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## Report 2025-031

**Report Title:** Planning, Economic Development & Strategic Initiatives Quarter 4, 2024 Update

**Committee Name:** Economic Development, Tourism and Planning

**Committee Meeting Date:** February 5, 2025

**Prepared by:** Dwayne Campbell  
Director  
Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Initiatives

**Approved by:** Jennifer Moore, CAO

**Council Meeting Date:** February 19, 2025

**Strategic Plan Priorities:**  Innovate for Service Excellence  
 Ignite Economic Opportunity  
 Foster a Thriving Community  
 Propel Sustainable Growth  
 Champion a Vibrant Future

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### Information Report

“That the Economic Development, Tourism and Land Use Planning Committee receive Report 2025-031 ‘Planning, Economic Development & Strategic Initiatives Department Quarter 4, 2024 Update’ for information; and

Further That the Committee recommend that County Council receive this report for information.”

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### Purpose

This report summarizes activities in the Planning, Economic Development and Strategic Initiatives Department in the fourth quarter of 2024.

### Background

The Planning, Economic Development and Strategic Initiatives Department is comprised of 7 service areas as follows:

- Business and Entrepreneurship Centre Northumberland (BECN)

- Economic Development
- Inspection Services
- Ontario Agri-Food Venture Centre (OAFVC)
- Land Use Planning
- Settlement Services
- Tourism

A high-level summary of the recent activities for each service area is provided in the discussion section below.

## **Consultations**

Various consultations occur on a regular basis with member municipalities in each service area and other joint departmental groups to ensure any opportunities for efficiencies and collaboration are explored and pursued.

## **Legislative Authority / Risk Considerations**

Department activities are conducted in compliance with all relative legislation and agreements.

## **Discussion / Options**

### Business and Entrepreneurship Centre Northumberland (BECN)

**Women’s Entrepreneurship Programming** - The 2nd Annual She Owns It Conference took place on November 7th, welcoming 150 attendees, an increase from the inaugural event in 2023. Building on this success and brand, a hands-on, interactive workshop is scheduled for March 27th, designed to offer participants practical learning experiences focused on marketing strategies and business finance to support entrepreneurial growth.

**Starter Company** - Fall intake opened in November for businesses in operation for 6 months plus. A total of 38 applicants were received and 20 were approved for up to \$3,500 in microgrant funds for a combined total of \$41,750 in grant funds distributed. The next intake will take place March/April 2025.

**Potential Shared Services** - In December we had discussions with Cramahe Township and their economic development committee about working together to help increase small business services. Details on this pilot program will be available in early 2025.

**Youth Programs** - We are expanding our youth entrepreneurship programs through a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Junior Achievement Northern and Eastern Ontario (JA-NEO). JA is a leading organization dedicated to inspiring and preparing youth in Grades 3 to 12 for success by offering programs in financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and real-world readiness skill development. Our first collaborative initiative is the “JA BECN FemSTEAM She Owns It Youth Event” in 2025.

**Technology Enhancement for Efficiency** – Introduced text messaging communication to make it easier for clients to book consultations, receive appointment reminders, and stay informed with important updates and notices. Additionally, implemented a digital video interview platform to streamline the grant application process, allowing applicants to submit responses more efficiently and making the overall intake process smoother and more accessible.

## Economic / Community Development

- After several discussions and a site visit, the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation, and Trade, and INVEST Ontario have added the Employment Lands at Hwy 401 and Hwy 28 to their official inventory of available Industrial Sites. This roster is used by the Minister to promote Ontario on his International Trade missions.
- The OPG lands in Wesleyville are one of three sites in the province that have been identified as a potential site for new electricity production. There is a \$30M fund attached to this designation for infrastructure development that will contribute to economic development in the surrounding community.
- Project Flow, an EV Battery project has been put on hold. The proponent was looking to purchase land in Hamilton Township. Despite the hold on the project, the land seller is proceeding with a land severance that will create a new 45 acre parcel of industrial property that will be available for development in the future.
- A solar farm has expressed interest in establishing themselves in Hamilton Township. Meetings have occurred between the proponent and Township staff and elected officials. Township support is required for any project to move forward.
- Northumberland Workforce Housing Corporation contracts and marketing tools have been created and a roster of development partners has been established in anticipation of a 2025 project launch.
- Negotiation continued with our private partners in the broadband project. In anticipation of a positive outcome, Municipal Access agreements have been created by the County and local Works Departments. These agreements are expected to be signed in early 2025. A tour of County roads was provided by the County Works department for the contractor chosen to build the fiber network in an effort to ensure they understood the conditions under which they will be building and the requirements to access County right-of-ways.

## Inspection Services

In accordance with long-standing agreements, County Inspection Services administers and enforces the sewage and plumbing system parts of the Building Code on behalf of member municipalities. In Q4 of 2024, Inspection Services issued 38 septic permits for an annual total of 180. (By comparison, there were 160 septic permits issued in 2023). Inspection Services received 119 plumbing permits in Q4, for an annual total of 531. (By comparison, there were 834 plumbing permits received in 2023).

Table: Number of Sewage Permits

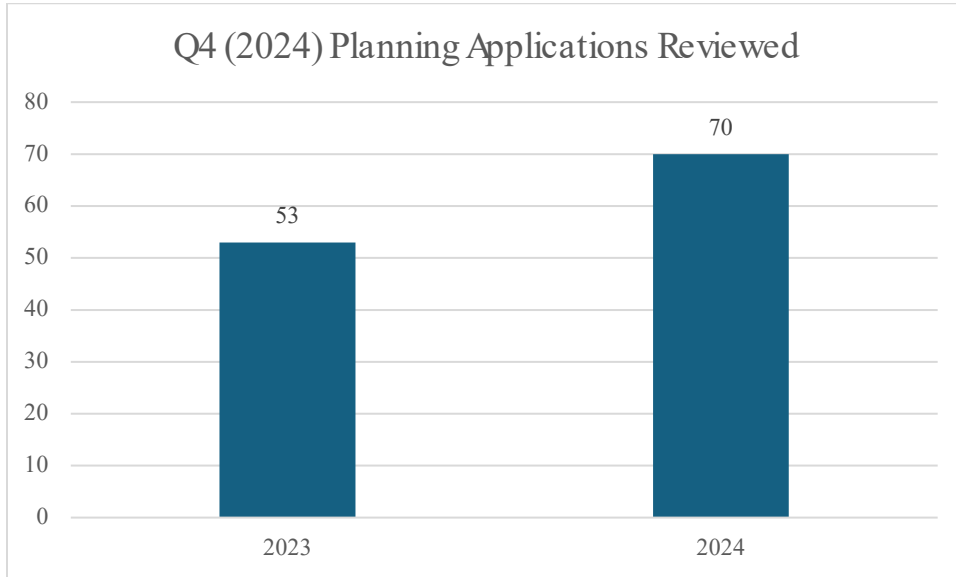
<b>2024</b>	AH	BR	CO	CR	HA	PH	TH	<b>Total</b>
Q1	8	7	0	5	7	1	-	<b>28</b>
Q2	18	9	0	9	22	6	-	<b>64</b>
Q3	14	6	1	5	19	5	-	<b>50</b>
Q4	7	6	1	9	10	5	-	<b>38</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>17</b>	-	<b>180</b>

Table: Number of Plumbing Permits

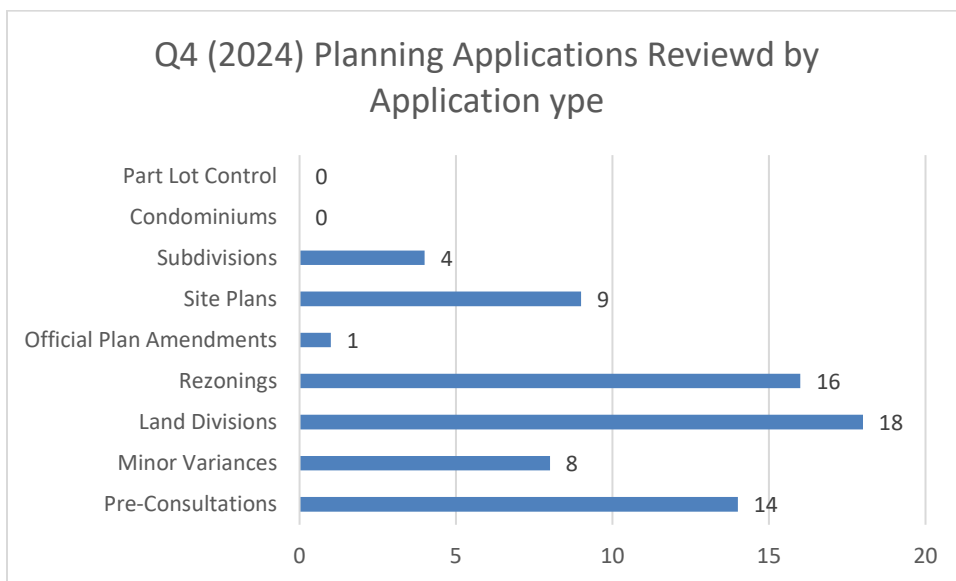
<b>2024</b>	<b>AH</b>	<b>BR</b>	<b>CO</b>	<b>CR</b>	<b>HA</b>	<b>PH</b>	<b>TH</b>	<b>Total</b>
Q1	1	7	32	6	8	16	14	<b>84</b>
Q2	33	25	39	9	15	11	30	<b>162</b>
Q3	19	20	28	16	14	26	43	<b>166</b>
Q4	13	31	23	8	7	13	24	<b>119</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>531</b>

Land Use Planning

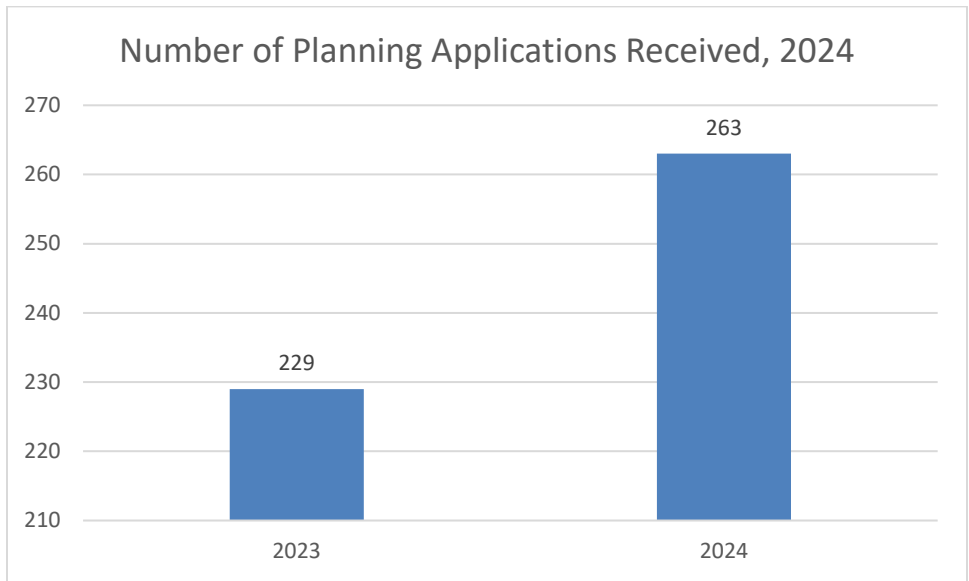
In the fourth quarter of 2024, County Planning received 70 development applications for review and comment (By comparison, 53 applications were reviewed in same quarter in 2023)



Land Division applications accounted for the highest number of applications (18) reviewed, followed by zoning by-law amendment / rezoning applications (16) and pre-consultation requests (14).



Throughout 2024, County Planning received 263 applications, an increase of approximately 15 per cent over the number of applications received in 2023.



Overall land division applications accounted for the most applications received by County Planning in 2024 (78), followed by zoning amendments (63) and minor variance applications (36).



It is noted that despite the *Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act* (Bill 185), which made development pre-consultations optional in 2024, proponents are still interested to regularly pre-consult with Land Use Planners across the County to discuss development proposals prior to submitting a planning application.

**Ontario Agri Food Venture Centre (OAFVC)**

In the fourth quarter of 2024, OAFVC assisted over 40 food businesses. The Centre gained four new Consumer Packaged Goods clients, and the OAFVC team helped launch 7 new Made-in-Ontario products. Q4 presented a record increase (30%) in food processing shifts booked

October through December when compared with the previous 3-year average. In Q4, clients' businesses made approximately \$700,000 of Made-in Ontario products at the OAFVC.

In response to client demand, and in collaboration with the Facilities Team, a fourth high-hygiene production room was opened for rent in October. November saw processing area floors resurfaced, after 10 years of wear-and-tear, to improve 'grippiness' (a key safety feature in food production.) The OAFVC team took advantage of the requirement for empty floor spaces to convert the lab/multi-purpose room into a New Production Room, the Centre's fifth income-generating high-hygiene shared-use food processing room.

The Centre has continued to see increasing numbers of inquiries from food business owners seeking to operate with a SFCR license. In anticipation of this change in market demand, OAFVC began implementing policies and procedures in 2023 to facilitate the transition into a federally inspected and licensed food processing facility. In 2024 OAFVC supported clients through, and participated in, not less than 4 Food Safety Audits, 2 taking place in Q4. The first client Food Safety Audit for 2025 has already taken place, and demand is expected to continue to grow as retailer and distributor expectations increase.

Year-end summary:

- OAFVC supported 75 businesses through 2024; 27% County-based
  - *Another* food entrepreneur relocated to Northumberland from the GTA to take better advantage of OAFVC supports.
- Of OAFVC's 2024 Top Ten clients, 50% are Northumberland County-based businesses.
- Year-end sales reports show the OAFVC invoiced 105% of services invoiced in 2023, and surpassed 2022's record to become the Centre's new *best-yet* year.
- 2025 clients have already doubled the record for number of production shifts booked in January

### Settlement Services

Settlement Services plays a crucial role in supporting newcomers to the County. By providing a wide range of services, including language training, employment assistance, and community integration programs, they help individuals and families join the community.

- 45 clients served during Q4
- 23 clients registered in the OAFVC / IRCC Newcomers Food Entrepreneur program

### Tourism

- 111,676 Visitor Newsletters sent with an average open rate of 43.1% and a click rate of 4.2% and promoted a total of 601 events in 2024.
- 6,233 Tourism Industry Newsletters sent with an open rate of 52% and a click rate of 6.0%.
- The average tourism industry email rates at the end of 2024 showed an open rate of 32.22% and a click rate of 1.16%. (per Constant Contact)
- Organically increased social media audience across all platforms by 2.2% to 28,447 followers:
  - 105,103 video views
  - 228.9% increase in published posts
  - 97.7% increase in engagement rate
  - Over 2,500 promotional mentions of Northumberland-based businesses

### *Do Something Delicious Campaign*

- Northumberland Tourism participated in the Culinary Tourism Alliance's 2024 Do Something Delicious campaign. Northumberland County was represented in two thematic blog articles supported by a paid spend on Facebook, Instagram and Google Discovery by Destination Ontario.
- Overall results for the campaign consisted of 6,875,135 ad impressions, an average ad click to landing rate of 88% and a total 71,084 landing page visits. Landing page engagement rate across both flights was 10.5% and over 1 minute of time spent on page.

### *Where you Land Campaign*

- Northumberland Tourism created [a series of six 30-second videos](#) based on the premise of "Where you land... makes all the difference" to run during the YouTube broadcast for the Innova Rip – the only Canadian qualifying event for the 2024 Professional Disc Golf Association Championship. Videos have been viewed a total of 193,000 times to date.

### *Ontario by Bike Webinar*

- Through our ongoing partnership with Ontario by Bike, Northumberland Tourism hosted 'Destination Bike, Welcoming Cyclists in Northumberland County', a webinar for local businesses to learn more about the process and economic benefits of becoming 'Bike Friendly Business' certified. Eight new businesses completed the process to become designated as Bike Friendly Businesses for a total of 53 (above the average of 41 in each of the 30 other Ontario destinations).

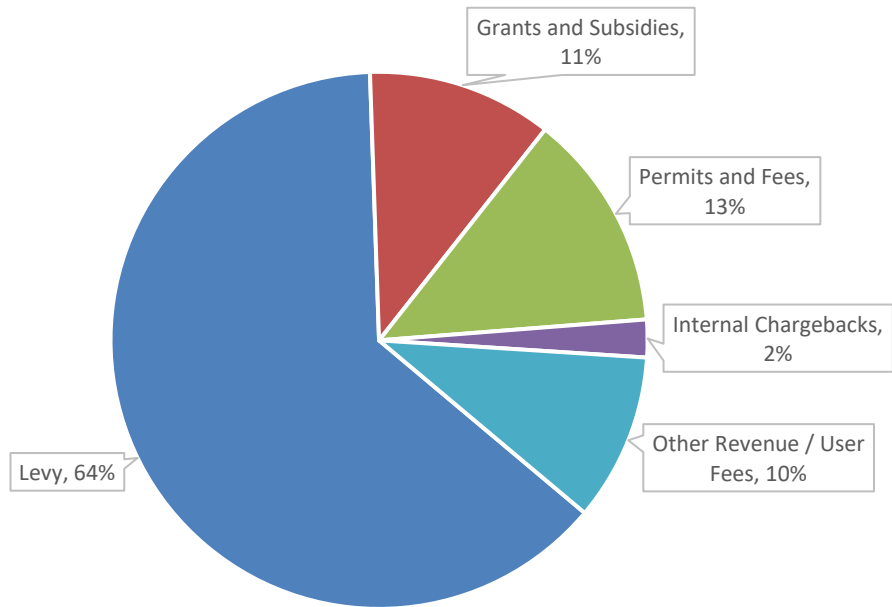
### *Earned Media*

- Northumberland Tourism connected with writer Benoît Legault who wrote a [5-page article in the September 2024 issue of French magazine Camping Caravaning](#) highlighting attractions and camping opportunities across Northumberland County.

### **Financial Impact**

The operating budgets in the Department total \$5,048,180 funded from various sources. Refer to the table below for a snapshot of budget revenues for 2024.

**Department Funding - 2024 Budget**  
**\$5.05 M**



**Member Municipality Impacts**

N/A

**Conclusion / Outcomes**

To maintain trust, confidence and transparency in the stewardship of public funds, this report provides a summary of the Planning, Economic Development and Strategic Initiatives Department's activity for the fourth quarter of 2024.

**Attachments**

N/A