includes quality of life and accessibility; People & Culture includes resident retention, inclusion and the creative economy. ²
2025 Parks and Recreation Master Plan	Council adopted the plan on December 15, 2025. The municipal project page describes a framework for facilities, parks, programs and service decisions. A strategic plan is not itself proof of funding for every project. ¹⁰
Talent Attraction & Retention Framework	The public framework connects employer access to talent with meaningful relationships that help people stay and thrive. It identifies employers and community partners as participants. ¹¹
CK Local Immigration Partnership	The 2026-2028 Community Plan connects appropriate employment and entrepreneurship, respectful community participation and service access. ⁹

Different communities need different access arrangements

A municipality-wide assessment can examine regional facilities alongside neighbourhood, town, village and rural opportunities. Travel time, available transport, program hours, fee assistance, accessible design and capacity at existing venues may reveal different needs. Equal opportunity does not necessarily mean an identical facility in every community, nor that people can readily travel to a single central site.

The municipality is a participant, not the owner of community life

Within their respective authority, Council and the Mayor address priorities, service levels, budgets and public accountability. Staff assess needs, costs, operating arrangements and implementation. ¹⁷ Clubs, artists, cultural and community organizations, businesses and residents contribute their own programs, knowledge and resources. Many services depend on other public bodies or independent providers; a municipal plan cannot commit those partners without agreement.

The Chamber's earlier ecosystem briefing describes its contribution as connecting businesses, convening partners and identifying recurring needs, rather than replacing municipal or specialist services. Employers retain responsibility for recruitment, compensation, workplace inclusion, training and working conditions. Community amenities complement those responsibilities; they do not substitute for them. ¹²

Use BRE to discover the actual connection

Ontario's Business Retention + Expansion model links confidential business interviews to referrals, action planning and follow-through. Applied here, additional questions could examine why recruits decline jobs, why employees leave, what affects partners and households, and whether program hours, housing, transport or other barriers affect expansion plans. These are proposed questions, not findings from the CK project. ¹³

Employee and resident perspectives would be needed alongside employer responses. Report themes and outcomes in aggregate, protect identifiable information, and distinguish issues requiring municipal action from those belonging to employers, educators or other service providers.

INVESTMENT CHOICES AND THE ANNUAL BUDGET

6. Compare the public benefit with the full cost of delivery

Quality-of-life investments share the financing disciplines discussed in the infrastructure and budget briefs. CK's asset-management guidance connects desired service levels and anticipated growth to financial planning and long-term budgets. A facility requires an operating model, not just a construction budget. ¹⁴

Option to assess	Potential contribution	Trade-off to examine
Renew existing assets	Maintain reliable access and extend useful service.	Condition, demand and remaining life; repairs may not resolve layout or capacity limitations.
Improve programs and access	Hours, registration, transport links, equipment access or fee assistance may address an identified barrier.	Recurring staff and delivery costs; whether the intended population can use the change.
Share space or partner	Combine municipal, school, community or private capacity where agreements support it.	Access rights, scheduling, maintenance, affordability, governance and partner continuity.
Add new capacity	Meet demonstrated demand that existing assets or partnerships cannot accommodate.	Capital cost, site and servicing requirements, staffing, energy, future renewal and low-use risk.

Financing changes timing; it does not eliminate cost

Ontario describes debt as a capital-financing tool, not revenue. Long-term municipal borrowing is for capital projects, with repayment affecting later budgets. Reserves can meet planned costs or provide a local contribution, but a withdrawal uses capacity available for other needs. Grants, donations and sponsorships require attention to conditions and reliability; unconfirmed contributions are not secured funding. ¹⁵

An annual cash-planning estimate can show: **operating and maintenance costs + debt service + planned renewal contributions - dependable user revenue - committed operating support**. This is an illustrative budgeting lens, not a prescribed accounting formula. It makes the continuing tax or other funding requirement visible.

Partnerships need a service agreement as well as a funding agreement

A joint-use venue, community operating agreement or private delivery arrangement can combine resources. The assessment needs to identify who owns the asset, sets fees, controls booking access, carries insurance and maintenance, and pays if demand or sponsorship falls short. The public benefit and the long-term obligations matter as much as the initial contribution.

Keep three assessments separate

Financial results compare the operator's or municipality's revenues with its costs. **Economic effects** concern additional business activity and employment. **Public value** includes accessible participation, cultural expression and community connection. They can overlap, but they are not interchangeable. Visitor spending is not municipal profit, and an activity may have public value without recovering every dollar through fees.

EVIDENCE, ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE BUSINESS CONNECTION

7. Measure use, outcomes and affordability separately

The International Association of Event Hosts distinguishes additional local spending from activity that would have happened anyway, displaced spending and money leaving the area. It cautions against treating direct economic impact divided by public investment as a return-on-investment ratio. The same care is relevant when describing tournament and festival benefits in CK. ¹⁶

What to monitor	Useful evidence	What it does not establish alone
Access and participation	Unique and repeat users, wait-lists, hours, travel barriers, accessibility and participation across communities.	A large attendance total does not show that excluded residents gained access.
Workforce experience	Voluntary offer-decline and stay/exit reasons; paid placements; completed training; participant follow-up.	A change in retention does not prove that a facility or program caused it.
Business and visitor effects	Documented supplier contracts, non-local visitor spending, room-nights and employer accounts of investment constraints.	Gross sales are not net local benefit, profit or municipal tax revenue.
Fiscal delivery	Actual capital and operating costs, cost per participant, dependable revenues, condition and funded renewal needs.	A capital grant does not demonstrate long-term affordability.

Monitoring framework: suggested measures for local assessment, not existing performance targets. Voluntary data collection, clear definitions, privacy protection and comparison over time are essential.

Questions for candidates and municipal leadership

Need and access: Which residents and employers identify the gap, and who is currently unable to participate?

Connection to opportunity: Is the purpose everyday community use, workforce participation, cultural expression, visitor activity, or a defined combination?

Alternatives and responsibility: Could renewal, programming or a shared-space arrangement address the need? Which organization has authority and delivery capacity?

Cost and risk: What are the full capital, operating and renewal costs, who pays, and what changes if use or external funding is lower than expected?

Accountability: What baseline, timeframe and evidence would show whether the intended benefit occurred, and when would the approach be reviewed?

Conclusion: community life and business growth are connected

A business needs more than a site; people need more than a job. The connections between work, affordable living, recreation, sport, arts, culture and belonging can influence whether a community is a practical place to move to, remain in and invest in. They also matter to businesses already here as they consider expansion, modernization and succession.

The issue is not whether every amenity is an economic-development project.

It is whether municipal decisions recognize the connection between a community people can participate in and a workforce businesses can build around. The case for any investment still needs a defined public purpose, credible evidence, accessible delivery and a sustainable budget. Community prosperity depends on these parts working together, not on any single facility or program.

EVIDENCE AND SOURCE NOTES

Sources and references

Superscript numbers in the briefing correspond to the sources below. Linked titles lead to public sources; the two unlinked items were supplied for this series. Public-source information was checked on September 29, 2026.

1. [OECD. Rethinking regional attractiveness.](#)

International framework linking economic opportunity, quality of life, environmental sustainability, talent and investment. Used for the analytical framing, not a quantified CK impact estimate.

2. [Municipality of Chatham-Kent. CK Plan 2035.](#)

User-supplied one-page plan, approved January 23, 2017: objectives 1.1-1.4, 2.3-2.4 and 3.1-3.3. The link provides official plan context. Objectives describe direction, not completed results.

3. [Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. 2023 Settlement Outcomes Report, Part 3: Place-based Programming in Regional Immigration.](#)

Historical Atlantic Immigration Pilot evaluation and 2022 Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot survey findings. Respondent-specific evidence about jobs, affordability, community and settlement; not a CK causal study.

4. [Canadian Parks and Recreation Association. Framework: Goals, Priorities, & Application.](#)

Active living, inclusion and access, nature, supportive environments and recreation capacity. A sector framework for assessing service purpose and participation.

5. [Statistics Canada. International Youth Day: The power of participating. August 5, 2026.](#)

National evidence on youth participation and community belonging. Associations are not estimates of municipal spending effects, employee retention or local migration.

6. [OECD. The Culture Fix: Creative People, Places and Industries. June 3, 2022.](#)

International research on cultural and creative employment, skills, business development, participation and social effects. Used to identify channels, not prescribe a local funding level.

7. [Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Business Data Lab. Artworks: The Economic and Social Dividends from Canada's Arts and Culture Sector. October 2025.](#)

Commissioned by Business / Arts with the Canada Council for the Arts. The commissioner's publication page reports \$65 billion in direct Canadian arts-and-culture GDP in 2024. No municipal grant multiplier is inferred.

8. [Canadian Heritage. Equity, diversity, inclusion and participation in sport.](#)

Definitions and participation barriers. Used to distinguish having amenities from providing equitable, respectful opportunities to participate.

EVIDENCE AND SOURCE NOTES

Sources and references - continued

9. [Municipality of Chatham-Kent. Local Immigration Partnership Community Plan 2026-2028.](#)

Three connected priorities: employment and entrepreneurship, positive attitudes toward immigrants, and access to appropriate immigrant-serving agencies. The briefing describes intended outcomes.

10. [Municipality of Chatham-Kent. Parks & Recreation Master Plan Update.](#)

Official project page confirms adoption of the 2025 plan on December 15, 2025. Plan adoption is distinguished from individual project financing and implementation.

11. [Chatham-Kent Workforce. Talent Attraction & Retention Strategy.](#)

Public framework objectives connect employer access to talent, meaningful community relationships and retention, with roles for employers and partners.

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

User-supplied briefing, pages 1-4: entrepreneurial ecosystem, household and workforce connections, Chamber role and BRE. Read with the preceding municipal-leadership and Growth from Within briefs in this series.

13. [Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Business Retention + Expansion Coordinator's Manual, Version 3. August 2020.](#)

User-supplied manual, pages 6-14, 22, 37-40 and 56-58: confidential interviews, referrals, implementation and monitoring. Additional workforce questions in this briefing are illustrative, not reported CK findings.

14. [Municipality of Chatham-Kent. Asset Management Plan.](#)

Local guidance on connecting assets, desired service levels and growth to financial planning and long-term budgets.

15. [Government of Ontario. Understanding municipal debt.](#)

Debt as capital financing, not revenue; useful-life considerations, repayment obligations and long-term financial planning. Project-specific authority and financing require professional review.

16. [International Association of Event Hosts. Event Impact Standards: Economic Impacts.](#)

Additionality, displacement, leakage, host-economy boundaries and limits on interpreting economic-impact figures as a financial return. Applied to the discussion of sporting and cultural events.

17. [Government of Ontario. The Ontario municipal councillor's guide: Role of council, councillor and staff.](#)

Roles in policy, services, financial integrity, administration and accountability. The guide distinguishes the additional powers and duties of designated strong mayors.

How to use this briefing

National and international sources explain possible relationships; local plans state objectives; the CK applications and monitoring questions are analytical suggestions. The reviewed material does not quantify the private investment caused by a specific CK recreation, sport or cultural expenditure. Project decisions require local demand, cost, access and outcome evidence.

Public-facing, non-partisan education resource. Not a substitute for project-specific financial, procurement or legal advice.