

Municipality of Brockton, Ontario



“We’re open for business”

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Municipality of Brockton

AT A GLANCE

MUNICIPALITY OF BROCKTON, ONTARIO

WHAT: A business-friendly, amalgamated community; population just under 10,000

WHERE: Bruce County, Ontario

WEBSITE: www.brockton.ca

A large, rectangular hay bale sits in the center of a field. The field is covered in tall, golden-brown grass. In the background, there are rolling hills and a line of trees under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The overall scene is peaceful and rural.

Brockton, Ontario

“We’re open for business”

Come home to community. That’s Municipality of Brockton’s slogan, and it’s one that’s demonstrated in every facet of life in this Ontario community through its rich and bustling business and recreational opportunities.

“Brockton is a very safe and welcoming community,” says Sonya Watson, the municipality’s Chief Administrative Officer. “It’s got that friendly small town feel. We have century old farms and long-standing businesses. Our unique downtown is

probably top of the list in Bruce County – people drive from different areas to visit and shop. The Saugeen and Teeswater rivers are a prominent feature of our landscape. And fishing, paddling, and tubing are some of our real highlights.”

Brockton’s heritage dates back more than 150 years. The municipality is made up of the townships of Brant and Greenock, which were incorporated in 1956, and the town of Walkerton, dating back to 1871. The trio amalgamated in 1999 to create the

MUNICIPALITY OF BROCKTON, ONTARIO

Municipality of Brockton. Today, the community is home to about 10,000 residents, but it's quickly growing. About half live in Walkerton.

Brockton is the agricultural epicentre of Ontario's Bruce County, generating more than \$84 million in gross farm receipts each year. "We're the biggest producer of agricultural goods and services – everything from cattle, dairy, sheep, and poultry to oilseed and grain," says Paulette Peirol, Brockton's Community Development Co-ordinator.

But it's not just agriculture that drives the economy. The area is centrally located, making it a great place to do business. Mayor Chris Peabody explains, "We are very strong in the agricultural businesses, but I like that we also have a diversified manufacturing sector as well as lucrative jobs from Bruce Power (Canada's only private-sector nuclear generator). If there are any economic downturns, we are somewhat insulated because of the diversified nature of our economy."

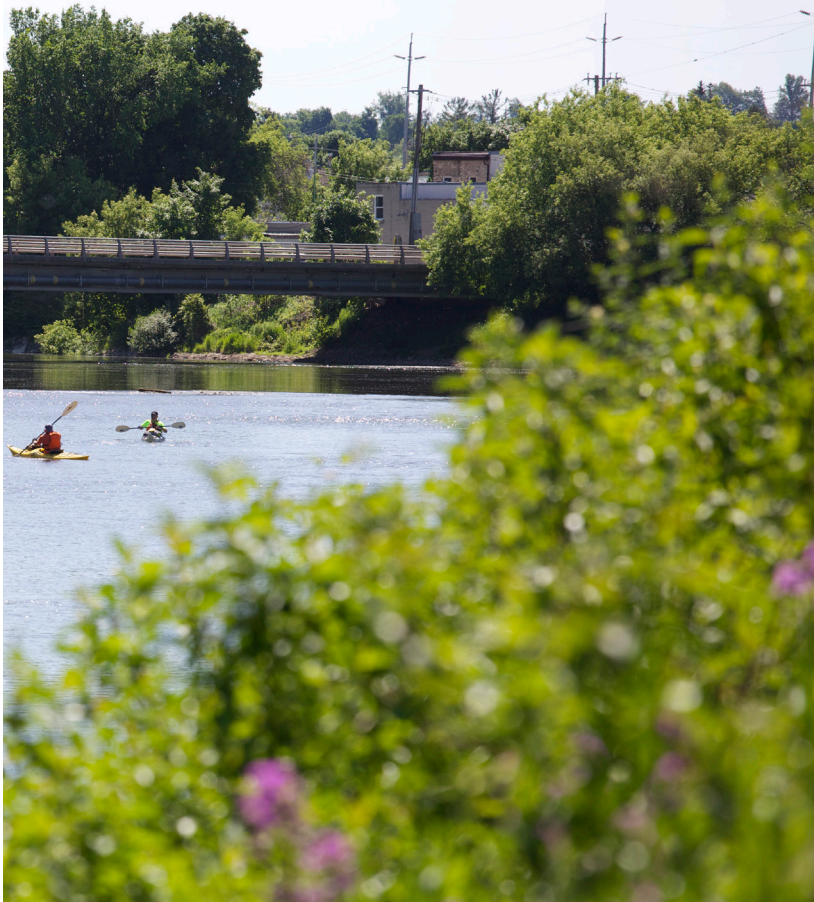
The municipality also includes a long-term care facility, retirement home, full-service hospital, municipal daycare centre, several libraries, and both public and separate (Catholic) school systems. It's also home to farmers' markets and roadside fruit and vegetable stands. And when it comes to recreation, the list is almost endless.

"We have lots of recreation opportunities, especially if you like the outdoors," says Peirol. In summer, visitors and residents enjoy fly-fishing, angling and paddling in the Saugeen and Teeswater rivers and take advantage of two golf courses, a municipal campground, outdoor pool and miles of biking, hiking and ATV trails. Come winter, there are indoor and outdoor skating rinks, fantastic snowmobile trails, curling and more. The municipality also has an airport!

"We are not far from the ski hills of Blue Mountain or the rocky escarpment of the Bruce



*Brockton Mayor Chris Peabody and
Chief Administrative Officer Sonya Watson*



Peninsula. And then there's Sauble Beach, the second-longest freshwater beach in the world. It's amazing how central we are to these natural assets!" Peirol adds.

The municipality's vast recreational opportunities and community focus are attracting lots of attention from residents of nearby cities like Kitchener-Waterloo and Guelph who are looking to relocate to smaller towns. This has increased since the COVID-19 pandemic forced many people to start working from home. "The exodus from these cities certainly began before COVID, but I think it's really accelerated everything, with people seeking a work-life balance and community values," says Peirol. "Walkerton fits the bill for them. They're discovering us and we're going full-steam ahead to meet that demand and it's going to continue."

Satisfying that demand includes increasing housing opportunities in the area. Currently, 500

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Natural Gas expansion announcement at Young Farms with MPP Lisa Thompson, MP Bill Walker and Mayor Chris Peabody to the right of the sign, and the Young family to the left. They are one of our largest agribusinesses, which will benefit from the provision of natural gas to power their grain driers.

units have been through the planning stages and are approved for development, and the municipality is working with a number of other developers on adding a variety of residential options, including some apartment rentals and homes suitable for retirees.

It has also secured a number of federal and provincial grants that will improve the services available to residents, particularly those outside the urban area of Walkerton. The grants include around \$4-million to provide high-speed rural broadband and \$20-million for 500 rural natural gas hookups, as well as funding for a bridge rehabilitation project in the hamlet of Chepstow.

The regional soccer park in Walkerton is also getting washrooms and concession stands. “We’re experiencing a real inflow of cash for different infrastructure projects,” says Peabody. “There’s all sorts of money flowing in and we’re putting it to good use. We’re really appreciative of our funding partners and our local MPPs and MP, and we are excited to see those projects being completed.”

The municipality is also servicing the remainder of its 157-acre East Ridge Business Park to meet increased demand from developers. The multi-million dollar project will see more than 70 acres of prime industrial land become available



East Ridge Business Park



in the next few years. The park is on County Road 4, the busiest highway in south Bruce-Grey, and less than a two-hour drive to major centres such as Toronto, Hamilton, and London.

Meantime, Brockton is working on a new strategic action plan, setting goals for the area to achieve by the year 2025. According to Watson, “We are currently going through the strategic planning process and it should be approved this summer. It will contain actions for the next five years with a lot of community input and looking at what council wants to prioritize. A lot of it is planning for the future and the growth that we are experiencing, as well as COVID recovery priorities and looking at how we can support our businesses in the immediate future.”

The pandemic, while challenging, didn’t hit Brockton’s economy as hard as some others. In fact, more than a dozen new businesses have been launched recently. This was in part because

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of the municipality's recovery program, initiated in the first months of the pandemic, which aimed to help keep people shopping locally and assist businesses transitioning to online services. But it was also due to Brockton's famous community spirit.

"We found a huge outpouring of support," says Peirol. "Our restaurants have been buoyed by large numbers of people ordering takeout. And our business community has banded together. At Christmastime there was a brief spell during the pandemic where they were able to open up and they had a outdoor Christmas market. It was the first time they had done that and it was very successful"

The municipality also opened a new parkette that provided picnic tables for people to sit outside and enjoy their takeout meals. "That is expanding to a full-scale beautiful parkette now," Peirol adds. "In the next year or so we hope to





have the Market Garden fully developed, with a small performing space, eating space and events space to support downtown businesses as well as visitors and shoppers.”

But it’s not just the small businesses that survived the war against COVID-19. A lot of Brockton’s larger businesses were deemed essential, so somewhat insulated from the changes in the economy, and many of them were busier than ever. Those essential businesses – which are among the municipality’s major employers – include Larsen & Shaw Ltd, which makes hinges for worldwide distribution, Price Schonstrom Inc., a welding fabrication company, the Bruce County government offices in Walkerton (the county seat), and the hospital.

While economically strong, the municipality – like so many others – is facing labor shortages. To combat this, it is looking at diversifying its workforce to attract new people to the



community. It has partnered with several economic development groups to work on diversity issues and offer language training and other incentives. Staff are also working with local colleges and a high school apprenticeship program to help provide more training locally to keep youth in the area.

Peabody notes, “We heard from our employers that they were having trouble retaining a skilled workforce in the trades and we are working with the school board and the apprenticeship co-ordinator to bring some college programs up here to Bruce County to allow the students to stay in the area while they work on their apprenticeships.” Success has already come from this approach, with Fanshawe College offering a partnership with the municipal daycare to provide an Early Childhood Education training program.

In addition to more labor, Brockton is also

looking to attract new businesses and suppliers, with land coming available in the East Ridge Business Park. “Being such a large producer of agricultural products, we’ve always been interested in attracting businesses in the value-added sector. They would always be welcome,” the Mayor says.

No matter who you are or what your business is, there’s always a place in Brockton. “I think we’ve got a warm and welcoming small-town atmosphere here that should attract families who would want to live here, as well as any investors who want to set up a business,” says Peabody. “We have a lot of serviced industrial land here and we are definitely open for business.”





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