

Candidate Briefing

Municipal Leadership in Chatham-Kent's Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

Active Participant. Enabler. Steward. Not Owner.

Chatham-Kent Chamber of Commerce | 2026 Municipal Election Information Series

Core message

Municipal Council and administration are not outside Chatham-Kent's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Their decisions actively shape the cost, capacity, timing, certainty and confidence that influence business investment and community prosperity. But the municipality does not own the ecosystem. Its leadership role is to understand the system, perform its public responsibilities well, reduce unnecessary friction, invest in enabling conditions and work with the many independent participants whose combined actions create prosperity.

Executive takeaways

- An entrepreneurial ecosystem is the connected environment of entrepreneurs, established businesses, markets, finance, talent, infrastructure, institutions, services, culture, leadership and relationships that shape whether enterprise can start, adapt, invest and grow.
- Council is an active participant because budgets, taxes, fees, development charges, infrastructure, service levels, planning policy and municipal processes change the environment in which private decisions are made.
- The municipality is not the owner of the ecosystem. Businesses, investors, workers, educators, lenders, utilities, community organizations, the Chamber and senior governments retain distinct roles, responsibilities and decision rights.
- Infrastructure policy, financing policy and budget choices are ecosystem policy: they determine whether Chatham-Kent has the physical and institutional capacity to convert opportunity into investment.
- The quality of the hand-offs between participants matters. A viable project can stall because of site servicing, approval uncertainty, financing, workforce, housing, utility capacity or fragmented support even when the core business opportunity is strong.
- The leadership test is not whether municipal government can do everything. It is whether the municipality performs its role reliably and helps the wider system work more effectively, transparently and accountably.

1. The entrepreneurial ecosystem: a system, not a program

The OECD describes entrepreneurial ecosystems as the broad set of interacting actors and factors that influence the scale and quality of entrepreneurship in a place. Its 2025 diagnostic framework includes institutions, culture, networks, infrastructure, markets, finance, knowledge, talent, leadership and intermediate services. Research also emphasizes that the strength of an ecosystem depends not simply on the presence of these elements, but on how they interact.

For Chatham-Kent, this means the ecosystem includes start-ups and established firms; farms and agribusiness; manufacturers, trades and main-street enterprises; investors and lenders; workers and educators; utilities and infrastructure; professional advisers; business-support organizations; community organizations; and all orders of government. No single institution can command the system, because participants control different resources and make independent decisions.

Participant	Primary role	How it affects the ecosystem
Entrepreneurs & established businesses	Take risk, identify markets, invest, hire, innovate, expand and undertake succession.	Business growth, productivity, jobs, local supply chains and reinvestment.
Municipal Council & administration	Set policy, service levels, budgets and local revenue tools; provide infrastructure and processes within municipal authority.	Cost, timing, capacity, predictability, quality of place and confidence in local delivery.
Chamber of Commerce	Listen to business, convene, connect, advocate and translate recurring business experience into collective issues.	Better information flow, coordinated advocacy, referrals and sustained follow-through.
Finance & professional services	Assess risk, provide capital and specialized advice.	Ability to finance viable projects and manage growth, succession and risk.
Education & workforce partners	Develop skills, career pathways, training and knowledge.	Labour supply, management capability, innovation and workforce renewal.
Community & social institutions	Support housing, safety, health, belonging, recreation and participation.	Quality of life and the ability to attract and retain people and households.
Provincial & federal governments	Set enabling legislation, taxation, regulation and major funding frameworks.	Municipal fiscal capacity, infrastructure leverage, trade and broader investment conditions.

2. Council is an active participant - but its role is defined

Ontario's Municipal Act assigns Council responsibility for representing the public, developing and evaluating municipal policies and programs, determining municipal services, ensuring accountability and transparency, and maintaining the municipality's financial integrity. Municipal officers and employees implement Council decisions and provide research and advice. The head of council also has a statutory role in fostering activities that enhance economic, social and environmental well-being.

These responsibilities place municipal leadership inside the ecosystem because the municipality controls important public conditions. A tax ratio, a capital deferral, a water-capacity decision, a planning policy, an approval process or a service standard can change the economics of a private investment even though Council is not making the investment itself.

The governance distinction

Council governs through policy, service choices, by-laws, budgets and accountability. Administration implements those decisions and provides professional advice. Businesses and investors then make their own commercial decisions. Effective ecosystem leadership depends on respecting these boundaries while making the interfaces between them work well.

3. Active participant does not mean owner

Entrepreneurial ecosystem research consistently treats government and policy as one domain among several. Isenberg's framework identifies policy and leadership alongside finance, culture, human capital, markets and support institutions. The implication is important: government is critical to framework conditions, but it should not attempt to substitute itself for the entrepreneur, the investor, the lender, the employer or the market.

A useful way to express the distinction is: municipal leadership can build the road, establish the rules and coordinate public responsibilities; it does not decide where every entrepreneur should drive. The goal is an enabling environment in which businesses can test opportunities and combine the resources they need.

4. Infrastructure, financing and the budget are ecosystem decisions

The Chamber's previous candidate briefings on infrastructure, municipal revenue and budgeting are not separate from the entrepreneurial ecosystem discussion. They describe the principal municipal levers that influence whether private-sector opportunities can move from idea to investment.

Municipal lever	What it shapes	Ecosystem / prosperity effect
Infrastructure	Roads, bridges, drainage, water/wastewater, broadband, employment lands, facilities and service capacity.	Determines whether a business site or community can physically support growth, and at what cost and timing.
Revenue & charges	Property tax ratios, user fees, development charges and other local revenues.	Affects operating costs, project feasibility, investor comparisons and the resources available to fund enabling services.
Debt & reserves	Timing tools for long-lived assets, lifecycle renewal, grant matching, shocks and opportunity readiness.	Can accelerate capacity or smooth costs when disciplined; can constrain future budgets when poorly matched to benefits and repayment sources.
Annual budget	Translates strategic priorities into funded staff, services, capital, maintenance and partnerships.	Shows which capabilities the municipality will actually sustain and which risks or opportunities are deferred.
Processes & service standards	Planning, permits, inspections, procurement, business concierge and cross-department coordination.	Creates or reduces delay, uncertainty and transaction costs for businesses and community partners.
Quality of place	Housing, safety, recreation, childcare access, health-service access, culture and community connection.	Influences talent attraction, retention, household decisions and the ability of employers to staff growth.

5. The investment journey shows why the connections matter

A business opportunity rarely depends on one organization. The practical ecosystem can be understood as a sequence of connected decisions and hand-offs:

Stage	Critical question	Typical lead / participants
1. Opportunity	Customer demand, succession, expansion or new venture	Business owner / entrepreneur
2. Site & capacity	Land, building, utilities, roads, drainage, environmental conditions	Business + Municipality + utilities
3. Process & permissions	Planning, approvals, permits, inspections, realistic timelines	Municipality + applicant + regulators
4. Capital & business case	Debt, equity, grants, cash flow and risk	Business + lenders/investors + advisers
5. People & capability	Skills, management, productivity, housing and workforce participation	Employer + educators + community partners
6. Construction & implementation	Procurement, contractors, servicing and commissioning	Business + public/private delivery partners
7. Operation, growth & succession	Customers, suppliers, workforce, reinvestment and ownership transition	Business + full ecosystem

A weakness at any stage can stall an otherwise viable investment. This is why municipal leadership affects the ecosystem even when the municipality is not the source of the business idea, the financing or the jobs.

6. Where the Chamber fits: business voice, connector and convener

The Chatham-Kent Chamber of Commerce has a different but complementary role. Its purpose is to cultivate a thriving business ecosystem and collaborate with like-minded stakeholders so that members can broaden their economic horizons, inspire success and contribute to a prosperous and vibrant community for generations to come.

The Chamber is not an approval authority, lender, engineering department or owner of the ecosystem. Its value is to listen across sectors, identify recurring barriers and opportunities, connect businesses to the right expertise, convene partners, advocate for private-sector-friendly conditions and maintain continuity around issues that cross organizational boundaries. The Chamber's Engage, Empower, Inspire and Impact pillars translate that role into practice.

Complementary, not competing roles

Municipal Economic Development and the Small Business Centre retain municipal service responsibilities. The Chamber adds a business-led perspective, reach and advocacy. Educators, lenders, utilities, professional advisers and community organizations retain their own expertise. A healthy ecosystem does not collapse these roles into one organization; it makes the connections between them easier to navigate.

7. Strategic fit with CK Plan 2035

CK Plan 2035 already provides a strong foundation for an ecosystem lens. Its Economic Prosperity area connects infrastructure, agri-industries, business attraction/retention/expansion and skills. The plan also links long-term community outcomes with Financial Sustainability, Open and Transparent Government and Resiliency, and states that decision-making, business planning and budgeting should align with the community strategic plan.

CK Plan 2035 lens	Ecosystem connection	Leadership implication
Economic Prosperity	Infrastructure, business cultivation, agri-industries and skills	Connect capital and operating decisions to business retention, expansion, investment readiness and productivity.
Healthy & Safe Community	Safety, housing, transportation, health and quality of life	Recognize that workforce attraction and business confidence depend on functioning communities.
People & Culture	Belonging, diversity, culture and resident attraction/retention	Treat human capital and household decisions as part of competitiveness.
Environmental Sustainability	Natural and built resources, resilience and energy	Balance growth with lifecycle stewardship, risk and long-term resource capacity.
Guiding principles	Financial sustainability, transparency and resiliency	Make trade-offs visible, fund what is promised and measure outcomes over time.

8. What ecosystem-minded municipal leadership looks for

1. Clarity of role. Is this a municipal responsibility, a partnership opportunity, a private-sector function or a senior-government issue?

- 2. Investment readiness.** Do land, infrastructure, utilities, approvals, costs and timelines support the investment being pursued?
- 3. Predictability.** Can businesses and community partners understand requirements, responsible contacts, fees and realistic schedules before committing resources?
- 4. Funding discipline.** Does the budget show the full cost of a decision, including lifecycle, staffing, operating impacts, debt service and reserve replenishment?
- 5. Leverage.** Are municipal dollars and staff capacity positioned to attract provincial, federal, utility, institutional or private investment?
- 6. Access and connection.** Can an entrepreneur or existing business reach the right expertise and support without navigating unnecessary duplication or hand-offs?
- 7. Whole-community capacity.** How do housing, safety, transportation, childcare, health, recreation and belonging affect the people businesses need?
- 8. Evidence and accountability.** What outcome will show that the policy or investment improved business conditions, service capacity or community prosperity?

9. Leadership considerations for the next Council

The following are practical considerations for candidates and the next Council when reviewing policies, budgets and capital plans through an entrepreneurial ecosystem lens:

- Use an ecosystem impact question in major reports: how will this decision affect business cost, capacity, timing, investment confidence, workforce or private-sector participation?
- Connect the capital plan and asset-management plan to an Economic-Enabling Infrastructure framework so infrastructure needed for safety, lifecycle renewal and growth can be distinguished and prioritized transparently.
- Review development charges, fees and non-residential tax policy alongside infrastructure readiness and competitor-community benchmarks rather than as isolated revenue questions.
- Maintain project-readiness and dedicated capacity for grant applications, business cases, public-private partnerships and other funding stacks so Chatham-Kent can act when outside capital becomes available.
- Use Business Retention and Expansion findings and other structured business engagement to identify recurring barriers before designing new programs or policy responses.
- Protect the distinction between governance and administration while expecting cross-department coordination, clear service standards and measurable follow-through.
- Assess prosperity across all communities and sectors - urban, rural, agricultural, industrial, main street and emerging enterprises - while respecting neighbouring First Nations' governance and wider regional relationships.
- Report publicly on a small set of ecosystem outcomes such as serviced employment land, approval timelines, private capital leveraged, business retention/expansion issues resolved, workforce constraints, housing capacity and infrastructure condition.

Candidate decision framework

Question	Why it matters
What are we trying to enable?	Business retention, expansion, entrepreneurship, housing, investment, workforce capacity, quality of life or risk reduction?
What is the municipality responsible for?	Policy, service, infrastructure, process, funding, advocacy or partnership - and what belongs to another actor?
What is the constraint?	Capital, infrastructure, utility capacity, approval, labour, housing, market demand, information, coordination or trust?
What is the public cost and risk?	Tax, rate, debt, reserve, operating cost, lifecycle liability, opportunity cost and potential unintended effects.
What private or external resources can be leveraged?	Business capital, lenders, utilities, institutions, provincial/federal programs, community partners or regional collaboration.
How will success be measured?	Investment completed, jobs and productivity, businesses retained/expanded, private dollars leveraged, timelines improved, capacity created or service outcomes achieved.

Bottom line for candidates

Council is not the owner of Chatham-Kent's entrepreneurial ecosystem, but it is one of its most influential participants. Entrepreneurs create businesses; employers and workers create value; investors and lenders deploy capital; educators develop talent; the Chamber connects and represents business; and community organizations strengthen the places people live. Municipal leadership shapes many of the conditions in which those participants interact. Its infrastructure choices determine capacity. Its financing and budget choices determine what can be delivered and when. Its revenue policies affect investment costs. Its processes influence certainty and trust. Its partnerships can multiply local resources. Community prosperity is therefore not produced by one municipal program or one organization - it is the outcome of a system working well. The leadership task is to make Chatham-Kent's part of that system reliable, competitive, connected and accountable.

Selected source basis

- OECD (2025), Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Diagnostics. Defines entrepreneurial ecosystems as interacting actors and factors and identifies institutions, culture, networks, infrastructure, markets, finance, knowledge, talent, leadership and intermediate services.
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- Municipality of Chatham-Kent, CK Plan 2035 - Economic Prosperity and Community Strategic Plan materials. Connects infrastructure, agri-industries, business cultivation and skills and aligns strategic planning with business planning and budgeting.
- Ontario, Municipal Act, 2001, ss. 224-227. Defines the roles of council, head of council and municipal administration.
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