

Brooke-Alvinston Strategic and Economic Planning

Stakeholder Input Workshop

December 11, 2017
Alvinston, Ontario



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Executive Summary

On December 11, 2017 interested members of the Brooke-Alvinston community met at the Brooke-Alvinston Inwood Community Centre for a highly interactive workshop facilitated by Bryan Boyle.

The purpose of the session was to solicit valuable input from the community to help the Council and staff of Brooke-Alvinston create a strong strategic and economic plan as a vision for the future.

Participants were asked, “What are the first one or two words that come to your mind when you hear the words Brooke-Alvinston?” Their thoughts were focused around our roots, agricultural influence, community landmarks and events as well as general attributes.

The participants’ perspectives about the current status of Brooke-Alvinston were quite mixed with a slightly positive trend. Many participants’ scores were clustered in the mid-range on the bar graph that was created.

The participants identified some desired outcomes which were clustered into the areas of business development, infrastructure, governance as well as population and community features.

Participants identified and prioritized merits that exist for Brooke-Alvinston. Those merits in order of priority include: generous caring community, vibrant agriculture, excellent recreational opportunities, Internet access, quality of life, excellent business host, strong infrastructure, effective Council and staff as well as excellent educational opportunities.

They also identified and prioritized some challenges that exist for Brooke-Alvinston. These challenges in order of priority include: funding and regulatory issues, lack of business development, declining or segmented population, deteriorating are nonexistent services as well as less than positive attitudes.

Participants agreed that there are many actions that could help ensure a strong and vibrant future for Brooke-Alvinston. These actions could build on the merits, reduce or eliminate the challenges, all the while keeping in mind our desired outcomes.

The participants identified, grouped and prioritized the actions they identified into key areas of focus. Highlights of the areas of focus listed from their highest to lowest priority are:

- 1st: Stimulate Business Development
- 2nd: Invest in Community Infrastructure
- 3rd: Market Our Municipality
- 4th: Practice Inclusive Fiscal Responsibility
- 5th: Encourage Innovation
- 6th: Support Community Groups
- 7th: Improve Effective Communication

As a first step to helping ensure that action will result from this strategic planning activity, participants shared their personal commitment for their specific actions that would contribute to the positive outcome to this planning process.

The workshop was a productive event, where the participants were very engaged. Through their valued input, the stakeholders present took an important step in providing input to a potential strategic and economic plan for Brooke-Alvinston.

Brooke-Alvinston Strategic and Economic Planning
Stakeholder Input Workshop
Brooke-Alvinston, Inwood Community Centre
December 11, 2017 Facilitated by Bryan Boyle

Purpose of the Session

To solicit valuable input from the community to help the Council and staff of Brooke-Alvinston create a strong strategic and economic plan as a vision for the future

Throughout this report whenever two or more participants (or in the cases of the eight discussion groups - number of groups) offered the same or very similar comments they are noted with an "x" and the number, i.e. (x3)

Current Perceptions

Participants were asked to share the first one or two words that come to mind when they hear "Brooke-Alvinston".

Our Roots

- Home (x9)
- Home territory
- My home municipality
- Raised in...
- Family setting

Agricultural Influence

- Farming (x2)
- Farming community
- Family farms
- Agriculture
- Rural community
- Country

Community Landmarks and Events

- Fall fair (x3)
- Hockey (x2)
- Arena
- Township arena
- Sydenham River
- Armors
- Old school

General Attributes

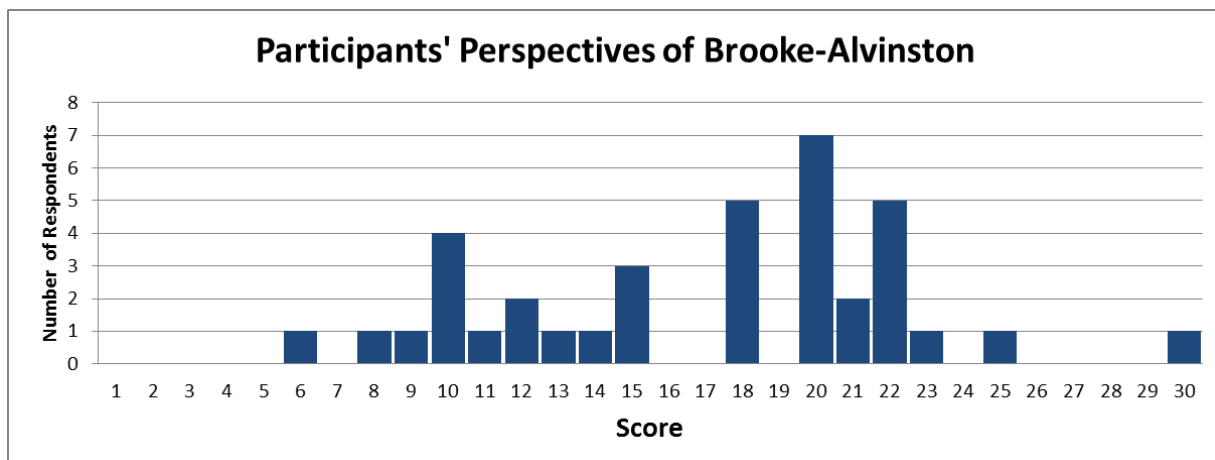
- Friendly community
- Community support
- Community opportunity
- Progress
- Friendly
- Welcoming
- Same old, same old
- Small
- Struggling
- Declining population

Participants' Perceptions of Agricultural Soil Health and Conservation in Ontario

On ballots numbered from 1 to 30, participants indicated the number that most accurately describes the current status of Brooke-Alvinston.

#30 = "Top of our Game": A thriving and vibrant community led by a well-coordinated, effective and responsive municipal government that provides strong value to the community

#1 = "Dead in the Water": An apathetic and declining community led by an uncoordinated, ineffective and unresponsive municipal government that provides very limited value to the community



Average = 17.33

Desired Outcomes

Participants were asked, “How will we know that we “got it right” with a successful strategic plan?”

Business Development

- New business development (x3)
- Industry (x2)
- Economic growth or opportunity
- Economic stability
- More young people owning land
- Rural and town businesses
- Residential improvements
- New positions or jobs

Infrastructure

- New homes being built (x2)
- More paved roads (x2)
- Residential improvements
- New municipal equipment
- Substantial arena upgrades

Governance

- We still have Brooke-Alvinston as a municipality
- Transparency
- Feedback to local government representatives welcome
- Reasonable taxation
- No complaints

Population and Community Features

- Stable or growing population (x2)
- Youth and young families stay or return
- People stay, retire here or move here
- Active community
- Safe and secure community
- Increased safety with fewer break-ins
- Positive outlook
- Volunteer groups are treated equally
- Tourism
- Some progress may be hard to gauge

What Merits Exist for Brooke-Alvinston?

Merits may be:

Strengths: Any factors or conditions that are considered positive and over which we have some control, e.g. skills, expertise, involvement, facilities

Opportunities: Any factors or conditions that are considered positive, over which we have little or no control but may be seized by ourselves or others, e.g. demographics, location, funding

Participants identified, grouped and prioritized many merits with the following results :

Rank	Merits	Total Score
1 st	Generous Caring Community	43
2 nd	Vibrant Agriculture	25
3 rd	Excellent Recreational Opportunities	24
4 th	Internet Access	23
5 th	Quality of Life	22
6 th	Excellent Business Host	20
7 th	Strong Infrastructure	14
8 th	Effective Council and Staff	10
9 th	Excellent Educational Opportunities	9

The points identified by the participants that were grouped and prioritized to create the table above are listed below:

1) Generous Caring Community

- Our great people (x3)
- Volunteers
- Work together
- Great people
- Tight knit community
- Friendly and caring community
- Family roots and heritage
- People that really and fairly support local businesses
- Generous donations to charity on a per capita basis
- Generosity
- Community groups and volunteers
- Community centered
- Inviting, quaint and beautiful town
- Entrepreneurs
- Great hospitality, e.g. food

2) Vibrant Agriculture

- Strong agricultural base
- Farming economy
- Excellent agricultural support services

3) Excellent Recreation Opportunities

- Excellent community centre (x2)
- Arena (x2)
- A.W. Campbell Conservation Area (x2)
- Athletic opportunities
- Youth sports
- Active service clubs supporting recreation
- Sydenham River trails
- Sydenham River

4) Internet Access

- Fastest Internet in Lambton County
- High-speed Internet
- Fiber optic services
- Brooke Telecom's Internet access
- Opportunities for fiber optics to invite IT type businesses

5) Quality of Life

- Quality-of-life to raise a family
- Youth retention
- Relatively low taxes
- Reasonable cost of housing
- Safe community
- Stability

6) Excellent Business Host

- Recent business development and growth
- Munro Honey
- Rural labourers with strong work ethics for business
- New businesses
- Encourage new development
- Innovative and risk-taking attitude
- Opportunity for tourism

7) Strong Infrastructure

- Infrastructure is available
- Low-cost development opportunities
- Bigger is not always better
- Central location proximity to three cities
- Location at the centre of the wheel

8) Effective Council and Staff

- Works and Roads Department
- Municipal staff
- More diverse Council needed in terms of age and ethnicity
- Advertising on Facebook and website for Brooke-Alvinston

9) Excellent Education Opportunities

- Excellent school system
- School
- Brooke Central French immersion
- Educational opportunities

What Challenges Exist for Brooke-Alvinston?

Challenges may be:

Weaknesses: Any factors or conditions that are considered negative and over which we have some control, e.g. inactivity, lack of direction, lack of stakeholder support

Threats: Any factors or conditions that could negatively impact us, over which we have little or no control, e.g. political climate, provincial, national or world conditions

Participants identified, grouped and prioritized many challenges with the following results :

Rank	Challenges	Total Score
1 st	Funding and Regulation Issues	43
2 nd	Lack of Business Development	41
3 rd	Declining or Segmented Population	33
4 th Tie	Deteriorating or Nonexistent Services	26
4 th Tie	Less Than Positive Attitudes	26

The points identified by the participants that were grouped and prioritized to create the table above are listed below:

1) Funding and Regulation Issues

- Decreased funding, both federal and provincial (x3)
- Reduced government funding
- Funding cuts
- Provincial regulation and funding reductions
- The government making decisions for local needs
- Too much outside administrative influence
- Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) property valuation increases
- Many needs and wants that can no longer be afforded
- Regulations
- Permits
- Red tape
- Supply management

2) Lack of Business Development

- Lack of major business for taxation funding
- No large industry to generate tax base
- Supporting local businesses
- No draw for new businesses
- Lack of space for new business
- Getting people to know where Alvinston downtown is located
- Not enough housing, new development
- No critical mass for industry
- Environment legislation not due to agriculture
- Lacking grocery store
- Lack of local shopping

3) Declining or Segmented Population

- Small population
- No employment base
- Lack of job opportunities
- Limited opportunities for young people
- Rural home renters
- Rural life controlled by urban rulers
- Vegans
- Getting people to move here
- Some people of all ages were moving into the community are not coming out to support the community

- Small taxation base
- Aging community
- Larger farms with current generation leaving the community

4) Deteriorating or Nonexistent Services

- Lack of utilities on rural roads, e.g. three phase hydro, gas, water (x2)
- Service requests could receive prompter action
- Aging Doctor
- Fire department amalgamation
- Municipal government amalgamation
- Lack of amenities
- Longer-term planning needed, e.g. sewers
- No new subdivision plans
- Hydro costs, taxes
- Underutilization of Sydenham River
- Need for land severance

5) Less Than Positive Attitudes

- Resistance to new ideas
- No vision
- Lack of a clear plan
- Reluctance to make change
- Lack of recreation
- Not progressive

Key Areas of Focus

There are many actions that could help ensure a strong and vibrant future for Brooke-Alvinston. These actions should build on the merits, reduce or eliminate the challenges, seize the opportunities or deflect the threats all the while keeping in mind your desired outcomes.

The participants identified and grouped these actions into areas of focus using the following method:

Each participant was given 100 points. They were asked to allocate their points to a number of areas of focus to show their relative importance. They based their allocation on where action would have the most positive impact on Brooke-Alvinston.

Rank	Areas of Focus	Total Score
1 st	Stimulate Business Development	840
2 nd	Invest in Community Infrastructure	755
3 rd	Market Our Municipality	580
4 th	Practice Inclusive Fiscal Responsibility	515
5 th	Encourage Innovation	385
6 th	Support Community Groups	245
7 th	Improve Effective Communication	220

The actions identified by the participants that were grouped and prioritized to create the table above are listed below :

1) Stimulate Business Development

- Establish incentives for new businesses, e.g. monetary, footprint, advertising
- Attract larger business for a boost to taxation base
- Initiate incentives for new businesses
- Encourage the next farming generation
- Provide tax breaks for new housing or new businesses
- Start new industry
- Start a marijuana plant
- Create jobs
- Create temporary housing for NOVA construction workers
- Programs to scale and assist the existing community businesses
- Encourage diversity in agriculture

2) Invest in Community Infrastructure

- Share resources
- Widen the roads to accommodate larger machinery
- Make the town and the main street more attractive to bring people in
- Plant trees for air quality, beauty and future appeal
- Build our recreational opportunities for youth and adults
- Develop a playground and parks for children in the South end of town
- Create a 10 year plan for the arena and community centre
- Build a walking bridge across the river
- Create a separate walking or cycling trail along accessible roadways
- Develop walking trails
- Promote new homes
- Plan for housing development, e.g. new housing, retirement, severance planning
- Create a museum for town industry
- Invest in projects that bring people together

3) Market Our Municipality

- Encourage, promote and advertise for people to come and live here
- Change the perception of our municipality for all
- Expand on becoming a “go to” destination
- Market our municipality
- Attract outside business investment
- Encourage private investors to take advantage of our municipalities merits
- Promote the community to large employers, e.g. NOVA expansion
- Create and encourage events where money stays in our community
- Implement ways to make use and young adults stay in our community

4) Practice Inclusive Fiscal Responsibility

- Promote our lower taxes
- Create tax incentives
- Hold public input meetings at budget time
- Provide more frequent financial reports for constituents
- Spend tax dollars wisely
- Cut costs
- Consider amalgamation of summer municipalities
- Amalgamate fire departments
- Continue to apply for funding
- Elect a government at various levels that supports small-town and rural development
- Work diligently to get Ontario government to listen to rural communities needs
- Listen to the ratepayers
- Identify opportunities by evaluating what each service is costing us

5) Encourage Innovation

- Take risks to build and improve for the future
- Encourage new ideas and plans
- Try new things
- Share information with constituents through new and innovative methods
- Create a reason for progress
- Seek out successful examples
- Encourage more open-mindedness
- Create space and opportunities for healthcare practitioners

6) Support Community Groups

- Encourage support of existing community groups (x3)
- Work closer with St. Clair Conservation Authority, e.g. trails
- Increase communication between volunteer groups, e.g. a biannual meeting of all groups

7) Improve Effective Communication

- Better communication through the Brooke-Alvinston website, Council minutes, meeting notices, etc. (x2)
- Implement improvements to the Township website to make it user-friendly and effective
- Better communication to the community to let people know what is happening
- Better communication through the Brooke-Alvinston website, Council minutes, meeting notices, etc. (x2)
- Improved communication
- Increase interaction between community organizations

Personal Commitments: “If it is to be, it is up to me!”

Bryan Boyle reminded the participants of an age-old adage: “If it is to be, it is up to me”. He suggested to all the participants in the room that they are all in a position to ensure a strong and vibrant future for Brooke-Alvinston. As a result, the following individual personal commitments were shared by participants.

I will:

- encourage the next farming generation (x2)
- develop new agricultural ideas
- continue to expand value-added crops and provide value to community growers through expansion
- as parents make it possible for the next generation to farm
- continue to question the Township Council on each line item at budget time to see if it is really necessary to still spend that much even if we have always done it
- provide better financial reports to the taxpayers
- attend more Council meetings and offer feedback
- become mayor
- bring in new business
- find a developer and promote new home building
- help pay for some of the natural gas line to service our area to ensure a vibrant agriculture
- supply natural gas to help businesses
- buy local and support community groups
- continue, increase and coordinate volunteer efforts
- be vocal and promote our community
- volunteer more and encourage others to do the same
- volunteer more and become more involved in the community

- encourage a positive attitude about Brooke-Alvinston
- volunteer and support community groups
- encourage and ask people to support the fall fair and programs for youth
- promote and talk to people about our fall fair
- spend any of my extra money left over in the community
- market the community to others
- encourage medical professionals to practice here
- continue to support the arena project
- try to promote the municipality to gain advantages from the new NOVA plant being built in Sarnia
- continue to work with the Optimist Club on the “Raise the Roof Project”
- renovate homes to make the community look better
- improve the lighting on Main Street
- develop a plan so older buildings on Main Street could lead to an improved overall look
- seek new forms of recreation for which we can fundraise, e.g. splash pad, new climbers
- provide more activities for young people to participate in
- encourage innovation

Summary of the Workshop

The workshop was a productive event, where the participants were very engaged. Through their valued input, the stakeholders present took an important step in providing input to a potential strategic and economic plan for Brooke-Alvinston.