

NEWS RELEASE

GRAND BEND AREA CHAMBER SHARES BUSINESSES IDEAS WITH COUNCIL What Kind of Town Do You Want in 10 or 20 Years?

August 28, 2015 – Grand Bend: Grand Bend & Area Chamber of Commerce releases report entitled *What Kind of Town Do You Want in 10 or 20 Years?*, the results of its May 27, 2015 round-table meeting at which representatives from local business, service clubs, Kettle & Stony Point First Nation and Lambton Shores councilors and senior staff attended to share their insights to assist Lambton Shores' strategic planning.

The purpose of this proactive approach was to provide Lambton Shores with actionable strategic suggestions from the business community as the Municipality begins its strategic planning process. The Chamber invited all local businesses, service clubs and councilors through a media blitz that included local print and radio media, emails to Chamber and Forest BIA members, as well as social media announcements and Lambton Shores electronic message boards.

Chamber Past-President Glen Baillie states, *"the Municipality's Strategic Plan is an important document. It determines which projects are planned for and what level of importance those projects receive in terms of time frames and money needed. This community has a curious set of circumstances in that it is comprised of an amalgamated municipality that combines a farming community, a tourist-based economy and a large First Nations community. It's our hope that found common ground and resulting recommendations to the Municipality will benefit us all for years to come."*

Attendees self-selected into four groups, each group focused on a key performance area: Tourism, Recreation & Culture, Transportation, Economic Development & Infrastructure, and Political Structure.

The final report highlights several common conclusions: the need for wayfinding signage and a shuttle service to enable travel between communities and parking lots and along key corridors like Highway 21. Partnership with Kettle & Stony Point First Nation in relation to the *Centre Ipperwash Beach* and parking lot management, greater utilization of Lambton Heritage Museum and future project development was seen not only as building a positive foundation for the future, but a means to real economic growth. Political structure recommendations pinpointed a move away from ward-based politics to a councilors-at-large system as a means of improved representation and community integration. The current ward structure was seen as setting communities in opposition to each other rather than encouraging community kinship.

Recommendations for economic development and growth hinged on two courses of action. For real economic development gains to be realized, the group advised the creation of an economic development position, hiring professional staff to fulfill this role, implementing the economic development action plan submitted to Council in 2014 and setting an appropriate budget. Likewise, the recommended strategy for tourism and visitor services centred on developing a plan, funding it, hiring professional staff and coordinating with regional tourism organizations and destination marketing organizations to ensure local tourism product is fairly and appropriately supported and promoted. Although Sarnia-Lambton Economic Partnership's statistics indicate 55% of all Lambton County's tourist-based businesses are in Lambton Shores, the board of directors for Tourism Sarnia Lambton (TSL), the official destination marketing organization for Lambton County, was seen as Sarnia-centric and Sarnia-focused. It was recommended that TSL's board be altered to be reflective of the County's tourism product and that directors be recruited from tourism-based businesses.

What Kind of Town Do You Want in 10 or 20 Years is a public document available for download in PDF format from www.grandbendchamber.ca/publications.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

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THE CHAMBER: Since 1957, Grand Bend & Area Chamber of Commerce has supported local business. We are a member-financed, not-for-profit network of businesses who work to improve the operating conditions and promotion of local business and contribute to our home communities. Member services include networking, advocacy, promotion and information. The Chamber also provides tourism and visitor services to the area, promoting amenities and attractions to tourists, cottagers and residents.