Economic Development Rural Plan - DRAFT

2026-2027

City of Ottawa

Economic Development Rural Plan

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Introduction

Ottawa's rural area is a defining element of the city's identity and economy. Spanning the majority of the municipality's land base and home to vibrant villages, farms, natural landscapes, and diverse businesses, rural Ottawa contributes to the prosperity, sustainability, and quality of life of the entire city. Rural communities support a wide range of economic activity, including agriculture, tourism, development, retail and small business, while offering unique cultural heritage, recreational opportunities, and a strong sense of place.

The updated Economic Development Rural Plan builds on earlier rural economic development initiatives and reflects the City of Ottawa's continued commitment to better understanding and supporting the needs of rural residents and businesses. While many economic fundamentals are shared across urban and rural contexts, rural Ottawa continues to experience distinct needs related to business supports, transportation, and infrastructure. Addressing these conditions requires approaches that are responsive to rural contexts and developed in collaboration with rural businesses and communities.

This Rural Plan aligns with a range of existing strategies and policy directions at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels. It complements the *Rural Economic Development Strategy* approved by Ottawa City Council in 2020, which established the foundation for supporting rural businesses and communities. It also reflects Ottawa Tourism's 2022 *Destination Stewardship Plan*, which highlights and promotes the city's rural assets as part of a broader tourism strategy. At the municipal level, the City's 2024–2026 *Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan* identifies rural economic development as a priority, emphasizing the importance of targeted support for rural communities. In addition, the Plan considers national and provincial priorities, including the federal government's 2024 strategy, *Rural Opportunity, National Prosperity: An Economic Development Strategy for Rural Canada*, and the Province of Ontario's 2025 strategy, *Enabling Opportunity: Ontario's Rural Economic Development Strategy*. By situating Ottawa's rural economy within these complementary frameworks, the

Rural Plan ensures that local initiatives are coordinated with broader policy objectives and best practices in rural economic development.

The Rural Plan also builds on the outcomes of the 2024 Ottawa Rural Summit, which provided a forum for rural residents, businesses, and organizations to engage directly with City leaders on key issues affecting rural communities. The summit reinforced the importance of improving rural service delivery, strengthening representation, and advancing commitments related to dedicated rural leadership within City departments, more efficient planning processes for rural development applications, a balanced approach to rural growth, and recognition of Ottawa as a rural city.

A central focus of this Rural Plan is implementation. The recommendations translate strategic priorities into practical actions designed to support and advance Ottawa's rural economy through rural-sensitive approaches, increase access to business supports in rural communities, and better leverage rural assets to drive economic activity. Implementation of these actions will be carried out within existing resources, beginning in 2026 and continuing through 2027, and will help inform the development of the City's next Economic Development Strategy.

The Rural Plan is informed by research, interest holder engagement, and collaboration across City departments and partners, including the Rural Affairs Office, Invest Ottawa, Ottawa Tourism, and Ottawa Film Office. It seeks to advance economic opportunities while reinforcing the social, cultural, and environmental foundations of rural Ottawa.

Through this Plan, the City affirms that a strong rural economy is integral to Ottawa's overall success. By reducing barriers, leveraging rural strengths, and responding to emerging opportunities, rural Ottawa can continue to thrive as a vital and dynamic part of the city's future.

Methodology

The updated Rural Plan was developed through a process that combined research, data analysis, interest holder consultation, and validation. This approach ensured that the Plan is evidence-informed, grounded in local perspectives, and aligned with the City's strategic priorities and operational capacity.

Phase 1: Research and Data Collection

This phase focused on building a strong analytical foundation. It included a review of available rural economic data, relevant policy documents, other rural economic development plans, and existing business support programs and services.

Phase 2: Consultation

Extensive consultation was undertaken to ensure the Rural Plan reflects the experiences and priorities of the rural community. More than 40 one-on-one interviews were conducted with various interest holders, including rural Councillors, business owners, Business Improvement Areas, community organizations, and City departments. Input from these discussions was consolidated to identify shared themes, key challenges, and emerging opportunities.

Phase 3: Rural Plan Development

Insights from the research and consultation phases were used to develop the goal, vision, strategic priorities, recommendations, priority actions, and desired outcomes that form the core of the Rural Plan. This phase focused on practical and tactical implementation and ensured that proposed actions were achievable within the City's existing resources.

Phase 4: Finalization and Validation

The draft Rural Plan was reviewed with key implementation partners to confirm accuracy, feasibility, and alignment with rural priorities. Feedback was incorporated to refine the recommendations and ensure the final document reflects shared objectives and a clear path forward.

Rural Ottawa Overview

Geography

Ottawa is often perceived as an urban capital city; however, the municipality is predominantly rural in geographic terms. With a total land area of approximately 2,790 square kilometres, Ottawa's rural area accounts for just over 80 per cent of the City's land area, or about 2,360 square kilometres. To provide context, Ottawa is roughly half the size of Prince Edward Island, which has a total land area of approximately 5,660 square kilometres.

Ottawa's municipal boundary includes more rural land than any other major Canadian city. In fact, the combined land areas of Toronto, Montreal, Calgary, Edmonton, and Vancouver could fit within Ottawa's geographic footprint. This scale highlights the unique role Ottawa plays as both a major urban centre and one of the largest rural municipalities in the country.

The Rural Plan focuses on Wards 1 (Orléans East–Cumberland), 5 (West Carleton–March), 19 (Orléans South–Navan), 20 (Osgoode), and 21 (Rideau–Jock). Together, these wards encompass a diverse rural landscape that includes agricultural lands, natural areas, villages, hamlets, and dispersed rural residential communities. They are connected by key transportation corridors that link rural communities to one another and to Ottawa's urban area.

This geographic context presents significant opportunities. The proximity of a large urban and suburban market provides rural businesses with access to customers, employees, and

services. At the same time, urban residents benefit from access to rural destinations for tourism, recreation, and locally produced goods and services. This urban–rural connection is a defining feature of Ottawa and a significant advantage in supporting a vibrant and resilient rural economy.

Population & Demographics

Rural Ottawa represents a smaller share of the city's population compared to urban and suburban Ottawa, but occupies the vast majority of its land base. In 2021, the rural population was 181,480, representing 17.8 per cent of Ottawa's total population of just over one million. By 2025, the rural population was 197,093 out of a total city population of 1,162,077, representing 17.0 per cent of Ottawa's population. This reflects rural population growth of approximately 8.6 per cent over the period, compared to overall city growth of 14.2 per cent. While rural areas continue to grow, they are doing so at a slower pace than suburban and urban areas (Environics Analytics, 2025).

The contrast between population and land area illustrates the distinctly rural character of these communities. Rural Ottawa occupies approximately 2,360 square kilometres, or 81.5 per cent of the City's total land area, while accommodating just 17.0 per cent of the population. This results in an average population density of about 83.5 people per square kilometre. By comparison, Ottawa's urban and suburban areas are home to approximately 965,000 residents within 534 square kilometres, with a population density of about 1,806 people per square kilometre (Environics Analytics, 2025). The Ontario Ministry of Rural Affairs defines rural communities as those with fewer than 100 people per square kilometre, confirming that Ottawa's rural wards meet this definition (Province of Ontario, 2026).

Rural Ottawa also has a slightly older population profile. In 2025, the median age of household maintainers[1] in rural areas was 57, compared to 51 for Ottawa as a whole (Environics Analytics, 2025). This demographic trend has implications for workforce availability, business succession planning, service delivery, and supports the need to attract and retain younger residents and entrepreneurs in rural communities.

Language profiles vary across rural wards and reflect Ottawa's broader bilingual character. Wards 1 (Orléans East–Cumberland) and 19 (Orléans South–Navan) have higher concentrations of residents who are French-speaking or bilingual in French and English, while Wards 5 (West Carleton–March) and 21 (Rideau–Jock) have a higher proportion of residents who are primarily English-speaking. This diversity has implications for business outreach and service delivery (Environics Analytics, 2025).

[1] According to Statistics Canada, the 'primary household maintainer' is the first person in the household identified as someone who pays the rent, or the mortgage, or the taxes, or the electricity or other services or utilities for the dwelling.

Rural Ottawa is also characterized by relatively strong household incomes. A higher proportion of rural households fall within upper income brackets compared to the city overall. In rural areas, 17.2 per cent of households earn between $150,000 and $199,999, compared to 13.6 per cent citywide. Similarly, 18.8 per cent of rural households earn between $200,000 and $299,999, compared to 13.9 per cent citywide, and 15.0 per cent report incomes above $300,000, compared to 10.6 per cent for Ottawa as a whole (Environics Analytics, 2025).

Labour market indicators further highlight the distinct economic structure of rural Ottawa. In 2019, the unemployment rate across Ottawa was 10.3 per cent, while the average unemployment rate across the rural wards was lower, at 7.9 per cent. Wards 5 (West Carleton–March) and 20 (Osgoode) reported some of the lowest unemployment rates at 7.6 per cent and 7.3 per cent, respectively (Statistics Canada, 2021).

Self-employment is also more prevalent in rural areas, reflecting the importance of small businesses, agriculture, and home-based enterprises. In 2019, 11.9 per cent of Ottawa's labour force identified as self-employed, compared to 14.2 per cent in the rural wards. This proportion was even higher in specific areas, exceeding 17.0 per cent in Wards 20 (Osgoode) and 21 (Rideau–Jock) and approaching 19.0 per cent in Ward 5 (West Carleton–March) (Statistics Canada, 2021).

Together, these demographic trends highlight rural Ottawa as a low-density, growing, and economically active population with a strong culture of entrepreneurship and self-employment. They also underscore the importance of policies and programs that respond to an aging population, support business succession and workforce development.

Key Industries

Agriculture

Agriculture is a cornerstone of Ottawa's rural economy and a defining feature of its landscape and identity. The Canadian Census of Agriculture (2021) defines a "census farm" as an operation that produces at least one agricultural product for sale and reports revenues or expenses to the Canada Revenue Agency. This definition includes a wide range of commercial agricultural activity such as traditional farms, greenhouses, nurseries, feedlots, and smaller-scale operations like maple syrup production or direct-market gardening.

According to the 2021 Census of Agriculture, rural Ottawa is home to more than 900 farms. These farms represent approximately 1.9 per cent of Ontario's total number of farms. Ottawa accounts for a slightly higher share of Ontario farms with total farm capital between $100,000 and $1 million at 2.4 per cent, and a smaller share of farms with capital exceeding $1 million at 1.7 per cent. This distribution indicates that Ottawa's agricultural sector is largely composed of small- to mid-sized operations compared to the provincial average (Statistics Canada, 2021).

The sector also shows strong engagement in direct-to-consumer and value-added agriculture. Ottawa farms account for 2.2 per cent of Ontario's direct-to-consumer operations, 3.5 per cent of farms with direct sales including value-added products, for example jams, and 4.4 per cent of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms. These figures demonstrate Ottawa's comparatively strong role in local food systems, short supply chains, and consumer-facing agricultural models (Statistics Canada, 2021).

Ottawa also plays a significant role in agriculture on publicly owned lands. While Ottawa farms represent 4.4 per cent of Ontario farms leasing land from governments, they account for 10.6 per cent of the province's total land area leased from governments. This reflects the scale and importance of public land leasing in Ottawa's agricultural sector and the role it plays in supporting farm viability and expansion (Statistics Canada, 2021).

In terms of livestock production, Ottawa farms account for 2.5 per cent of Ontario's dairy farms and 2.9 per cent of the dairy cow population, underscoring the role of dairy farming in the region (Statistics Canada, 2021).

Ottawa agriculture is particularly notable for its specialization in several crops and production types. Although rural Ottawa accounts for 2.1 per cent of Ontario's total area in field crops and hay, it has a significantly higher share in certain niche and specialty crops. This includes:

- 9.4 per cent of Ontario's hemp
- 5.6 per cent of sunflower seed
- 4.3 per cent of spring wheat
- 4.2 per cent of faba beans, and
- 3.7 per cent of spring rye (Statistics Canada, 2021)

In fruit production, Ottawa represents only 0.6 per cent of Ontario's total fruit-growing area overall, yet it accounts for 6.5 per cent of the province's strawberry production area and 5.1 per cent of raspberry production. This highlights Ottawa's strength in select high-value fruit crops (Statistics Canada, 2021).

Greenhouse and specialty production also feature prominently. While Ottawa represents just 0.2 per cent of Ontario's total greenhouse production area, it accounts for 4.9 per cent of greenhouse herb production, demonstrating a concentration in this niche market. Similarly, Ottawa accounts for 2.3 per cent of Ontario farms producing mushrooms, but 6.4 per cent of the province's total mushroom-growing area, indicating a higher concentration of larger or more intensive mushroom operations (Statistics Canada, 2021).

In field vegetable production, Ottawa accounts for 2.1 per cent of Ontario's total number of farms, though typically with a smaller share of total production area. Notable exceptions include broccoli and cauliflower, where Ottawa farms account for 16.7 per cent and 12.5 per

cent of Ontario's production area, respectively. These figures position Ottawa as a major provincial producer for these crops (Statistics Canada, 2021).

Overall, Ottawa's agricultural sector is characterized by a diverse mix of small- and mid-sized farms, strong engagement in direct marketing and value-added production, and notable specialization in several high-value and niche commodities. This combination supports economic resilience, strengthens local food systems, and creates opportunities for continued growth in agri-food innovation, agritourism, and farm-based entrepreneurship within rural Ottawa.

Tourism & Recreation

Tourism and recreation represent a significant opportunity for economic growth in rural Ottawa. Rural Ottawa provides visitors and residents a chance to experience nature, culture, and countryside activities, while also offering accessible alternatives to urban-based attractions. Although accommodation is often a primary driver of tourism development, Ottawa's rural tourism is primarily driven by day visitors whose spending on attractions, food and beverage, retail, and services generates meaningful economic benefits. These activities contribute to employment and business revenue, while supporting the long-term vitality of rural communities.

Rural Ottawa's natural environment is a major tourism asset. Scenic landscapes, forests, wetlands, waterways, and extensive cycling and walking trails attract visitors interested in outdoor recreation and nature-based experiences. Ottawa is home to two provincial parks and campgrounds, Fitzroy Provincial Park along the Ottawa River and Rideau River Provincial Park, as well as several conservation areas including Morris Island, Richmond, and Baxter. In addition, large natural areas such as the Marlborough Forest, Mer Bleue Bog, Carp Hills, Cumberland Forest, South March Highlands Conservation Forest, Torbolton Forest, Sheila McKee Park, and the Kizell Wetland provide opportunities for hiking, wildlife viewing, limited snowmobiling, and all-terrain vehicle use. More recently acquired City properties, including Galetta Island and the Ferry Road site along the Ottawa River, further expand the portfolio of natural destinations. Strengthening connections between these sites and nearby businesses, particularly food and beverage establishments, can increase visitor spending and enhance the overall economic impact of outdoor recreation.

Cultural and heritage attractions also play an important role in rural tourism. Sites such as the Cumberland Heritage Village Museum, Pinhey's Point Historic Site, Watson's Mill, the Goulbourn Museum, and the Osgoode Township Museum draw visitors interested in Ottawa's rural history and heritage. These destinations create opportunities to increase visitation to surrounding villages and support local businesses. Many cultural, historic, and scenic locations are also well positioned to serve as settings for film and television productions, photography, and special events such as weddings, corporate retreats, and community celebrations, expanding their economic and promotional value.

Seasonal and year-round attractions further strengthen rural Ottawa's tourism offering. Signature seasonal events include fall fairs in Navan, Metcalfe, Carp, and Richmond, as well as spring maple syrup operations such as Stanley's Olde Maple Lane Farm and Proulx Maple and Berry Farm. Winter attractions include destinations such as RiverOak Skating Trail and snowshoeing experiences, while other seasonal and year-round attractions include Saunders Farm, Valleyview Little Animal Farm, Commando Paintball Action Centre, Stittsville Shooting Ranges, the Rural Root Theatre Company, the Morris Island Train Bridge, and the Hard Rock Casino. Together, these attractions support a steady stream of visitation and economic activity across different seasons.

Rural Ottawa also benefits from an extensive network of linear parks and multi-use pathways, many of which are former rail corridors converted into recreational trails. Key examples include the Osgoode Link Trail in the south, the Trans Canada Trail through western rural Ottawa, and the Prescott–Russell Recreational Trail in the east. The recent acquisition of the Beachburg Rail Corridor creates future potential to connect Kanata with Dunrobin, Fitzroy Harbour, and Morris Island, as identified in the City's Transportation Master Plan. While these trails are primarily designed to support active transportation for residents, they also represent a significant tourism and economic development asset.

These linear parks, particularly those separated from vehicle traffic, are well suited to family and leisure visitors and offer opportunities for rural businesses to attract trail users through signage, wayfinding, and targeted services. Improved awareness, promotion, and physical connections between trails and village centres can encourage increased local spending. They also create opportunities for guided tours, bike services, and other visitor-oriented businesses that can further enhance the rural tourism economy.

Since April 2025, snowmobile, all-terrain, and off-road vehicle associations have been granted expanded access to Ottawa's linear trail system, with measures in place to minimize conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users. However, the connection of these user groups to local businesses for economic uplift has not been actively pursued. Installing business directory signage at parking lots could raise awareness of rural goods and services available near the trails.

Together, Ottawa's natural landscapes, cultural and heritage assets, seasonal and year-round attractions, and trail networks form a strong foundation for rural tourism and recreation. With coordinated promotion, improved connection to local businesses, and continued collaboration between the City, Ottawa Tourism, and rural interest holders, tourism and recreation can play an increasingly important role in supporting economic growth across rural Ottawa.

Retail & Services

Retail, services, and small business activity is the backbone of Ottawa's rural villages. Rural villages serve as social, cultural, and economic hubs, providing residents with access to

everyday goods and services while also offering experiences that reflect rural character and identity.

The City's Official Plan identifies 26 rural villages, each with a defined role in accommodating growth and supporting economic activity: Ashton, Burritt's Rapids, Carlsbad Springs, Carp, Constance Bay, Cumberland, Dunrobin, Fallowfield, Fitzroy Harbour, Galetta, Greely, Kars, Kenmore, Kinburn, Manotick, Marionville, Metcalfe, Munster, Navan, North Gower, Notre-Dame-des-Champs, Osgoode, Richmond, Sarsfield, Vars, and Vernon. These villages range from historic riverfront communities such as Manotick and Burritt's Rapids, to larger and growing residential centres such as Greely, Richmond and Carp. Together, they form a network of local service hubs that are vital to rural living and support surrounding agricultural and residential areas.

Rural villages typically include a mix of small-scale retail, food and beverage establishments, professional services, personal services, trades, and home-based businesses. Examples include grocery stores, pharmacies, cafés and restaurants, hardware and building supply stores, automotive services, financial services, health and wellness providers, and community-oriented businesses such as daycare centres. These businesses play a critical role in reducing travel distances for residents, strengthening community cohesion, and keeping economic activity within rural areas. Village-based retail and service businesses also benefit from and support other rural sectors. Restaurants, specialty retail, farm markets, and artisan businesses, in particular, help connect local agricultural production and tourism experiences to the broader rural economy.

Overall, retail and service businesses enhance the attractiveness of rural communities as destinations to visit, live and invest. Strengthening village economies supports local employment, enhances access to services, reinforces rural identity, and creates more complete and resilient communities. Continued investment in village infrastructure, business support programs, and place-based economic development will be central to the long-term success of rural Ottawa.

Development & Construction

The development and construction sectors are an important contributor to economic activity in rural Ottawa and play a central role in supporting growth and infrastructure renewal. Rural development activity includes residential, agricultural, commercial and industrial projects, infrastructure works, and the extraction of aggregates that supply essential materials for construction across the region. Together, these activities support local employment, supply chains, and skilled trades, while enabling the continued growth and evolution of rural communities.

Residential development continues to be a key driver of growth in rural Ottawa, particularly in and around larger villages where development is directed through the City's Official Plan.

According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, recent activity has been strongest in Richmond (125 housing starts from January to October 2025, following 270 in 2024), Manotick (53 in 2025 and 140 in 2024), Carp (34 in 2025 and 4 in 2024), and Cumberland (15 in 2025 and 0 in 2024). New housing supports population growth, strengthens local retail and services markets, and helps sustain schools, and community facilities. In smaller villages and hamlets, development activity is more incremental but remains important for maintaining housing supply.

An important opportunity within the rural development sector is the availability of vacant rural industrial land that can support future employment growth and investment. As of July 2024, Ottawa had more than 400 net hectares of vacant land designated for “Rural Industrial and Logistics” development (City of Ottawa, 2024). This represents a significant supply of developable land that can accommodate industrial, logistics, and employment uses that are well suited to rural settings, such as warehousing, agri-food processing, construction yards, equipment storage, and small-scale manufacturing.

Vacant rural industrial land is concentrated in a small number of employment areas. The Carp Road Rural Employment Area accounts for almost 280 of the 400 net hectares available, making it the largest cluster of rural industrial land in Ottawa. The Moodie Drive Industrial Area contains more than 44 net hectares, the IndCum Industrial Area approximately 43.5 net hectares, and the South Gloucester Industrial Area nearly 33 net hectares (City of Ottawa, 2024). These areas represent the primary locations for future rural industrial growth and employment development.

Servicing conditions vary across rural industrial lands and influence development potential. Most rural industrial developments rely on private wells and septic systems. However, both the Moodie Drive and IndCum Industrial Areas include parcels that are partially serviced, either through combinations of municipal or private communal water and sewage systems. Access to servicing is a critical factor in attracting development, particularly for larger or more intensive employment uses.

Despite the available capacity of industrial land, development activity has remained modest. Since mid-2020, just over one net hectare of rural industrial and logistics land has been consumed per year (City of Ottawa, 2024). Between 2022 and 2024, only two of the 13 development applications received by the City for lands with this designation were located in rural business parks. This indicates that while land supply is strong, market demand and development uptake remain relatively limited, underscoring the importance of proactive planning, servicing strategies, and targeted promotion and economic development efforts.

Rural development also faces challenges related to workforce availability, rising material costs, longer travel distances, and planning and permitting processes that must balance growth with the protection of agricultural and environmental lands. Stronger coordination between

economic development, planning, and infrastructure delivery will be essential to ensure rural development supports long-term economic resilience and sustainability.

Business Support Services

A key deliverable of the City's Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan was the completion of a Small Business Needs Assessment. The assessment examined the challenges facing small businesses, how they engage with City Hall, and how the City, alongside economic development partners, can help create a more supportive environment that encourages entrepreneurship and small business growth and prosperity. Implementation of assessment recommendations is underway and will continue through 2026. As part of this work, the City launched the Small Business Navigator, a new online resource on ottawa.ca that provides entrepreneurs and small business owners with clear, practical information and tools for every stage of business development.

Generally business support services in Ottawa are delivered primarily through Invest Ottawa, which provides a wide range of programs to support entrepreneurs and businesses. Invest Ottawa's services are available to individuals across the city, including those in rural areas. This support is particularly relevant in rural Ottawa, where self-employment rates are higher than the city average, highlighting the importance of accessible and tailored business support services for rural entrepreneurs.

Despite this need, rural businesses are underrepresented in the use of several existing support programs. Between 2020 and 2025, only 6.2 per cent of attendees at Invest Ottawa workshops were residents of rural wards. Similarly, rural businesses accounted for only 12.1 per cent of advisory service clients, 5.5 per cent of business retention and expansion clients, 5.7 per cent of smart mobility clients served at Area X.O, and 6.7 per cent of Ottawa Innovation Farm clients (Invest Ottawa, 2025). Rural representation is also low among Ottawa Tourism membership, where 8.6 per cent of members within City boundaries are in rural wards (Ottawa Tourism, 2025). While the precise causes of this underrepresentation are uncertain, consultation findings suggest the distance to service delivery locations, limited awareness of available programs, and communication methods may be contributing factors.

Innovation support is available through the Ottawa Innovation Farm at Area X.O, operated by Invest Ottawa. It supports both agri-technology companies and the farming community through applied research, demonstrations, and commercialization in areas such as precision agriculture, biotechnology, robotics, artificial intelligence, and data-driven farming. The Innovation Farm works in partnership with post-secondary institutions, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Farm Credit Canada, and local producers, and has supported projects focused on improving productivity, soil health, water efficiency, and environmental performance.

Support for food-based businesses is delivered through a mix of community and municipal programs. Just Food operates a Start-Up Farm Program that provides access to land, training,

shared infrastructure, and equipment for new and emerging farmers, including newcomers and career changers. It also promotes local food systems through buy-local guides, CSA promotion, and the Savour Ottawa network, which connects producers with restaurants and institutional buyers. The City's Business Ambassador Service for Food Establishments provides guidance on regulatory requirements and supports businesses in navigating approvals and compliance processes.

The City also works to support economic diversification through policies that permit on-farm diversified businesses, allowing farmers to expand on-site income opportunities. The City provides guidance through the *Guide to Planning Your On-Farm Diversified Business*, which helps farmers navigate planning and development requirements and supports appropriate rural economic activity.

Together, these tools and services form a strong foundation of support for rural businesses. While the City's *Toolkit for Businesses in Rural Ottawa*, available on Ottawa.ca, provides an overview of business support services and funding programs, increasing awareness and improving accessibility of services will be key to maximizing impact.

Funding Programs

Rural businesses in Ottawa have access to a range of provincial and municipal funding programs that support business growth and development. At the provincial level, Ontario offers both loan and grant programs aimed at strengthening economic development and business competitiveness. Two key programs available to Ottawa businesses are the Eastern Ontario Development Fund, which supports projects that promote business expansion, job creation, and productivity, and the Rural Ontario Development Program, which is available to communities with a "0" as the second digit of their postal code. The Rural Ontario Development Program is particularly relevant to rural Ottawa businesses, as it provides matching grants to create strong businesses, boost economic growth, protect jobs and improve infrastructure in small communities.

Ottawa Tourism administers the Destination Development Fund, which provides funding to projects that advance priority tourism objectives. These include developing new and innovative destination offerings, enhancing visitor experiences, supporting sustainable and inclusive tourism, strengthening sector capacity, and generating long-term economic benefits. While this fund plays an important role in advancing Ottawa's visitor economy, its focus on overnight visitation and external markets does not always align with rural tourism operators serving primarily Ottawa residents.

The City's Rural Affairs Office plays a central role in advancing rural priorities within the City. The Office monitors and supports issues affecting rural Ottawa, assesses the impact of City policies and programs on rural communities, facilitates communication between rural residents and the City, and advocates for rural perspectives. The Rural Affairs Office also administers the

Rural Community-Building Grant Program which supports rural organizations and community initiatives that strengthen economic development, capacity building, and community vitality.

Together, these funding programs provide an important framework for supporting rural economic development in Ottawa. Improving awareness of available programs, aligning funding criteria with rural business realities, and strengthening coordination between municipal, provincial, and sector-based funding sources will be critical to maximizing their impact on rural businesses and communities.

Consultations

Key Themes

Infrastructure & Transportation

A consistent theme was that limited infrastructure constrains rural economic growth. The lack of municipal water and wastewater servicing restricts the scale and type of development that can occur in many rural areas. Similarly, limited transit service affects both workforce attraction and customer access, increasing reliance on private vehicles. Businesses noted that employees without access to vehicles face significant barriers, and customers who do not have private vehicles may be discouraged from visiting rural destinations. Concerns were also raised about road safety, including difficult access and egress from busy rural roads, the absence of turn lanes and traffic controls, limited pedestrian infrastructure, and the need for improved parking capacity in popular villages and tourism destinations. Participants emphasized that infrastructure investment is foundational to enabling rural business development and improving market access.

Planning & Development

Many interest holders expressed that planning and development processes are complex, costly, lengthy and poorly suited to rural realities. Businesses described the need to hire multiple professional consultants to navigate approvals, increasing both time and expense. There was a strong perception that rural businesses are held to urban standards despite receiving lower levels of municipal servicing. Participants questioned why regulatory flexibility cannot better reflect rural contexts, particularly for parking standards, signage permissions, and commercial development fees. Concerns were also raised about inequities in bylaw enforcement, where compliance often depends on whether a complaint is filed, resulting in inconsistent application.

Business Supports & City Policy Development

Distance from business support providers and limited visibility within City processes were recurring concerns. Rural businesses reported challenges accessing training, funding programs, advisory services, and networking opportunities that are largely centralized in urban

locations. Many expressed a sense of disconnect from policy development and decision-making, noting that rural perspectives are often limited or underrepresented in the development of City programs, bylaws, and strategies. Interest holders emphasized the importance of City staff meeting rural businesses where they operate and continuing to build relationships through direct engagement and localized service delivery, such as pop-up business services and consultations in rural communities.

Marketing & Promotion

Interest holders consistently identified stronger promotion of rural Ottawa as an opportunity. Many urban residents remain unaware of the range of rural attractions, experiences, and businesses located within Ottawa's boundaries. Improved signage, themed itineraries, passport-style programs, and coordinated marketing efforts were suggested to increase visibility and visitors. Events such as Doors Open Ottawa were seen as effective platforms for showcasing rural destinations. Interest holders also emphasized the need for better coordination across City departments and partners regarding who is responsible for promoting rural trails, museums, and attractions, particularly from a tourism perspective rather than solely a recreation or transportation lens.

Rural Business Connections

There was strong support for improved collaboration among rural businesses. Cross-promotion, shared marketing initiatives, and stronger business-to-business sourcing were seen as ways to advance economic development. Participants suggested the creation of a rural business advisory group or business association to help coordinate initiatives, events, and collective promotion. Networking events and shared platforms were viewed as important tools to strengthen collaboration and build a more cohesive rural business community.

Tourism Infrastructure

Interest holders emphasized that rural tourism growth requires better visitor infrastructure. This includes additional municipal parking lots in village centres and near attractions, improved directional signage, maintained trailhead facilities with washrooms, and space for food trucks or seasonal vendors. They also highlighted opportunities to enhance trail promotion through tools such as drone footage, maps, and directories that link recreational users to nearby businesses. Better connections between trails, villages, and service providers were seen as essential to converting recreational traffic into local economic activity.

Agriculture & Food Systems

Consultations reinforced the importance of supporting agricultural diversification and value-added production. Community kitchens, shared processing facilities, and improved farmers' market infrastructure were identified as priorities to help producers increase revenues and extend operating seasons. Participants also emphasized the need to connect farmers with innovation resources such as the Ottawa Innovation Farm at Area X.O and the Just Food

Community Farm. Farm succession planning and land preservation were raised as long-term priorities, with interest in models that maintain agricultural use while supporting business continuity.

Advocacy

Several issues were identified that require advocacy beyond the municipal level. These included the impact of provincial regulations on abattoir availability and electricity rate structures. Interest holders described these as barriers that limit competitiveness and create inequities compared to other Ontario regions. Stronger municipal advocacy was viewed as essential to addressing these systemic constraints.

Film & Cultural Development

Rural Ottawa was seen as having untapped potential in film production and cultural tourism. Maintaining an inventory of rural filming locations and promoting rural heritage sites for filming were identified as opportunities.

Flexible Service Delivery

Finally, interest holders encouraged the City to test new approaches and remain open to experimentation. Suggestions included using rural library branches and Service Ottawa centres as hubs for entrepreneurship programming, piloting hop-on and hop-off shuttle services in key villages, developing last-mile transit connections to major rural attractions, and offering temporary incentives such as fee holidays for commercial development. There was broad support for piloting initiatives, learning from outcomes, and scaling successful approaches over time.

Goal, Vision & Strategic Priorities

The following goal, vision and strategic priorities establish the overarching direction for the updated Economic Development Rural Plan and provide a framework to guide the twelve recommendations of the Plan.

Goal

To foster a strong rural economy that reflects the realities, priorities, and character of rural businesses and communities.

Vision

Ottawa’s rural economy is vibrant, resilient, and competitive, supported by policies, services, and infrastructure that reflect rural realities. Rural businesses are well connected to the supports, networks, and markets they need to grow, and rural communities are recognized as vital contributors to Ottawa’s economic prosperity.

Strategic Priorities

- Ensure City policies, programs, and services reflect rural contexts and support rural businesses to grow.
- Expand and decentralize business support services so rural businesses can more easily access advice, funding programs, training, and networking opportunities.
- Build on rural Ottawa's strengths in agriculture, tourism and recreation, retail and services, and development and construction to support diversified and sustainable growth.
- Strengthen partnerships between the City of Ottawa, rural businesses, community organizations, and economic development partners.
- Increase awareness of rural Ottawa's businesses, destinations, and opportunities among residents, visitors, and investors.

Recommendations

R1. Establish a rural business liaison position

Economic Development Services will establish a dedicated Rural Business Liaison position to support and advance rural economic development.

Consultations highlighted that rural businesses lack a clear point of contact within the City and feel disconnected from business supports and City services. A dedicated Rural Business Liaison would address this gap by providing coordinated, rural-focused support, improving communication between rural businesses and City departments, and ensuring rural priorities are represented.

Priority Actions

- Lead implementation of the Economic Development Rural Plan.
- Serve as a single point of contact for rural businesses to navigate City programs, approvals, and services.
- Strengthen coordination between City teams to address rural-specific economic challenges.

R2. Strengthen integration of rural business perspectives

Economic Development Services will strengthen the integration of rural business perspectives across City policies, programs, partner agencies, and intergovernmental initiatives.

Consultations highlighted that City policies, programs and services are often urban-focused and not suited to rural realities. Strengthening rural integration ensures that the unique needs and perspectives of rural businesses are considered in City initiatives and there is improved

alignment between City actions, partner agency initiatives, and senior government programs impacting the rural economy.

Priority Actions

- Collaborate with the Rural Affairs Office to establish a formal process to assess and incorporate rural economic impacts and considerations into relevant City initiatives.
- Review rural commercial development applications highlighting their economic implications to inform decision-making.
- Represent rural business interests on interdepartmental working groups and with external partner agencies to ensure rural needs are reflected in decision-making.

R3. Pilot decentralized business support services

Economic Development Services will pilot the delivery of decentralized business support services across all rural wards.

Data shows rural businesses are underrepresented across Ottawa's business support programs. Piloting decentralized and pop-up service delivery directly addresses access challenges and aligns with consultation feedback calling for services to meet businesses where they operate.

- Host quarterly in-person business pop-up clinics in each rural ward.
- Coordinate service delivery with Invest Ottawa's Small Business Entrepreneurship Centre, the Ottawa Public Library, the City's Business Ambassador Service and local business associations to maximize impact.
- Leverage virtual service delivery to complement in-person support and reach businesses in more remote areas.
- Promote rural business services through targeted communications, including Councillor's newsletters, Rural Affairs' newsletters, and rural networks, to ensure businesses are aware of and can access support.

R4. Strengthen engagement with rural businesses

Economic Development Services will strengthen engagement with rural businesses to identify and address economic challenges, and connect them to supports.

Consultations emphasized the importance of consistent, two-way communication with the City. This recommendation ensures emerging opportunities and challenges are identified early and that rural businesses remain informed about supports, funding programs, and policy changes affecting their operations.

Priority Actions

- Establish a volunteer Rural Business Advisory Group that brings together rural businesses, associations and City staff once per quarter.
- Contribute information on rural business services, programs and opportunities to the Rural Affairs' e-newsletter.
- Coordinate direct connections between rural businesses and relevant municipal departments, partner agencies, and senior government contacts to resolve issues and support growth.

R5. Collaborate with local business associations to facilitate networking

Economic Development Services will collaborate with local business associations to facilitate networking and mentoring opportunities.

Consultations identified strong demand for better business-to-business connections, shared marketing, and peer learning. Supporting networking and association-based collaboration strengthens rural business ecosystems and reflects the structure of rural economies where small and self-employed businesses are prominent.

Priority Actions

- Facilitate business to business connections and informal mentoring matches.
- Partner with local business/industry associations to organize networking events and sector-specific workshops.
- Promote virtual networking and peer-to-peer learning opportunities to complement in-person events and connect businesses across the region.

R6. Strengthen marketing and promotions of rural Ottawa

Economic Development Services will collaborate with City communications and Ottawa Tourism to strengthen marketing and promotions of rural Ottawa.

Tourism and recreation are major growth opportunities, yet many urban and suburban Ottawa residents as well as visitors remain unaware of rural attractions. A coordinated campaign builds on the region's natural, cultural, and recreational assets and responds to calls for stronger promotion, themed itineraries, and signage.

Priority Actions

- Assess existing tourism product and identify gaps.
- Collaborate with City communications and Ottawa Tourism to develop creative material suitable for the resident and visitor markets.

- Engage rural businesses and community partners to contribute stories, images, and experiences to amplify campaign reach.
- Coordinate cross-channel promotion on City and Ottawa Tourism assets.

R7. Secure provincial and federal funding to support rural business growth projects

Economic Development Services will collaborate with the Rural Affairs Office to secure provincial and federal funding for projects that support rural business growth and expansion, including transportation pilots, wayfinding, business signage, public realm improvements, and mobility connections.

Consultations identified strategic projects that could significantly improve rural business operations, connections, and visibility. Leveraging provincial and federal funding is essential to advancing these initiatives, given the scale of investment required.

Priority Actions

- Collaborate with the Rural Affairs Office to identify and prioritize funding opportunities that align with rural economic development projects.
- Coordinate application development with the Rural Affairs Office, including preparing supporting materials, cost estimates, and impact analyses.
- Engage rural businesses to gather input and demonstrate local support for proposed projects.

R8. Promote rural Ottawa as a filming destination

Economic Development Services will collaborate with the Ottawa Film Office to promote rural Ottawa as a filming destination to support local economic growth.

Rural heritage sites, landscapes, and villages offer strong filming potential, yet are underutilized. Promoting rural locations supports economic diversification, builds awareness of rural assets, and aligns with consultation themes around culture, tourism, and creative industries.

Priority Actions

- Collaborate with the Ottawa Film Office to identify and develop marketing materials to promote additional filming locations, including natural landscapes, heritage sites, and community landmarks.

R9. Promote rural Ottawa as a destination for corporate and entertainment events

Economic Development Services will promote rural Ottawa as a destination for corporate and entertainment events, including weddings.

Consultations highlighted that rural Ottawa has strong, underutilized potential to host retreats, weddings, and special events, supported by its landscapes, heritage sites, and unique venues. Promoting rural Ottawa for corporate and entertainment events would diversify the visitor economy and generate new demand for rural hospitality, food services, accommodations, and village-based businesses.

Priority Actions

- Identify and promote additional suitable event locations and facilities and promote Ottawa Tourism's no-cost membership.
- Support rural venues in navigating City approvals, permits, and services needed to host events successfully.

R10. Commission a baseline evaluation and benchmark study of Ottawa's rural economy

Economic Development Services will commission a baseline evaluation and benchmark study of Ottawa's rural economy to inform future policy, investment, and program decisions.

The diversity and scale of rural industries, particularly agriculture and tourism, require a stronger data foundation. A baseline study supports evidence-based planning, performance measurement, funding advocacy, and policy development tailored to rural economic realities.

Priority Actions

- Develop the study scope, objectives, and methodology in consultation with internal departments, rural business associations, and agricultural interest holders.
- Collect and analyze data on rural business activity, employment, revenue, and sector-specific trends.

R11. Assess the competitiveness and capacity of Ottawa's employment lands to support projected economic growth, and identify priority locations for future industrial development

Economic Development Services will collaborate with Policy Planning to assess the competitiveness and capacity of Ottawa's employment lands to support projected economic growth, and identify priority locations for future industrial development.

More than 400 net hectares of rural industrial land are available, yet development uptake remains low. This work responds directly to consultation concerns about development costs, servicing constraints, and market readiness, and supports the attraction of rural industrial investment.

Priority Actions

- Develop the study scope, objectives, and methodology in consultation with Policy Planning.
- Evaluate Ottawa's employment lands and identify priority areas for future industrial growth.

R12. Explore opportunities to expand on-farm diversified uses to simplify ancillary business development and increase opportunities to enhance the long-term viability of rural farms.

Economic Development Services will collaborate with Policy Planning to undertake a review of the Official Plan, Zoning By-law and Site Plan Control By-law with respect to on-farm diversified uses, including targeted consultation with rural interest holders to identify barriers, opportunities, and priority areas for expanded diversification.

This work responds directly to consultation feedback highlighting the importance of advancing agricultural diversification and supporting value-added production opportunities.

Priority Actions

- Review the Official Plan, Zoning By-law and Site Plan Control By-law related to on-farm diversified uses, in collaboration with Policy Planning, including targeted consultation with rural interest holders to identify barriers, opportunities, and priority areas for expanded diversification.
- Analyze on-farm diversification policies and frameworks in comparable municipalities to identify best practices, innovative approaches, and lessons learned that could inform potential updates in Ottawa.
- Recommend amendments to the Official Plan, Zoning By-law and Site Plan Control By-law that facilitate the development of diversified on-farm uses while maintaining agricultural primacy and bring forward a report to Committee and Council for consideration.

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Appendix A – List of Interest Holders Consulted

Black Dog Bistro (Ward 21)

Black Walnut Bakery (Ward 1)

Business Ambassador Service (City of Ottawa)

Carleton Mushroom Farms (Ward 20)

Carp Road Corridor BIA (Ward 5)

Carp Village BIA (Ward 5)

City Communications (City of Ottawa)

Commando Paintball (Ward 19)

Councillor Brown (Ward 21)

Councillor Kelly (Ward 5)

Councillor Kitts (Ward 19)

Councillor Luloff (Ward 1)

Councillor Skalski (Ward 20)

Cumberland Belle (Ward 1)

Cumberland Community Association (Ward 1)

Cumberland Farmers' Market (Ward 1)

Cumberland Heritage Village Museum (Ward 1)

Dalmeny Acres Farm (Ward 20)

Development Review (City of Ottawa)

Diefenbunker: Canada's Cold War Museum (Ward 5)

Domaine Perrault (Ward 19)

Exterior Craft (Ward 21)

Festival of Small Halls

Foster Family Farm (Ward 21)

Geospatial Analysis, Technology and Solutions (City of Ottawa)

Greely Business Park (Ward 20)

Hard Rock Hotel and Casino (Ward 20)

Invest Ottawa

Jabulani Vineyard and Winery (Ward 21)

KIN Vineyards (Ward 5)

Koss Welding (Ward 19)

Manotick BIA (Ward 21)

Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority (Ward 5)

Natural Systems (City of Ottawa)

Ontario Federation of Agriculture

Ottawa Cedar Lumber (Ward 19)

Ottawa Film Office

Ottawa Public Library

Ottawa Tourism

Ottawa Wedding Chapel (Ward 20)

Pinhey's Point Historic Site (Ward 5)

Policy Planning (City of Ottawa)

RiverOak (Ward 20)

Robert Plante Greenhouses (Ward 19)

Rural Affairs Office (City of Ottawa)

Saunders Farms (Ward 21)

Stanley's Olde Maple Lane Farm (Ward 20)

Strathmere Country Retreat/Dreammind Group (Ward 21)

Suntech Greenhouses (Ward 20)

Valleyview Little Animal Farm (Ward 21)

Vans School of Blacksmithing (Ward 19)

Vignoble Clos du Vully (Ward 19)

Watson's Mill (Ward 21)