

Greater Kingston Chamber of Commerce Strategic Plan 2022-2024

A letter from the CEO

Making bold predictions about the years to come sure has a different feel to it now, doesn't it? After two years of uncertainty and change, it's enough to make even the wisest of us plan in pencil rather than ink.

Despite the challenges in knowing what will come next, we know failure to plan is planning to fail. That's why we are pleased to present this updated vision for the Greater Kingston Chamber of Commerce at this crucial time for business and for the Chamber.

Since I joined the Chamber in 2019, we have been on a journey to innovate within this storied organization and ensure it has the resources, focus, and offerings to maintain and build upon its relevancy in a new business climate.

Much of the past two years has been spent clearing up legacy systems, rebuilding the team, and (yes) responding to COVID. While those tasks will continue to be a work in progress, it's now time to move into the next phase: growth.

The Chamber's membership currently includes a fraction of the overall business community in Kingston. For the Chamber to effectively represent the needs and concerns of local businesses, this has to increase. We know that most businesses aren't going to sign up for membership just because, they need to realize a benefit.

This is why you will see us continue to strengthen our value proposition in the coming years with a particular focus on local advocacy – a topic which came up repeatedly in our consultations to build this plan – as well as a revisiting of our membership tiers and member engagement initiatives, among other exciting plans.

A special shout out must go to our current members for their support, especially those who have stuck by us in the good times and the bad, and to those who helped shape this plan. They shared many interesting and compelling ideas and, though we may not be able to use all of them, each piece of feedback was carefully considered and balanced in creating this final plan.

As author Alan Cohen once said, "Do not wait until the conditions are perfect to begin. Beginning makes the conditions perfect."

To new beginnings,

Karen Cross
Chamber CEO

Chair's Letter

This is a pivotal time for our city. Kingston is growing rapidly and experiencing growing pains. We're attracting new companies and investment and are having the tough conversations around what that will mean for our climate. We're also bringing in new people who enjoy the lifestyle we have here and are experiencing change – for the better – because of what these newcomers bring.

Kingston's business community plays a key role in driving these changes: creating jobs, building community, and making our city (and not just our economy) stronger. But this diverse group requires a community leader that can help us all navigate and negotiate the challenges we all face, especially the unique challenges faced by business owners.

In the years to come, we believe the Chamber will step into this role, creating a space where these businesses come to organize, strategize, and collaborate in order to effect positive change on our community. This strategic plan outlines some tangible steps the Chamber will take to position itself as that common ground from which community solutions can be built.

We're two very different people, as you might expect from our very different professions and backgrounds. Yet the Chamber has brought us together initially as a way of strengthening our businesses and, over time, as a means for us to strengthen those around us through our individual talents and knowledge. This is a core feature and strength of organizations like Chambers of Commerce: their ability to create bridges across industries, demographics, and regions, and mobilizing these connections for community good.

Those solutions don't happen without a strong member base behind the Chamber, providing their feedback and ideas. We're grateful to the new members joining the Chamber in droves over the past few months and hope to see the trend continue throughout this plan. While the future is uncertain, we know Kingston's business owners to be a resilient, resourceful, and creative group: from our restaurateurs to our hoteliers, our artists and creators, our manufacturers, retailers, service providers, and many others. It is a privilege to share in your stories and struggles, and we look forward to serving and getting to know more of you in the years to come.

There are many opinions, thoughts, and proposals as to how we address our challenges. It is our hope we can all commit to being hard on the issues while soft on each other; to disagreeing (when necessary) without being disagreeable; and to leaving the campsite better than we found it. We are all on Team Kingston.

To brighter days ahead for our city and our businesses,

Tarek Hussein
Chair (2021) and Owner, Weller Pharmacy

Connor Holway
Chair (2022) and Commercial Account Manager, RBC

Introduction

Pandemics. Recessions. Wars. Businesses in Kingston have survived and thrived through challenging times before. And so have we.

We are the Greater Kingston Chamber of Commerce, one of Canada's oldest Chambers of Commerce. Though what we do and the way we do it has changed over 180 years, our core purpose remains the same: we champion the cause of business in Kingston and the surrounding area.

Today, we no longer check scales to make sure the pound of flour you bought really was a pound. But we are working to even the scales for business to ensure a level playing field against global competition as we build back better.

Much like the Third Crossing will, later this year, form new linkages across disparate parts of our city, we bridge the gap between business, our government leaders, and the community to create common ground and drive community solutions. When COVID arrived in our community, we rallied our members to share solutions and provide access to programs like rapid testing.

We build powerful connections that help our businesses grow and succeed. Through networking, advocacy, and events, we bring together 600 separate organizations into a united front for business.

And we help shape the discussion to ensure the priorities of business owners and leaders are considered during the important conversations facing our community.

We're able to do all these things thanks to a strong, supportive, and engaged membership base. Join us today.

> [Learn more about our plans for the years ahead](#) >

Our mission: We are committed to stimulating the growth and prosperity of the local business community. We will influence public policy, be the catalyst for connectivity, and provide unique competitive advantages for our members.

Our vision: To be the indispensable partner for businesses sustainability and growth in the Greater Kingston region.

"The Chamber should be distinct by keeping their eye on what is changing that may impact businesses, taking the long-term view. This is a void that has not been filled by other organizations in Kingston."

Anne Vivian-Scott
Kinarm

But first, a little backstory

To build our new strategy, we spoke to members, past members, other support organizations in Kingston, major local employers, our government partners, and other Chambers for their perspectives.

We launched our consultations in November of 2021, concluding in January 2022. In that time, we heard from more than 60 members and dozens of other stakeholders covering Kingston's key sectors. The feedback covered a wide range of themes including talent development and attraction, smart growth, and making life better for businesses post-COVID.

This strategic plan is informed by the feedback, ideas, and input received, and we thank everyone who participated.

"Having the Chamber at the table as part of the Economic Recovery Team has provided an important information flow from businesses. We're looking forward to continued communication and collaboration as the Chamber builds on the strong foundation it has built through the pandemic."

Mayor Bryan Paterson

The Plan

Priorities

Our plan revolves around three key and interconnected pillars: INFLUENCE, CONNECT, and SUPPORT.

Influence

Something we heard loud and clear during consultations was that many stakeholders wanted the Chamber to have a more vocal and active role within our community's topics of discussion and challenges. This came up in the context of workforce development, construction development and housing, COVID recovery, and many other priorities.

Influencing public policy can be challenging work – balancing the needs of members (sometimes competing members) and the big picture city priorities, criticizing government one day and asking for a favour the next, and being proactive while always keeping the lens of “how might this affect business” in focus.

Yet, it is central to our identity and it's a unique role only we can play. This is why we're recommitting ourselves to this important work.

Connect

If there is anything the past two years have underscored, it is that social connection is crucial to our health and wellbeing – and not just to us as people. Our business owners need social connection to share ideas and solutions, find new business, and empathize with each other.

"The Chamber has done a great job communicating over the last 20 months. There have been so many changes, and they've done a very good job of getting that info out to members. If I was a really small business, where else would I get that information?"

Shawn Geary
McCoy Bus Service

The future of events for us is certainly hybrid, as we seek to maintain the health of our community and business environments, adapt to busy schedules, and attract new and different speakers and offerings to our members. We look forward to continuing to offer Kingston's leading business networking events, including the recently revamped Business Excellence Awards, and the Chamber Golf Classic with new offerings such as the Connect Expo.

These activities will be especially important as we welcome newcomers and new businesses to town, and as businesses recovering and growing in the years ahead look to hire and adapt to an ever changing work environment.

Support

Our third pillar was previously “Education” but we're making a slight change here. Our role as the Chamber is to bring you speakers, products like our newsletter, and other professional development opportunities...but we're often not the ‘educators’ ourselves.

Going forward, you will see us embracing that facilitation role more frequently with an emphasis on bringing you the best of our amazing members and partners through our informative events like our ongoing webinar series.

"The Chamber helps us build relationships that will be beneficial as we truly launch our business, while also providing useful tools for our back pocket."

Sean Billing
Frontenac Club

Goals

We are fans of the expression 'what gets measured gets done'. Annual goals will be attached to each of these measures, as appropriate, during the Chamber's internal business planning process.

Goal statements for three priorities:

1. Take a proactive, thoughtful, non-partisan approach to our advocacy which strengthens our community.
2. Foster deeper connections between members, between Kingstonians and the issues that affect them, and across our community that drive better decision making and business success.
3. Make Kingston an even greater place to start and grow a business.

"Owners get approached every day on ways to spend their money and have to sort out what is 'good to do' versus 'must do'. Our Chamber membership is absolutely worth keeping as it pushes us outside our bubble."

Chris Clarke
Patry Group of Companies

Actions

We have chosen three themes for the three years of this plan (2022, 2023, and 2024):

Year 1 Theme: Amplifying Our Voice

Year 2 Theme: Accelerated Growth

Year 3 Theme: Operational Excellence

Amplifying Our Voice

1. Strengthen our relationships with our elected officials and local stakeholders
2. Seek opportunities for regional collaboration with likeminded organizations
3. Craft plans, policies, and programs that guide our response to local issues of importance

Accelerated Growth

1. Cultivate community through programming that drives deeper connection both within the Chamber network and in the broader community
2. Grow and diversify revenue streams beyond membership and events
3. Break down silos, barriers, and other impediments to integration for newcomers to Kingston, start-ups and new entrepreneurs, and those from equity-seeking groups

Operational Excellence

1. Continue to evolve our digital platforms to create improved access to information and resources
2. Achieving sustained membership growth
3. Augment our programming with new opportunities that leverage technology and meet the needs of members

"The Chamber is going to be an important reconnector for people who have felt disconnected. This role, along with the information and help they provide, will be a critical tool for recovery."

Tim Pater
Black Dog Hospitality

Conclusion

One hundred and eighty-one years ago when the Chamber was created, we doubt any of its founders would have predicted what it would become today, nor the way Canada would start to come together as a nation three decades later, nor the way our country would evolve in the time since. It was a time of uncertainty.

We find ourselves in uncertain times again. We cannot predict how long recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic will last, nor what will come next. Governments will come and go, and priorities will wax and wane. The only constant is change.

No matter the circumstances, we know our role. We have survived uncertainty and adversity. Our members want and expect from us the same things they always have. Through this plan, and our actions in the coming years, we will champion their cause.

Join us today at kingstonchamber.ca.

Credits

Thank you to all of the individuals and organizations that helped shape our Strategic Plan, including all who completed the 2021 Member Survey.

Avenue Strategy

Barburrito

Barrie Chamber of Commerce

BDC

Black Dog Hospitality Group

BPE Group of Companies

Canadian Chamber of Commerce

City of Kingston

Cunningham Swan

Doornekamp Construction

Downtown Kingston! BIA

CFB Kingston

City of Kingston

Environmentall

Frontenac Business Services

The Frontenac Club

Gordon's Downsizing

Homestead Land Holdings

I2C Immigration Consulting

Kinarm

Kingston Accommodation Partners

Kingston Destination Group

Kingston Economic Development Corporation

K. Mulrooney Trucking

Make it Matter Media Inc.

McCoy Bus Service

Ontario Chamber of Commerce

Peterborough Chamber of Commerce

RBC

Smith School of Business

Sustainable Kingston

Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce

Weller Pharmacy

YMCA of Eastern Ontario