

An aerial photograph of a town at sunrise. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow over the landscape. In the foreground, there is a large, modern building complex with multiple wings and a parking lot. A white semi-truck is driving on a road in the lower right. The background shows rolling hills and distant towns under a clear sky.

# *Township of* Wellesley, Ontario

Growing stronger, responsibly

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# *To* Wellesley, Ont





# Township of Ontario

## Growing stronger, responsibly

**T**he Township of Wellesley is a picturesque rural community that prides itself on its environmentally progressive practices and strongly connected community members. The township in the Region of Waterloo is a stone's throw away from the hustle and bustle of Ontario's tech and biotech industry, driven by major academic centres in Kitchener-Waterloo. Although residents of Wellesley take advantage of the urban center's amenities, they enjoy working and living a slower pace in one of the many communities that make-up the township.

Township Mayor Joe Nowak takes pride in the municipality and knows that anyone who enjoys the outdoors, scenic rolling hills and valleys, working the land, homesteading, or just living a more relaxed life loves spending time in the township. He shares, "It is very rich in fertile lands. Our urban footprint in Wellesley Township is approximately 2% of the total land area. We've got great forests and lots of natural landscape. It's a beautiful place. If you're a hunter, you're a fisherman, you're a bird watcher; there's just about something for everyone. It's a great community."

Wellesley Township is an amalgamation of several small communities with rich histories dating back to pre-confederate Canada. Those communities include the Village of Wellesley, St. Clements, Hawkesville, Linwood, Bamberg, Dorking, Heidelberg, Kingwood, Wallenstein, and Paradise Lake. Several of those hamlets have historic buildings that are still in use today, including the Wellesley Public Library in the former Wellesley

### AT A GLANCE

## TOWNSHIP OF WELLESLEY, ONTARIO

<b>WHAT:</b>	A small urban/rural municipality; population approx. 11,400
<b>WHERE:</b>	Region of Waterloo in southwestern Ontario
<b>WEBSITE:</b>	<a href="http://www.wellesley.ca">www.wellesley.ca</a>



Township Public School building, which was constructed in 1898.

Approximately 11,400 residents call Wellesley Township home. That number has been very slowly increasing because more than 90% of the over 100 square kilometer municipality is prime and protected agricultural land. Nowak doesn't see the region changing that, but the township has spent many months advocating for increased employment lands to add to their complement of industrial businesses.

Many of the farms are run by the thriving local Mennonite community. They also operate successful farm shops, which produce and fabricate parts for companies all across Canada and the United States. According to Nowak, "There are more than 300 such shops in the township and many Help Wanted signs offering lots of opportunities. The Region of Waterloo is in the process of redoing their official plan right now, so we've been pressing them to add more employment lands for us out here."

A successful industrial park in the Village of St. Clements is nearly full, with two vacant lots. There are other industrial areas in Hawkesville, as well as in Wellesley Village which is where the township hopes to expand employment.

Nowak doesn't categorize the township as the traditional definition of a bedroom community, but many people who are working remotely have relocated to the township since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic because of the combination of a rural feel and the proximity to a larger urban center. Most of the villages have high speed internet connections, not all are fiber, but the Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology (SWIFT) expansion program will increase fiber coverage in 2022 and it is hopeful that the Universal Broadband Fund will further expand fiber in the near future.

When it comes to residential development,



Nowak asserts, "The houses that come up for sale on the market right now, they really don't last long. It's well noted that there is a big push for people getting out of the city and coming to the small communities." Currently, the township has three projects on the go to help alleviate the housing crunch in the Wellesley area, one is a 180-unit building, another includes 50 townhouses, and a third with 25 townhomes. "Unless the region changes its plans, that's about as much as we can expand," says Nowak. "That's probably the extent of the growth that we are going to see for some time. We have our constraints with services, with the sewage plant, and that sort of thing."

Education-wise, the township has several elementary schools, Mennonite schools, and a private trades school in Hawkesville, but students are bused into surrounding communities for secondary school. Residents of the township are about a 10-minute drive to the University of Waterloo, Laurier University,



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Greenwood Hill Road, Wellesley



*Mayor, Joe Nowak*





Conestoga College, and other institutions in Kitchener-Waterloo.

When it comes to infrastructure, the municipality is working to improve road quality with a continuous repaving schedule, and in 2023 they will take on a \$2.5 million project to completely reconstruct Queen's Bush Road in the Village of Wellesley. That will include new storm sewer management systems.

A project near and dear to the township that brought community members together like never before is the new recreation complex. In 2019, the current complex in the Village of Wellesley was shuttered due to safety concerns stemming from problems with the roof. Nowak recalls, "It was a very difficult decision, and caused a lot of anxiety in the community, but it caused something wonderful. It was just amazing the way the community rallied behind us, as we started to look for options moving forward."

The municipality decided not to waste money trying to fix the 45-year-old building and harkened back to the 2014 Recreation and Culture Master Plan that pointed out many things the township was lacking, including soccer fields, skateboard parks, trails, and other amenities. The community is now helping to design and fundraise for the new recreation complex. The township council is in the preliminary stages of choosing one of the finished design concepts and the \$22 million project has gone out for bid – scheduled to break ground in April 2022. The Province of Ontario funded \$16 million and the community is working to raise the remaining \$6 million.

When completed the new recreation complex will include a gymnasium, fitness facilities, an NHL-sized hockey rink with seating for 500, a skateboard park, a youth center, commercial kitchen, walking tracks, seniors' active living center, and much more. Nowak boasts, "It's exciting... it's transformational. It's going to



turn this community into something even more special than it already is!”

As a rural township, Wellesley is forward-thinking from an environmental perspective. They have solar panels installed on many of the municipal buildings, including arenas, community centers, and municipal administration building. All street and arena lighting was converted to LED. They declared a climate emergency and are working with Sustainable Waterloo Region to actively reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. Rik Louwagie, Chief Administrative Officer, acknowledges, “Sustainable Waterloo is a very strong partner. They provide us with expertise and assistance in figuring out how we can reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and what we can do to better the environment as well.”

They have introduced a special tax levy to help add to the tree canopy in the township and for two years have provided more than 1,200



*Rik Louwagie, Chief Administrative Officer*




trees annually to residents. The Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) supplies the township with trees like cedar, sugar maple, White Oak, Red Maple, and White Spruce at a reduced cost. The GRCA also gives grants to improve the water quality through a partnership with farmers, the conservation authority, and the region. Nowak notes, "There is pond in Wellesley and because of the program that they initiated, the water that's coming into that pond now is probably cleaner than it's ever been, so they've been a great organization to work with." The GRCA also stocks their portion of the Conestogo River with trout annually.

The township is also looking into more solar projects, electric vehicle charging stations, and when the new arena is built they will completely utilize electric ice resurfacing.

In the coming years, Nowak hopes to add to the Township's complement of seniors housing, so



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each community can support a local seniors facility. He also looks forward to finishing the recreation complex and he's interested in finding out what the community wants to do with the former arena facility.

Louwagie has his own goals for the future of Wellesley Township. He wants to see a firm commitment to development for both residential and commercial lands in the township, and he hopes to have a firm plan to continue reducing their emissions and operate sustainably. He shares, "I'd also like to see the energy and community togetherness that came from the arena continue. What we're working toward is really uniting the entire township. We have some current silos of individual communities and we're just trying to bring that all together into one united township. That, in my opinion, will continue to make the township and its residents stronger."

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## PREFERRED VENDORS/PARTNERS

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