

Strathroy–Caradoc

State of Business Report

Based on SDCC “Business Voice” Survey March 2026



Prepared By:
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Strathroy & District Chamber of Commerce
March 2026

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Respondents

22

Biggest Challenges

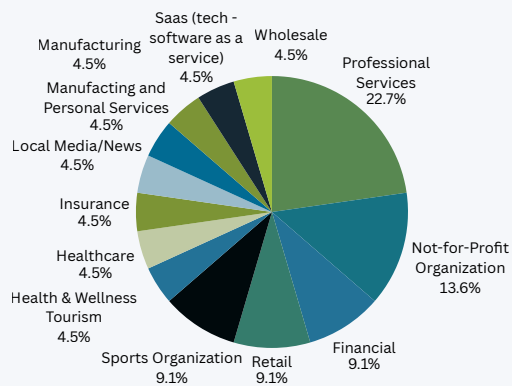
- 1. Economic Uncertainty**
- 2. Marketing & Visibility**

Other challenges include
rural location | internet reliability
affordable housing | donations & volunteers
parking & traffic | funding & red tape

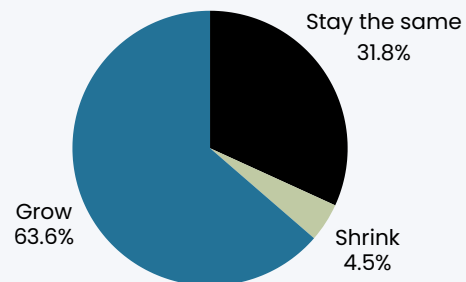
Business Environment Rating

7.5/10

Industries Represented



2026 Business Forecast



Opportunities for Improvement



Infrastructure & Development



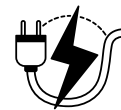
Housing & Workforce



Financial & Process Support



Community & Collaboration



Essential Utilities

"Investments in regional marketing, modern infrastructure, & streamlined processes are key to strengthening the local business environment."

— Donna Pammer, Executive Director

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The 2026 “Business Voice” Survey was distributed to all Strathroy & District Chamber of Commerce members and shared publicly online. Responses captured the voices of 22 individuals from a cross-section of local industries. While this represents only a small sample size, there is valuable insight from engaged local business owners and organizational leaders. These findings should be interpreted as a snapshot, offering directional trends rather than a statistically representative sample of all businesses in Strathroy–Caradoc.

When comparing the **Strathroy–Caradoc “Business Voice” Survey** results to the 10th annual **Ontario Economic Report (OER)** completed by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce in February 2026, several key trends emerge including: trade and tariff impact, cost of living, labour costs, and infrastructure deficits. While Strathroy–Caradoc businesses share many of the broader regional concerns, they also face localized challenges related to marketing and rural location.

The OCC’s Ontario Economic Report describes a provincial economy that is “stalled but stable” after years of successive shocks. Highlights of the report include:

- **Confidence Stagnation:** Business confidence in the Ontario economy sits at **23%** (down from 26% last year). Confidence is lowest among small businesses (**20%**).
- **Trade & Tariffs:** 2026 marks the first full year of major tariff impacts. **25% of firms** are increasing prices, and **22%** are diversifying suppliers to cope with trade volatility.
- **Growth & Labour:** Real GDP is projected to grow by **1.2%** in 2026. Unemployment remains high at **7.6%**, and **75% of businesses** cite the cost of living as their primary driver of pessimism.
- **Tech Adoption:** While **52% of firms** are adopting AI and emerging tech to solve labor gaps, high costs and infrastructure deficits remain barriers.

Reference: Ontario Economic Report 2026 <https://occ.ca/interactive-oer2026/>

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Biggest business challenges faced by respondents:

#1 Economic Uncertainty

Stemming from potential tariffs and the daily pressures of cost of living, uncertainty can stifle consumer spending. While we haven't suffered the industrial closures that have hit other towns, the 'fear of the unknown' is still a significant burden. Survey results highlight a call for a strategic shift in mindset: instead of focusing on what we might lose, we must begin to look for the opportunities that these economic changes are creating right here in Strathroy and District.

#2 Marketing & Visibility

In an era of rapid digital transformation, our local businesses are finding it increasingly difficult to cut through the noise and reach both long-standing residents and the influx of newcomers to our region. This local struggle aligns with a key finding in the 2026 OER: the critical need to 'strengthen domestic demand.' Businesses aren't just asking for help with advertising; they are calling for a coordinated, community-wide strategy.

#3 Other

Other challenges cited include rural location, internet reliability, affordable housing, donations & volunteers, parking & traffic, and funding & red tape.

Survey respondents highlighted several key challenges for businesses in Strathroy and District. Economic uncertainty (driven by tariffs and rising living costs) remains the top concern, underscoring the need for an opportunity-focused approach. Businesses also face marketing and visibility challenges in a fast-changing digital landscape, pointing to the need for coordinated, community-wide strategies. Other issues include rural location, internet reliability, affordable housing, donations and volunteers, parking and traffic, and navigating funding and regulatory processes.

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Opportunities for improvement:

Infrastructure & Development: Essential improvements include improving public transit, addressing traffic flow issues and pedestrian safety, completing major projects and continued downtown revitalization, and increasing downtown public parking,

Housing & Workforce: There is a critical need for affordable housing and more housing options to attract and retain families and support the workforce growth necessary for businesses to thrive.

Financial & Process Support: Small business grants to assist with hiring, removing “red tape” for developments, and streamlined municipal processes are seen as vital for improving the ease of doing business.

Community & Collaboration: Strengthening “Shop Local” marketing efforts would help both new and established businesses reach the growing population. Business owners emphasized the importance of networking and working more effectively with surrounding townships to achieve shared goals.

Essential Utilities: Improving basic infrastructure, specifically high-speed internet, is viewed as a necessary foundation for modern business operations.

The opportunities identified in the “Business Voice” survey form the foundation for specific recommendations to the local and provincial government. Strathroy & District can position for sustainable economic success through continued engagement between local businesses and government representatives.

Our recommendations call for collaboration to strengthen the local economy through strategic investment and policy improvements. Priorities include supporting a regional “Shop Local” campaign, investing in essential infrastructure such as high-speed internet and downtown enhancements, and streamlining regulations to reduce barriers for business and housing development. Together, these actions would improve workforce availability, support small businesses, and position the region for long-term economic growth.

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Recommendations from the Strathroy & District Chamber of Commerce:

#1: Strategic Investment in Regional 'Shop Local' Initiatives

All levels of government should collaborate (or provide financial support) for a robust, multi-channel 'Shop Local' campaign. This initiative is designed to bridge the visibility gap between our high-quality local offerings and a rapidly growing consumer base. By investing in this program, leadership will:

- **Enhance Market Visibility:** Provide small and mid sized businesses with the professional marketing reach necessary to compete with e-commerce and large urban centers.
- **Foster Regional Synergy:** Create a unified economic voice across Middlesex County, ensuring that both rural and urban businesses are integrated into a single, thriving ecosystem.
- **Cultivate Economic Optimism:** Shift the consumer and business mindset away from current uncertainties and toward a culture of local support and community pride.

#2: Foundational Infrastructure for Future Growth

All levels of government should prioritize capital investment in essential utilities and commercial-zone enhancements to maintain a competitive edge. To transition from 'resilience to renovation', the region requires a modernization of its physical and digital foundations. Key focus areas should include:

- **Digital Connectivity:** Fast-tracking the installation of high-speed fiber internet to allow local firms to adopt the productivity-boosting technologies (such as AI and cloud computing) highlighted in the 2026 OER.
- **Downtown & Commercial Vitality:** Sustaining downtown revitalization through strategic lighting, sidewalk repairs, and parking/traffic flow improvements. These 'ground-level' enhancements are critical for attracting external investment and increasing foot traffic for local businesses.

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#3: Regulatory Modernization & Workforce Accessibility

Streamline permitting processes and eliminate the 'red tape' that acts as a barrier to business expansion and housing development. A business-friendly climate requires a regulatory environment that moves at the speed of commerce.

- Reduce Administrative Barriers: Audit and simplify permitting processes to lower the 'soft costs' of doing business in the region.
- Unlock the Housing Market: Apply these streamlined processes to fast-track the development of attainable and diverse housing. By increasing the local housing stock, we transform a regional challenge into a distinct business advantage: a stable, local workforce that can afford to live in the community where they work.
- Provincial support for small businesses to assist with labour recruitment and training.


We would like to sincerely thank all survey respondents for sharing their insights and experiences, which have been invaluable in shaping this report. Their input provides a timely snapshot of the local business climate and highlights the opportunities and challenges facing the community. We present these findings and recommendations for government consideration, with the goal of supporting informed decision-making and fostering the continued growth and resilience of Strathroy & District's business community.

Questions, comments, or media inquiries can be directed to:

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