

LAKE OF BAYS

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN

Prepared by Oosterbaan Strategy & KLB Consulting



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Land Acknowledgement

For more than 15,000 years, Indigenous peoples have walked upon, and cared for, the lands we now call home: the Anishinaabeg (Ojibway and Chippewa), Haudenosaunee, and many others who cared for their families and communities, the way we now seek to care for ours.

We acknowledge that we do work as uninvited guests on the traditional lands of Indigenous peoples. Specifically, the Muskoka area is home to three sovereign Nations – Wahta Mohawks First Nation, Moose Deer Point First Nation and the Moon River Métis. We would also like to acknowledge the Williams Treaty (of 1923), the Robinson Huron Treaty of 1850 and the J. Collins land purchase (of 1785) and respect all of the Nation-to-Nation agreements that have formed relationships with the original inhabitants of Turtle Island; the reality of our shared history; the current contributions of Indigenous people within our community and seek to continue empowering expressions of pride amongst all of the diverse stakeholders in this area.

We extend our gratitude to all Indigenous peoples and their descendants, past, present and future, who continue to care for and inhabit these lands and tend these waters. We seek to do better, to continue to recognize, learn, and grow, in friendship and community, Nation-to-Nation.

As a government serving the needs of our community, we embrace the responsibility to help ensure that our current residents and the next generations of business owners, citizens and visitors are respectful and grateful for the bounty of this land on which we all live, work, play, and study.

We commit to continue to explore and make meaningful contributions to the Calls to Action that result from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), including inclusive and meaningful economic prosperity for Indigenous peoples in the Township of Lake of Bays.

The Township of Lake of Bays has their own Land Acknowledgement statement, which can be found here: lakeofbays.civicweb.net/document/89838/.



Executive Summary

The Township of Lake of Bays has developed a comprehensive 5-Year Economic Development Strategy to enhance the community's quality of life, support businesses, and attract visitors, while maintaining environmental sustainability. This strategic plan is grounded in extensive community engagement and analysis, making it well-informed and responsive to the needs of the residents and businesses in Lake of Bays. It is focused on fostering complementary and value-added business retention and development and making the community a great place to live, work, play, and do business.

The plan provides a clear framework for the Township to address current challenges and seize future opportunities. Over the next five years, it will provide a guide for decision-making, budgeting, and planning initiatives related to economic development in the Township. It will also empower staff to advance organizational priorities, build community partnerships, enhance internal capacity, and efficiently allocate resources.

The strategic planning process was thorough, incorporating secondary research and engaging with community stakeholders, businesses, and the public. It included a review of key background documents, an analysis of regional industry trends, and examination of socioeconomic and demographic factors impacting business development.

The engagement phase included surveys, interviews, small groups discussions, social media feedback opportunities, and public workshops to gather insights from a diverse range of viewpoints in the community. This comprehensive approach ensured that the strategic plan reflected the collective ambitions and aspirations of the Lake of Bays community.

Key Findings and Recommendations

The 5-Year Economic Development Strategy presents a comprehensive roadmap for Lake of Bays' economic development activities in the coming years. Key findings from the engagement process highlight the need for enhanced business support, strategic investment, and enhanced quality of place to support resident engagement and tourism. Recommendations include fostering business-friendly policies, developing strategic communications and marketing initiatives, and supporting sustainable tourism and community development.

By focusing on these areas, Lake of Bays aims to foster a thriving, sustainable community that balances growth with environmental stewardship, enhancing the quality of life for all residents and visitors. The Strategy sets the stage for sustained growth, community impact, and economic resilience in Lake of Bays.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Enhance the Operating Environment for Businesses

- A** Enhance communication and build a two-way relationship between the Township and the business community.
- B** Support entrepreneurship in the community, especially for youth.
- C** Enhance connection between businesses in Lake of Bays.
- D** Improve awareness of businesses in the community.
- E** Support workforce development and attraction within the Township.

Goal 2: Attract, Support, and Retain Strategic Investment

- A** Adopt a business-friendly attitude, where it aligns with the vision and needs of the community.
- B** Better communicate Township planning and development processes and successes.
- C** Attract investment to Lake of Bays that provides high-quality employment and is complementary to the community's industrial strengths, opportunities, and values to enhance quality of life.
- D** Enable the development of workforce attainable housing.
- E** Work with partners to develop local transportation solutions.
- F** Support and promote regional economic development efforts that align with the Township's strategic goals.

Goal 3: Develop Lake of Bays as a Destination for Residents and Visitors

- A** Enhance the quality of place and space in the four hamlets of Lake of Bays.
- B** Increased day and overnight visitors to Lake of Bays and maximize their community impact while protecting the natural environment.

Introduction

The purpose of this Economic Development 5-Year Strategy is to provide a comprehensive roadmap for fostering economic growth and development within the Township of Lake of Bays. It serves to guide the Administration and Council on economic development initiatives, opportunities for growth, and how to create a vibrant economic landscape within the Township while keeping in mind the social, cultural, and environmental fabric of its communities.

This strategy was developed with the following goals in mind:

- 1 Identify Opportunities and Challenges:** Assessing the community's current economic landscape, including strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, to understand the local economy's dynamics.
- 2 Attract, Retain, and Expand Businesses:** Develop strategies to attract new businesses and industries to the area while retaining and supporting the sustainable growth of existing businesses.
- 3 Enhance the Tourism Sector and Attract Visitors:** Enhance the tourism product, and packaging and promotion of it within Lake of Bays.
- 4 Enhance Quality of Life:** Integrate economic development efforts with initiatives to improve the quality of life for residents, such as improving community amenities, housing, and recreational opportunities.
- 5 Promote Workforce Development:** Enhance the skills and capabilities of the local workforce to meet the needs of employers and support sustainable economic growth.
- 6 Encourage Investment:** Create a favourable environment for investment by improving infrastructure, streamlining the regulatory process, and offering incentives to attract investors.
- 7 Foster Collaboration:** Promote collaboration among local government, businesses, educational institutions, and other stakeholders to leverage resources and expertise for economic development.
- 8 Sustainability:** Ensure that economic growth is sustainable and environmentally responsible, balancing development with the preservation of natural resources and community character.

Further, the Strategy establishes goals that align with the community's vision for economic prosperity and provides performance measurement indicators that allows the Township to track progress towards the strategic goals and objectives, allowing for adjustments and improvements over time.

The Role of Economic Development

Economic development is a multifaceted process aimed at improving the economic well-being and quality of life for a community. It involves the concerted efforts of policymakers, businesses, and other stakeholders to create and maintain conditions that foster economic growth, innovation, and sustainable development. In rural communities, economic development is particularly crucial as these areas often face unique challenges such as limited infrastructure, lower population density, and reduced access to resources and services, as is the case in Lake of Bays. In order to provide context to the strategy and the role of the Township, this section provides some additional context around the role of economic development. Some of the key roles of economic development include:

- **Job Creation:** One of the primary goals of economic development is to generate employment opportunities. By attracting new businesses and supporting existing ones, communities can create jobs, which in turn improves the standard of living and reduces poverty.
- **Business Attraction and Retention:** Economic developers work to attract new businesses to a community while also supporting the growth and retention of existing businesses. This involves providing incentives, reducing regulatory barriers, and offering technical assistance.
- **Enhancing Quality of Life:** Economic development efforts aim to improve the overall quality of life by promoting healthcare, housing, recreation, and cultural opportunities. A better quality of life attracts and retains residents and businesses.
- **Infrastructure Improvement:** Economic development initiatives often focus on enhancing infrastructure, such as transportation, communication networks, and utilities. Improved infrastructure facilitates business operations, attracts investment, and enhances the overall quality of life for residents.
- **Skill Development and Education:** Investing in education and workforce training is critical for economic development. By equipping residents with the necessary skills, communities can ensure that their workforce meets the needs of local employers, fostering economic growth and reducing unemployment.

Economic developers are professionals dedicated to promoting economic growth and improving the economic health of a community. Their roles and responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- **Community Engagement and Partnership:** They work closely with local stakeholders, including government officials, business leaders, business development and employment organizations, educational institutions, and residents, to build consensus, support, and partnership for economic development initiatives.

- **Project Management:** Economic developers manage various projects aimed at boosting economic activity, such as business development programming, infrastructure improvements, and workforce development programs. They ensure projects are completed on time and within budget.
- **Marketing and Promotion:** They promote their community as an attractive location for business investment, residents, and visitors. This involves developing marketing materials, promoting the community, and networking with potential investors.
- **Resource Coordination:** Economic developers identify and secure funding from various sources, including federal and provincial grants, and public-private partnerships. They ensure that resources are efficiently allocated to maximize economic impact.
- **Policy Advocacy:** They advocate for policies that support economic growth, such as tax incentives, regulatory reforms, and investment in infrastructure and education. They work with local, provincial, and federal governments, as well as partners and stakeholders, to create a favourable business environment.

Rural communities face specific challenges that require tailored economic development strategies. These include:

- **Limited Access to Capital:** Rural areas often struggle with access to financial resources. Economic developers in these regions work to identify funding opportunities and create financial incentives to attract investment.
- **Workforce Development:** With often lower educational attainment and fewer training opportunities, rural areas need focused efforts to improve education and skills training. Economic developers collaborate with schools, colleges, and vocational programs to enhance workforce readiness.
- **Infrastructure Deficiencies:** Many rural communities lack the necessary infrastructure to support modern businesses. Economic developers prioritize infrastructure projects that improve transportation, broadband access, and utilities.
- **Economic Diversification:** Rural economies are often reliant on a few industries, such as agriculture or manufacturing. Economic developers aim to diversify the economic base by promoting sectors like tourism, renewable energy, and technology.
- **Retention of Talent:** Retaining young people and skilled workers is a significant challenge. Economic developers create opportunities and improve the quality of life to make rural areas more attractive places to live and work.

By addressing these challenges, economic developers play a crucial role in fostering sustainable economic growth and improving the quality of life in rural communities. Their efforts are vital to ensuring that these areas can thrive and compete in an increasingly globalized economy.

Methodology

The development of the Lake of Bays 5-Year Economic Development Strategy involved an in-depth background document review, analysis of Statistics Canada and local labour market data, and consultation with the community, including social media questions, a survey, interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders and businesses, and two public meetings. Background documents that were reviewed included:

- A Tapestry of Place: Culture Strategy
- Lake of Bays Community Improvement Plan
- Parks, Open Spaces, and Recreation Strategy
- Dorset Waterfront Plan and Downtown Study
- Official Plan
- Muskoka Second Home Study
- Muskoka Workforce Development Strategy
- Lake of Bays 2017 Economic Development Strategy

There were 7 questions posed to the community to collect information about their economic development needs and insights. The survey, also collecting information on economic development needs and insights, received 275 responses from residents, seasonal residents, businesses, and local organizations. Twelve in-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders and businesses. There were over 40 attendees who attended the public consultation sessions in both Baysville and Dwight.

Participation from the business community, however, was a challenge, which provides insight into the current state of economic development at the municipality. Of 57 businesses contacted, on several occasions, to participate across 6 business focus groups, only 7 businesses participated. Two of the focus groups were added on due to low participation and utilized availability polls to find the most suitable time, and even then, only 3 of 8 who indicated they were available for the selected times chose to participate, potentially pointing to low levels of engagement between the Township and the business community.

It should be noted that much of the data summarized below under key themes were derived from the survey, social media responses, interviews, consultations, and focus groups. Thus, they reflect the personal perspectives and experiences of those who chose to participate in the process and may not be reflective of the views of the wider community or the actual practices of the Township. For example, several had concerns regarding the length of time for planning approvals, but through the Township's Community Planning Permit process the approvals process is streamlined, making it a speedier and simpler process than most others in Ontario.

Community Assets and Stakeholders

Location and Geography

The Township of Lake of Bays is a picturesque rural community known for its natural beauty and vibrant four-season activities, located in the northeastern part of Muskoka, just east of Huntsville. Situated beside the renowned Algonquin Provincial Park, Lake of Bays boasts over 100 lakes and encompasses a land area of approximately 667.5 km². The Township includes the charming hamlets of Baysville, Dorset, Dwight, and Hillside, offering a mix of rural areas, waterfronts, Crown land, and Provincial parkland.

As part of the District Municipality of Muskoka, Lake of Bays is only three hours north of Toronto, making it an ideal destination for both permanent residents and seasonal visitors. With a year-round population of 3,759, the Township provides a blend of outdoor recreational opportunities, specialty shops, and restaurants, catering to cottagers and travelers seeking a serene summer retreat or a winter wonderland. Lake of Bays' proximity to major cities, including being 1.5 hours south of North Bay, 3 hours north of Toronto, and 3.5 hours west of Ottawa, enhances its appeal as a premier destination in Ontario.

Baysville

Located on the southern shore of Lake of Bays, Baysville is renowned for its picturesque scenery, quaint atmosphere, and vibrant community. The hamlet offers recreational activities, specialty shops and restaurants, and is home to popular attractions, including Lake of Bays Brewing Company, Bigwin Island Golf Club, Lake of Bays Community Centre Arena, etc. Baysville is the only settlement area with municipal servicing and can therefore accommodate more infill and redevelopment.

Dorset

Dorset lies on the eastern shores of Lake of Bays. It is a unique community split between two Townships and further between two Upper Tier Municipalities. The Dorset community is punctuated by tourism assets such as the Dorset Fire Tower, the Dorset Heritage Museum, and the S.S. Bigwin docking facility and Lake of Bays Marine Museum, as well as some notable restaurants, docking facilities, and a general store.

Dwight

Known as the "Gateway to Algonquin Park," Dwight has become a popular destination with visitors travelling the Highway 60 corridor into Algonquin Park. Dwight offers several amenities that cater to the Algonquin Park audience including shops, galleries, restaurants, cafes, and bakeries. It's also home to a number of other businesses within the community, such as an international manufacturer of audio equipment, and a garden centre that hosts a highly regarded weekly market.

Hillside

Hillside, Ontario, named after the Hill family, one of the area's original settlers, was established through free land grants and the logging industry in the late 1800s. Hillside is a vibrant hub for artists and outdoor enthusiasts. The area features nine artists' studios along Limberlost Road, where the Artists of Limberlost Studio Tour showcases the work inspired by the rugged landscape of the Canadian Shield and is home to the Limberlost Forest and Wildlife Reserve.

Assets

The Township is home to a number of economic development and tourism assets that help enhance the local environment for business. The following section details physical assets and partnerships that should be considered and leveraged as the Township implements this plan.

Lake of Bays

Lake of Bays is one of the largest lakes in the District of Muskoka. It provides four-season activities from boating and paddle boarding to snowmobiling and ice fishing. The four communities in the Township, Baysville, Dorset, and Dwight are positioned around different parts of the Lake of Bays.

100+ Other Lakes

The Township is also home to over 100 additional lakes, making it a hotbed for recreation for permanent and seasonal residents and visitors. While the lakes add significantly to the quality of life in the community they also support businesses by adding recreational opportunities to the area and many of the Township's accommodations are centred around a lake.

Highway 60

The Highway 60 corridor connects Huntsville to Ottawa and passes directly through Ontario's tourism gem, Algonquin Park. The majority of Algonquin Park's recreational opportunities, services, and development are concentrated on the Highway 60 corridor. Highway 60 passes directly through Dwight and Hillside.

District Road 117 and Highway 35: The "Shortcut" to Algonquin Park

Once known and promoted as the "shortcut" to Algonquin Park, District Road 117 and Highway 35 connects Baysville and Dorset to the communities along the Highway 60 corridor. This route is popular for its scenic beauty and lower traffic compared to major highways. It allows travelers to enjoy the natural landscapes of Muskoka and Haliburton while reaching their destination efficiently.

Provincial Parks

Algonquin Park, Arrowhead Provincial Park, and the soon-to-be-operating Bigwind Lake Provincial Park are located within a 45-minute radius of Lake of Bays. In 2022, these parks attracted over 1.3 million year-round visitors and increasingly offer four-season programming to visitors. While much of the traffic to these parks "passes through" the Township of Lake of Bays, they contribute to its visitor economy, particularly in the summer and offer opportunities for day trips to those who are staying overnight in the community.

Algonquin Park is a world-class tourism asset that attracts visitors from around Canada and internationally. In 2022, Algonquin Park welcomed over 1,056,821 registered visitors through all entrances. The vast majority of those (933,999) were campers [1].

The Park's West Gate is situated 15 minutes from Dwight along the Highway 60 corridor, 3 hours from Toronto, and 3.5 hours from Ottawa, two of the largest marketplaces in Canada. The Park offers over 1,800 campsites, trails, and outdoor recreation opportunities and is serviced with outfitters within and around the Park. The majority of campsites, trails, and services are along the Highway 60 corridors, which receives the bulk of the visitation. Several businesses within the Township of Lake of Bays, in particular, those that offer experiential tourism, utilize the Park to host workshops and events, or for artistic inspiration. In addition to Highway 60, Lake of Bays is also home to the "scenic shortcut" to Algonquin Park via Highway 35 and District Road 117 through Baysville and Dorset.

Arrowhead Provincial Park is located approximately 20 minutes from Dwight and Hillside and in 2022, Arrowhead Provincial Park welcomed 290,685 registered visitors [1]. This Park offers 388 car campsites, trails, and recreation opportunities.

Located a half hour south of Baysville. Bigwind Lake Provincial Park will become the first new fully operating Provincial Park to open in Ontario in 40 years. The proposed plan includes up to 250 car campsites, 25 backcountry campsites, and 25 roofed accommodations.

Arts Loop

The Lake of Bays Arts Loop is a collaboration of artists currently who seek to promote and advocate for the arts within the Township. They have a website with the director of members and a map with members identified. The loop currently consists of 18 members. Consultation revealed that prior to COVID-19 the Arts Loop had a higher membership.

Limberlost Forest and Wildlife Reserve

Limberlost Forest and Wildlife Reserve is a year-round wilderness haven with twenty lakes and over 10,000 acres of mixed forest. The Reserve offers more than 70 km of hiking, biking, skiing, and snowshoeing trails, accessible to the public at no charge.

Libraries

With branches in Dwight (soon-to-be expanded) and Baysville, the libraries serve as community hubs that offer more than just books. They host a robust suite of events, programming, and workshops, and provide internet access and other resources to residents and visitors.

Dorset Lookout Tower

While not technically within the Township, it is directly adjacent to the community in Dorset and is an attractive tourism draw. A historic fire lookout tower offering panoramic views of the surrounding area. It's a significant tourist attraction, especially in the Fall when the tree foliage is at its peak.

Baysville Curling Club

Baysville Curling Club offers both curling and bocce ball and is celebrating 71 years in the community. It offers small opportunities for winter sports tourism through curling bonspiels and events.

[1] [Ontario Parks-Visitation Statistics 2022.xlsx \(live.com\)](#)

Service Clubs

The Township is home to a number of volunteer-based community groups that are essential to supporting residents and improving the community. These include but are not limited to:

- Baysville Community Group
- Baysville Horticultural Society
- Baysville Riverfront Group
- Friends of the Library
- Lake Associations (i.e., Lake of Bays Association, Echo Lake Association, Peninsula Lake Associate, etc.)
- Lions Club - Baysville
- Lions Club - Dorset
- Lions Club - Dwight
- Winter Pantry

Community Centres

Facilities like the Dwight Community Centre, Lake of Bays Community Centre Arena, and Dorset Recreation Centre offer spaces for sports, events, and community gatherings, enhancing social cohesion within the community and providing space to build bridges into the community for new and seasonal residents.

S.S. Bigwin

A historic cruise boat, the S.S. Bigwin, provides public cruises departing from both Dwight and Dorset. Additionally, it operates the Marine Museum in Dorset, showcasing autographs, artifacts, and photographs depicting the marine history of the Township and the Lake of Bays area.

Dwight Beach

A family-friendly beach in Dwight with sandy shores, shallow waters, picnic tables, and nearby amenities.

Norway Point Park

A peaceful and secluded beach at Norway Point, offering a quiet spot for swimming and relaxation with minimal facilities.

Grassmere/Hillside Beach

Grassmere Beach is a popular local beach with sand and grassy areas, suitable for swimming and relaxing. Basic amenities include picnic tables and washrooms.

Dorset Heritage Museum

A museum in Dorset showcasing local history and cultural heritage through artifacts, photographs, and educational programs.

Lake of Bays Community Fund

In June, 2024, the Lake of Bays Community Fund was created in partnership with the Muskoka Community Foundation to support charitable organizations and programs that are impacting residents in the Township. Grants from the Fund are disbursed to projects that are delivered by charitable organizations working in the areas of food insecurity, education, recreation, health and wellness, seniors, children and youth.

Stakeholders and Partners

Economic development is a team sport and, especially being a small municipality, the Township should expect to work with and leverage partner support and programming to realize the economic development goals in this strategy. The following section details some key stakeholders and partners the Township should consider engaging as part of the implementation of this strategy. The list includes existing stakeholders but if other relevant and suitable stakeholders exist, they should be included as well. Having more 'strategic' partners involved typically results in higher quality end products at a more efficient cost.

Lake Associations

Many seasonal residents are part of a Lake Association. There are several lake associations based around different lakes in the Township. Their primary goal tends to relate to policy influence, to advocate for the needs of those who live on the Lake they represent and at times the lake itself. They also provide regular communication to their members and thus present an attractive partnership opportunity to help celebrate and create awareness of the great businesses and attractions that Lake of Bays has and will continue to develop.

Muskoka Futures

Muskoka Futures is one of 61 federally funded Community Futures Development Corporations in Ontario that are tasked with providing support for rural businesses. This includes providing financing products, and business development support and coaching to businesses across Muskoka. They have also been responsible for creating more innovative funding opportunities and programming to encourage business development, leadership, and innovation in a region where access to capital has been challenging. Consultation with Muskoka Futures indicated that they would like to have more of a presence in the Lake of Bays community and connect with more Lake of Bays businesses through their programming and leadership opportunities.

YMCA Employment Services

YMCA Employment Services offers self-directed, independent job search services as well as one-on-one job search support with an Employment Specialist. Job search services include computers for resume and cover letter preparation, internet access, a resource library, assessment tools, job search workshops and fax, photocopy, and telephone use for job search.

One-on-one services include an employment assessment, mentoring and coaching from an employment specialist, job matching and placement, possible financial incentives, job retention assistance and an intensive assisted job search and coaching program. Self-employment and re-training programs can also be accessed through its one-on-one services.

Regional Tourism Organization 12, Explorer's Edge

Explorers' Edge (EE) is one of thirteen Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs) representing stakeholders in the geographic areas of Algonquin Park, the Almaguin Highlands, Loring-Restoule, Muskoka, Parry Sound and South Algonquin, Ontario, Canada. EE's mission is to steward the regional tourism industry's recovery, rebuild and renewal by developing innovative regenerative programs to ensure long-term sustainability and success for all stakeholders. As many of their tourism operators are challenged by finding the workforce they need, in particular due to the shortage of attainable housing in the region, EE is spearheading a pilot project to develop a Work-Training and Housing Integrated Ecosystem. The pilot project, called Catalyst Housing, is meant to be a new housing model to meet the staffing needs of the tourism sector, attract workers, develop professionals, and build industry and community resiliency.

Muskoka Tourism

Muskoka Tourism is a non-profit membership-based marketing organization that promotes the District of Muskoka region and its tourism operators to encourage people to visit Muskoka for tourism purposes.

Muskoka Small Business Centre

The Muskoka Small Business Centre is based in Bracebridge and provides business development support and coaching as well as events geared towards small businesses across the District of Muskoka. In particular, this organization supports business start-ups, including operating the Summer Company program to help youth enter the field of entrepreneurship, and the Starter Company Plus program to help anyone in the community start a business with support and seed funding. Given the challenges facing employment in Lake of Bays, including housing and transit, exploring opportunities to encourage entrepreneurship as a career path and as an investment opportunity should be a consideration for the Township.

District of Muskoka

The District of Muskoka is the upper-tier municipality and is responsible for many aspects of service provision across the District. Most recently, they have hired a Regional Economic Development and Grants Coordinator which presents future opportunities for partnership around economic development activities. Part of the focus of that role will be to implement the newly adopted regional workforce development strategy and implementation plan.

Other Muskoka Municipalities

The Township of Lake of Bays has a history of working with other regional municipalities across the District of Muskoka for economic development purposes. This is a partnership that has evolved over recent years through the development of an investment attraction website, Venture Muskoka, and the subsequent development of the Muskoka job board to centralize and promote employment opportunities in the region. This group of municipalities also spearheaded the development of the Regional Workforce Development Strategy and intends to continue their collaboration to oversee its implementation.

Township of Algonquin Highlands

The Township of Algonquin Highlands is a lower tier municipality in the County of Haliburton. It borders the Township of Lake of Bays beyond Dwight, as well as in Dorset, where the village of Dorset is divided between the Township of Lake of Bays and the Township of Algonquin Highlands. There are many synergistic assets between the two municipalities and further partnership with potentially enhance tourism activities and synergies between operators and attractions in the region.

Summary of Data and Key Themes

Lake of Bays Demographic Highlights

Lake of Bays has a small permanent population of 3,759 residents, with a significant seasonal influx of approximately 12,584 [2]. The area experienced an 18.7% population growth from 2016 to 2021, primarily among residents aged 65 and older. Approximately, 9.4% of the population is under the age of 15, compared to 15.8% across Ontario, and 34.4% of the population is over the age of 65, compared to 18.5% across Ontario. The median age in the Township is 58.4 years, which is notably higher than the Ontario median age of 46.1.

The average total income of households in 2020 was \$108,000, aligning close to the Ontario average of \$111,000. The median total income of households in Lake of Bays is \$90,000, closely aligning with the provincial median of \$91,000.

Of the 1,760 occupied private dwellings in Lake of Bays, 97.2% are single detached homes compared to 53.6% of the province's occupied private dwelling stock. On average 2.1 persons live in a dwelling unit, compared to the Ontario average of 2.6. This highlights what was a significant theme in the consultation, a lack of affordable and attainable housing in the community. There is a significant need for more diversified housing in the community in particular to support the workforce which can be addressed through several avenues including Community Improvement Plan (CIP) incentives, and policy regulation, in particular revisiting minimum lot size requirements in the Official Plan. Most properties (91.2%) are owner-occupied, notably higher than the provincial rate of 68.4%.

The community has a low immigrant population at 10.3%, with only 30 new immigrants settling in the Township over the past two decades. 85 people (2.2%) identified as Indigenous.

[2] muskoka.on.ca/en/business-planning-development/Planning-Docs-Forms/2023-SHS-Final-Report.pdf

[3] Profile table, Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population - Lake of Bays, Township (TP) [Census subdivision], Ontario (statcan.gc.ca)



3,759
Full-time Residents



12,584
Seasonal Residents



18.7%
growth in population between 2016 and 2021. Growth was highest amongst the 65+ year old category.



\$90,000

was the median income in 2021, only \$1,000 lower than the Ontario average.



58.4
was a median age of residents in 2021, almost 17 years older than the Ontario average.



10.3%
of the population are immigrants, significantly less than the Ontario average.



91.2%
properties occupied by owners (as opposed to renters), versus 68.4% across Ontario.



10
immigrants moved to Lake of Bays between 2011 and 2021.

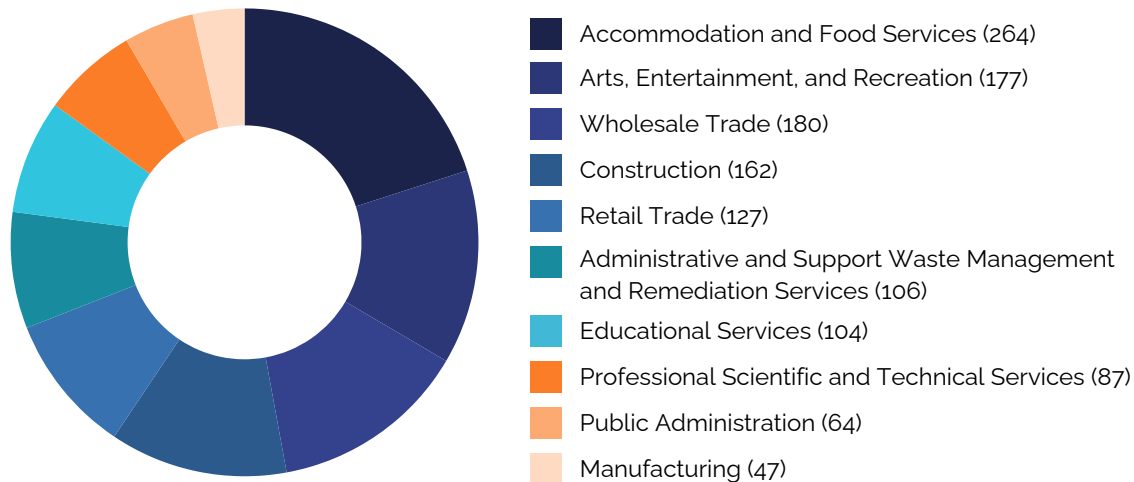


20
immigrants moved in the preceding decade.

Lake of Bays Workforce

Labour Market Data

Highlights from 5-year assessment in change in employment by industry [4]. The Township's largest sectors of employment are by number of jobs are:



In economic development, the location quotient analyzes a community's industrial specialization compared to a larger region, typically a state or nation. To better understand which sectors the Township of Lake of Bays has an existing advantage in, location quotients were assessed in comparison to industries in the Province of Ontario. The Township displays a higher-than-average employment concentration in the mining quarrying and oil and gas extraction (1.87), construction (1.79), wholesale trade (2.74), administrative and support waste management and remediation services (1.56), arts, entertainment, and recreation (7.47), and the accommodation and food services (2.49) industry sectors.

The industry sector that experienced the most growth over the five-year period between 2019 and 2024 was the wholesale trade sector with a 138% increase in employment, this was followed by professional scientific and technical services, with 75% employment growth, educational services with 67% growth, and construction with 48% growth, administrative and support waste management and remediation services sector with 37% growth, and lastly the art entertainment and recreation sector with 35% growth. In that same time period, there were two sectors that shrunk; information and cultural industries, and the public administration sector which both decreased by 40%. It's also worth noting that retail sector employment only grew by 1% over that same five-year period while the population continued to increase, which may reflect why residents felt that access to retail options were decreasing in the community. Also, a concern to note is that employment in the accommodation and food services sector fell by 2% over that same five year period.

[4] LightcastTM. (2024) Q.3 2023 Industry Table. Accessed: March, 2024.

Shift share analysis revealed that as a result of the competitive effect, which measures change in employment as a result of locally competitive factors, the wholesale trade sector increased by 104 jobs, the arts entertainment and recreation sector grew by 52 jobs, the construction sector grew by 42 jobs, and the educational services sector grew by 38 jobs. Unfortunately, due to the competitive effect, the information and cultural industry sector shrunk by 14 jobs, and the public administration sector lost 51 jobs.

Based on projections by EMSI Lightcast data, program occupations that are expected to grow the most by 2030 in terms of number of jobs include sales and service occupations (90 jobs, median hourly wage \$19.39), business and finance occupations (34 jobs, median hourly wage \$25.97), trade and transport occupations (32 jobs, median hourly wage \$28.24), occupations in manufacturing and utilities (25 jobs, median hourly wage \$22.95), and occupations in education (17 jobs, median hourly wage \$40.37). [5]

[5] LightcastTM. (2024) Q.3 2023-2030 Highest Ranked Occupations. Accessed: March, 2024.

Background Reports and Plans

This section offers summarized highlights from the background documents analyzed as part of the strategy development process. Detailed summaries are available in Appendix A. Throughout the analysis, a number of key themes that relate back to the development of this economic development strategy emerged including:

- The importance of placemaking to enhance the community's quality of place and tourism assets.
- The opportunity to highlight, support, and enhance the strong and unique art, culture, and heritage sectors within the community.
- The desire for more recreation, entertainment, retail, and service options within the hamlets.
- The opportunity to enhance tourism and community connectivity via improved wayfinding signage.
- The importance of boating, water, and water-related activities.
- The need for housing that is affordable for all residents, including the workforce.
- The importance of sustainable growth to create meaningful employment opportunities and protect environmental integrity.

Tapestry of Place (Cultural Tourism Strategy)

The Cultural Tourism Strategy for Huntsville and Lake of Bays, completed in 2013, highlights cultural tourism as a burgeoning marketplace, characterized by visitors who are drawn to the local environment, history, culture, and arts. Cultural tourists, who often travel more frequently and spend significantly more per trip than other types of travelers, provide a lucrative opportunity to develop the area as a cultural hub. Data from the Ontario Arts Council substantiates this trend, noting that cultural tourists comprised approximately 22% of the 42.8 million overnight trips to Ontario in 2010, spending nearly twice as much as the average overnight tourist. Notably, the majority of these tourists are baby boomers, a demographic that is expected to remain financially influential well into the future. Despite increasing competition from neighbouring communities, this Strategy advocates for a place-based approach over an attractions-based one. This approach promotes a cohesive cultural experience that encapsulates the region's rich history, diverse flora and fauna, and unique cultural attributes such as a relaxed lifestyle and a community-oriented ethos.

The Strategy emphasizes leveraging the natural and cultural heritage of Huntsville/Lake of Bays to foster a comprehensive cultural tourism experience. Key attributes like the distinctive local wildlife, the rugged landscape of the Canadian Shield, and the area's rich human heritage are identified as foundational to this experience.

The Strategy also outlines the area's intrinsic qualities like hospitality, humour, and an authentic, slow-paced lifestyle which enhance its appeal as a cultural destination. It identifies several key narratives and themes such as the Anishinaabeg People's Creation Story and Muskoka's historical significance in Cottage Country, which could be integrated into cultural tourism offerings. Despite existing strengths like a large visitor base and a variety of cultural events, challenges such as the underutilization of technology and a lack of dedicated cultural infrastructure remain. Addressing these through strategic initiatives like establishing a Cultural Tourism Coordinating Committee and initiating a product development process are recommended to capitalize on the opportunities and mitigate the threats to developing a sustainable cultural tourism sector.

Community Improvement

In 2024, the Township of Lake of Bays adopted a Community Improvement Plan (CIP) aimed at revitalizing the community through infrastructure enhancement, enhancing community spaces, and stimulating economic growth. The CIP's primary objectives are to upgrade buildings, streets, and parks, foster private sector development, and enhance the community's appeal to tourists and investors. This plan enables the Township to offer incentives such as grants to businesses for physical improvements and guides municipal enhancements to streets and parks. Focused on the designated settlement areas of Baysville, Dwight, Dorset, and Hillside, the CIP gathered community input through surveys and community meetings, which highlighted top priorities including promoting new businesses, developing multi-unit affordable housing, and enhancing landscapes.

Key areas addressed in the CIP include improving signage and wayfinding to better direct visitors to community assets, enhancing pedestrian and cycling infrastructure supported by the District of Muskoka's Active Transportation Reserve Fund, and addressing parking issues that may hinder business development. Recommendations also extend to parks and community facilities, with a focus on streetscape enhancements particularly in Dorset, Dwight, and Baysville to improve pedestrian access. The Plan advocates for infill development to meet housing goals, especially in Baysville where existing services can support growth, while suggesting modest infill projects in other areas. Additionally, the CIP outlines incentive programs aimed at encouraging private investments into the business community, beautification efforts, and housing development, all designed to reinforce the Township's economic and community development objectives.

Program	Fee Rebate	Project Grant	Loan	Tax Increment Financing
A. Encouraging Expansion and Diversification of Existing Businesses	✓	✓	✓	✓
B. Encouraging Beautification and Visual Appeal	✓			
C. Encouraging Housing Development	✓	✓	✓	✓
D. Encouraging Tourism and Business Development	✓	✓	✓	✓
E. Fostering Public Art		✓	✓	

Parks, Open Space and Recreation Plan

The Parks, Open Space and Recreation Plan, received by the Township of Lake of Bays Council in March 2023, serves as a comprehensive guide for the development and management of parks, recreation facilities, and cultural services over a 20-year period. This Plan integrates the Township's broader economic goals, detailing a phased approach based on extensive background research and community consultation spanning from Fall 2021 to Winter 2023. Community feedback emphasized a general satisfaction with current recreation programs, though many respondents identified a need for improved marketing support, more significant event offerings, and enhanced business involvement to boost community attractiveness and tourism. The Plan also recommends the creation of a Program Developer/Coordinator role to better develop and coordinate community programs and events, and highlights potential partnerships, such as with the Township of Algonquin Highlands, to expand recreational opportunities.

Honouring and integrating the rich Indigenous history of the area into the Township's cultural and recreational offerings was a key element of the Plan. The Plan outlines initiatives for placemaking and placekeeping that emphasize long-term stewardship of public spaces and active community engagement, including the development of Indigenous-focused events and educational programs. Additionally, the strategy addresses the physical infrastructure of recreation spaces, advocating for enhanced signage, consistent and AODA-compliant branding across major parks and facilities, and the exploration of additional recreational uses of local assets such as beaches, waterfronts, and trails. Recommendations also extend to supporting local arts, culture, and heritage through direct product provision, public realm improvements, capacity-building, and investment encouragement to bolster tourism, facility development and enhancement, and community engagement. The comprehensive nature of this Plan aims to foster a vibrant, culturally rich community that is well-positioned to attract both new residents and tourists to the Township of Lake of Bays.

Dorset Waterfront Plan and Downtown Study

The Dorset Waterfront Plan & Downtown Study, conducted in 2016, provided a long-term vision aimed at revitalizing Dorset's waterfront and downtown areas to boost tourism, economic development, and job creation. Commissioned by the Township of Lake of Bays, the Lake of Bays Marine Museum & Navigation Society, and the Dorset Community Partnership with FedNor's funding, the study also involved the Township of Algonquin Highlands due to Dorset's unique positioning across two municipalities. The comprehensive analysis assessed opportunities for improvements in pedestrian connectivity, economic growth, and environmental preservation, highlighting the need for better utilization of public and private assets to foster sustainable community partnerships. Community feedback from various consultation activities underscored the challenges of seasonality and highlighted a preference for more diverse shops, services, and attractions, with suggestions for increased business variety and improved marketing strategies to enhance the year-round appeal.

The Study outlined three strategic land use options to transform Dorset's landscape: a Modest Approach focusing on immediate, cost-effective enhancements like pedestrian safety and docking extensions; a Transitional Approach with medium-term, moderate-cost improvements including all-season structures and better parking facilities; and a Transformative Approach, the most extensive and expensive, proposing significant developments like new docking facilities and a revamped skating rink for year-round activity. These options are aimed at not only enhancing tourist attractions but also ensuring the economic and environmental sustainability of the waterfront and downtown areas. Additional steps recommended included comprehensive engineering and Environmental Impact Studies to support these developments. The Study was accepted but not adopted by the Council.

Official Plan

The Lake of Bays Official Plan (OP), adopted in January 2016, is a strategic policy document guiding the development within the Township of Lake of Bays in collaboration with the District Municipality of Muskoka. As a critical tool for municipal governance, the OP sets forth policies to manage land use, the provision of municipal services and facilities, and the regulation of land development over a 20-year period, ensuring the Township's growth is orderly, sustainable, and harmonious with existing land uses. The OP is comprehensive, encompassing a variety of land uses within the municipal boundary, including community, rural, and waterfront areas, and emphasizes the maintenance of the unique character and values of each designation while accommodating necessary growth and development.

The OP outlines specific objectives and policies across thirteen categories, such as environment, economy, settlement & growth, and cultural heritage, aiming to enhance the quality of life, preserve natural and cultural assets, and stimulate economic growth. Significant focus is given to maintaining environmental integrity, fostering economic development that complements the Township's economic base, enhancing community vitality, and supporting sustainable growth in designated areas. Additionally, the OP prioritizes the conservation of waterfront areas, development of recreational and cultural facilities, and the protection of natural resources. Regular reviews, mandated by the Planning Act, are required to ensure the OP remains relevant and effective in achieving its long-term goals. The Township is in the process of updating the Official Plan, and the goals of this initiative should be considered as policy is updated.

Muskoka Second Home Study

The Muskoka Second Home Study, completed in June 2023, provides a comprehensive analysis of the seasonal residents in the District of Muskoka, capturing their demographics, spending habits, and recreational activities, thereby offering insights into their significant economic and cultural impact on the region.

This study, which now includes questions about healthcare, waste management, and Muskoka Airport usage, highlights that second homes represent about 47% of Muskoka's dwelling units, with considerable variation across its municipalities. The Township of Lake of Bays, noted for the largest increase in second homes since the previous survey, demonstrates the area's growing appeal, particularly for available waterfront properties.

The Study reveals diverse interactions between seasonal residents and local amenities, showing increased usage of parks and conservation areas and a consistent engagement with boating and other water-related activities. However, there has been a decline in the use of libraries and community centers, likely influenced by social distancing measures in place in the recent past at the time of the Study. Significantly, while the majority of seasonal residents make their common purchases within Muskoka, there's a noted preference for shopping outside the region for variety. This study, vital for its role in shaping local economic and service strategies, sets the stage for subsequent surveys intended to continually adapt and respond to the evolving needs and patterns of Muskoka's seasonal population.

Muskoka Workforce Development Strategy

In May 2024, the District of Muskoka adopted a comprehensive Regional Workforce Development Strategy and Implementation Plan, following thorough community engagement including surveys, stakeholder interviews, and discussions with businesses and workers. This Strategy aims to address the myriad of challenges facing Muskoka's workforce — such as housing accessibility, cost-of-living issues, and labour shortages — through a multifaceted approach emphasizing the attraction, retention, and training of workers. This initiative took into account the region's unique demographic challenges, like lower average incomes and a higher prevalence of part-time and seasonal employment, and seasonal demand for housing, which compound these workforce issues.

The Strategy delineates three strategic goals: enhancing coordination and leadership to support workforce initiatives, creating conditions favourable for worker attraction and retention, and building a talent pipeline for regional employment opportunities. These goals target both unique and common regional challenges and are aimed at fostering a robust ecosystem for workforce development. A key component of the Strategy's success is the effective implementation of these goals, particularly the first goal, which focuses on providing essential coordination and leadership. The Strategy recommends a collaborative approach with local partners to leverage a broader range of expertise, resources, and communication strategies, and has established an initial plan for resource allocation to kickstart these efforts.

Lake of Bays 2017 Economic Development Strategy

The 2017 Lake of Bays Economic Development Strategy served as a comprehensive roadmap for enhancing the township's economic landscape through targeted actions and collaborative efforts among township staff, community organizations, and local businesses. The Strategy was developed through extensive consultations, including data analysis, interviews, online surveys, and community summits, culminating in a robust plan with actionable items set for implementation across immediate, short, and medium-term timelines.

Structured around five strategic themes — Business Support & Development, Communications, Marketing & Branding, Community Infrastructure, Tourism, and Workforce Development, Retention, and Attraction — the Strategy outlines specific objectives and 22 detailed action items. These include annual reviews of investment readiness, updates to the community profile, the creation of business directories and an industrial/commercial land inventory, and strategies for enhancing broadband access and diversifying housing options. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of tourism through the development of a travel guide and wayfinding signage, alongside initiatives aimed at bolstering workforce development through training and rural transportation solutions. This Strategy represented a focused effort to propel economic growth, improve community infrastructure, and enhance the overall quality of life in the Township of Lake of Bays.

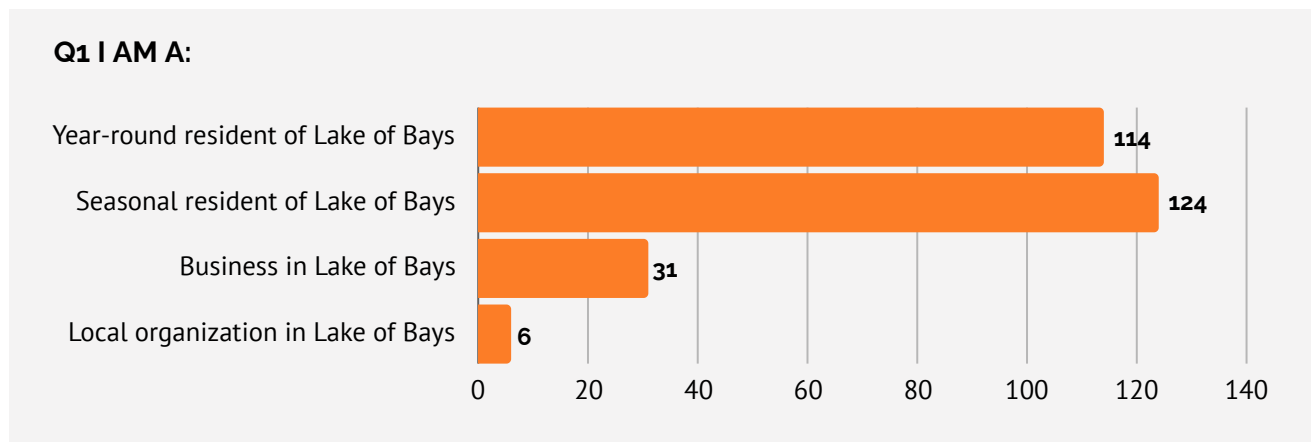
Consultation Overview

Community engagement and consultation were crucial in developing this Strategy, offering unique insights and perspectives from community members, stakeholders, and partners. Discussions with residents, local leaders, municipal staff, community service organizations, and businesses highlighted the Township's economic strengths and identified challenges that could hinder growth and evolution, thereby shaping the direction of the Strategy.

By actively involving local stakeholders and residents, a deeper understanding of their perspectives was achieved. This ensures that strategic initiatives accurately, effectively, and authentically reflect the economic landscape of the Township of Lake of Bays. Furthermore, meaningful engagement fosters community collaboration and a shared commitment to the Township's growth.

Survey Highlights

Seven questions were posed to the community to gather information about their economic development needs and insights. The survey, designed to collect this information, received 275 responses from residents, seasonal residents, businesses, and local organizations.

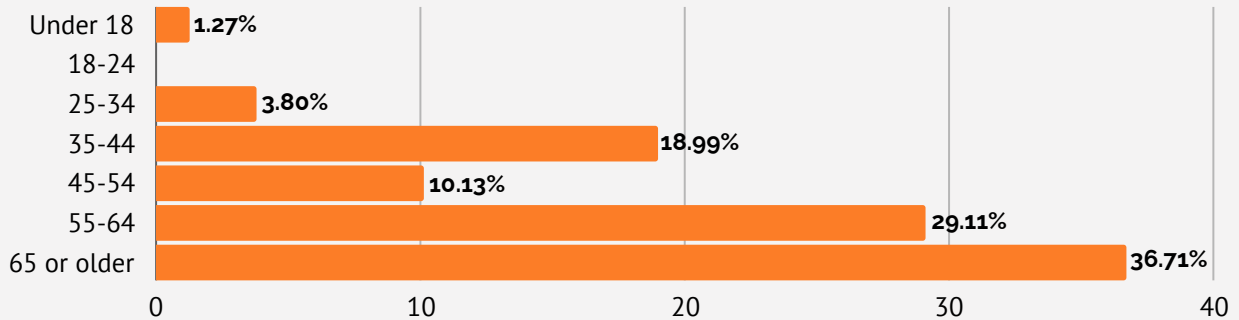


↳ Of the responses received, approximately 114 were year-round residents of the Township of Lake of Bays, 124 were seasonal residents, 31 were businesses, and 6 represented local organizations.

RESIDENTS

HOW OLD ARE YOU?

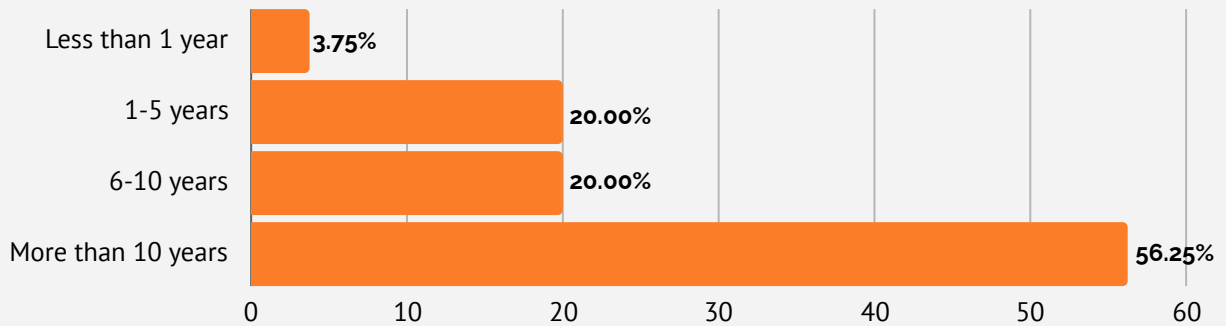
ANSWERED: 79 SKIPPED: 196



↳ The majority of resident respondents were over the age of 65 (37%), followed by 29% between the ages of 55-64, and 19% between the ages of 35-44.

HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU BEEN A RESIDENT IN THE TOWNSHIP OF LAKE OF BAYS?

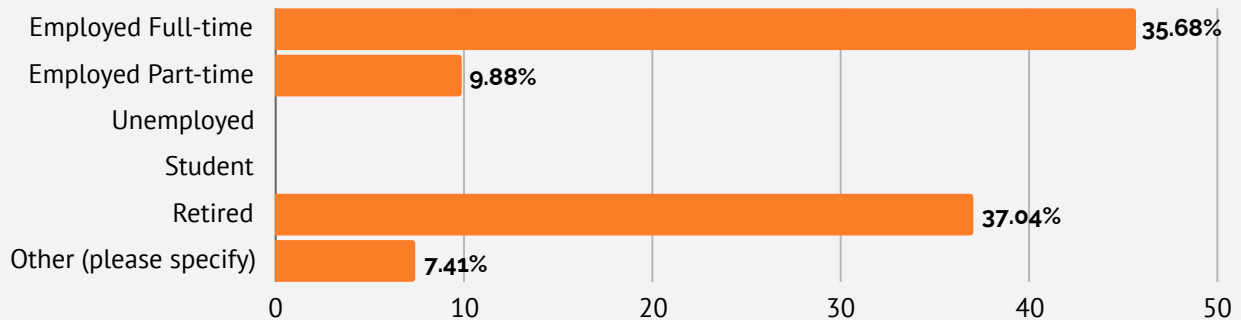
ANSWERED: 80 SKIPPED: 195



↳ 56% of respondents had been a resident of Lake of Bays for over 10 years.

WHAT IS YOUR EMPLOYMENT STATUS?

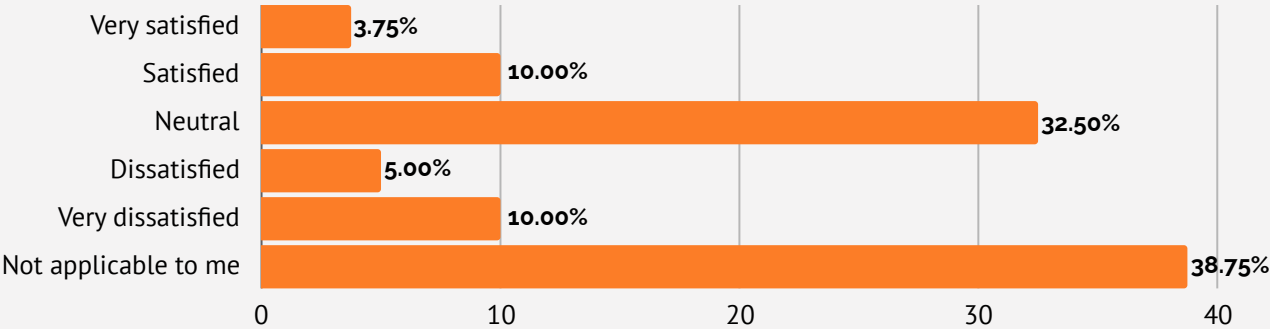
ANSWERED: 81 SKIPPED: 194



↳ Of the resident survey respondents, 46% were employed full-time, 10% employed part-time and 37% retired.

HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE CURRENT JOB OPPORTUNITIES IN THE TOWNSHIP OF LAKE OF BAYS?

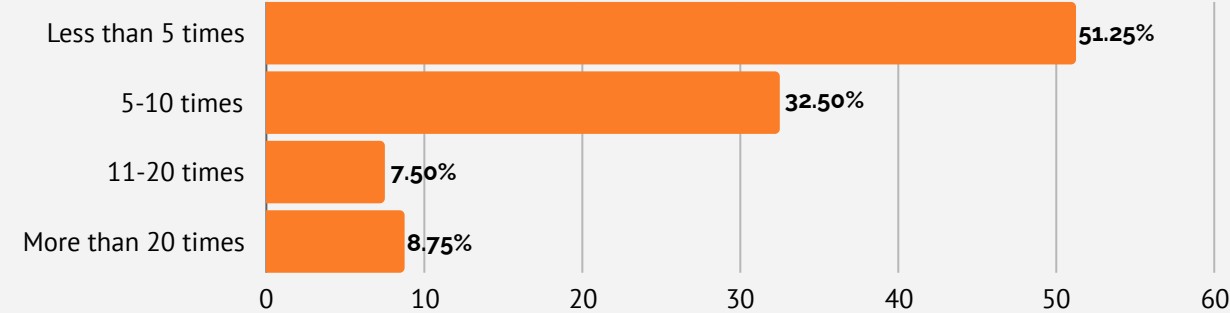
ANSWERED: 80 SKIPPED: 195



↳ 14% of residents were satisfied or very satisfied with current job opportunities in the Township of Lake of Bays, 15% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the current job opportunities. 32% considered themselves neutral and the remaining respondents felt the question was not applicable to them. Residents who were most satisfied with employment opportunities were those who were employed full-time or self employed. It was noted that there were available jobs in Lake Bays although many of those were seasonal. There were suggestions from respondents that more and diverse businesses were needed.

ON AVERAGE, HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU VISIT RECREATIONAL AMENITIES, ATTRACTIONS, RESTAURANTS, OR SHOPS IN THE TOWNSHIP OF LAKE OF BAYS PER MONTH?

ANSWERED: 80 SKIPPED: 195



↳ 51% of residents visit recreational amenities, attractions, restaurants, and shops in the Township of Lake of Bays less than 5 times a month, 32% visit between 5- 10 times a month.

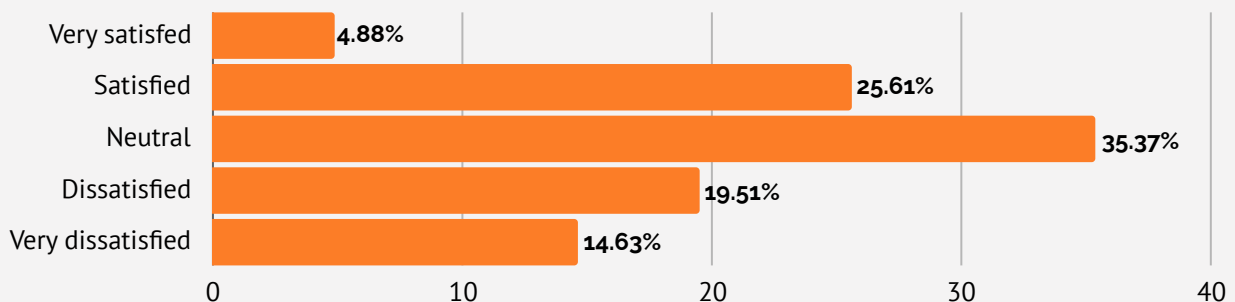
On average 17% of resident respondents visit recreational amenities, attractions, restaurants, and shops outside of the Township of Lake of Bays more than 20 times, 16% visit 11 to 20 times per month, and 35% visit five to 10 times per month.

Resident respondents identified the top economic development priorities to them. They are as follows:

- 1 Small Business Support
- 2 Attracting new retail and service businesses to the community
- 3 Affordable housing
- 4 Attracting or creating new events and festivals for the community
- 5 Infrastructure improvements (such as roads and internet)
- 6 Access to health care services
- 7 Beautifying Lake of Bays communities
- 8 Creating more interesting and fun public spaces
- 9 Helping businesses stay open or attracting businesses that are open on a year round basis
- 10 Environmental sustainability initiatives
- 11 Education and skills training
- 12 Attracting new jobs to the community
- 13 Tourism and cultural development
- 14 Communication with residents about businesses and events in the community

HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE AVAILABILITY OF ESSENTIAL SERVICES IN THE TOWNSHIP OF LAKE OF BAYS (EG. HEALTHCARE, GROCERY STORES, SCHOOLS)?

ANSWERED: 82 SKIPPED: 193



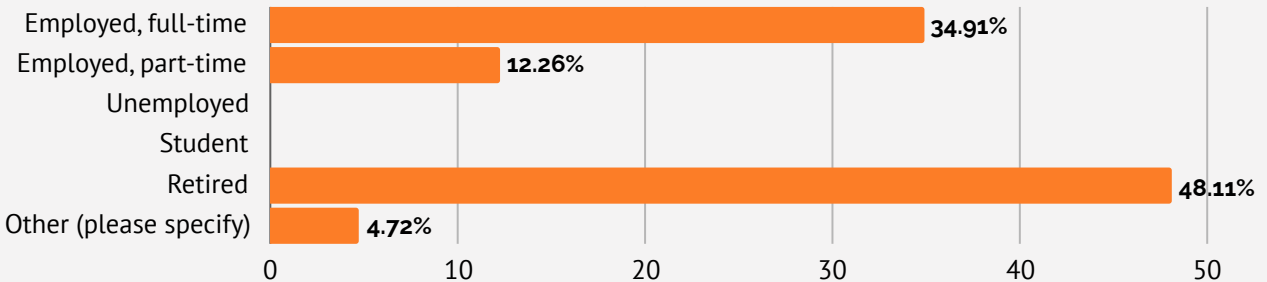
↳ Satisfaction amongst residents' survey respondents with the availability of essential services in the Township of Lake of Bays, such as health care, grocery stores and schools, was mixed. 5% of respondents indicated they were very satisfied, 26% of respondents indicated they were satisfied, 35% indicated they were neutral, 20% indicated they were dissatisfied and 15% indicated that they were very dissatisfied. In particular, more diverse grocery options was cited as something respondents would like to see more of, as well as, hardware stores, veterinarians, healthcare providers, restaurants and a more diverse retail and service mix.

In regards to specific attractions, events, or public space improvements respondents would like to see, a number of respondents suggested enhancing existing festivals, adding off-season festivals, creating public art, and adding more family recreation spaces, be it in the library or children's playground.

SEASONAL RESIDENTS

WHAT IS YOUR EMPLOYMENT STATUS?

ANSWERED: 106 SKIPPED: 169

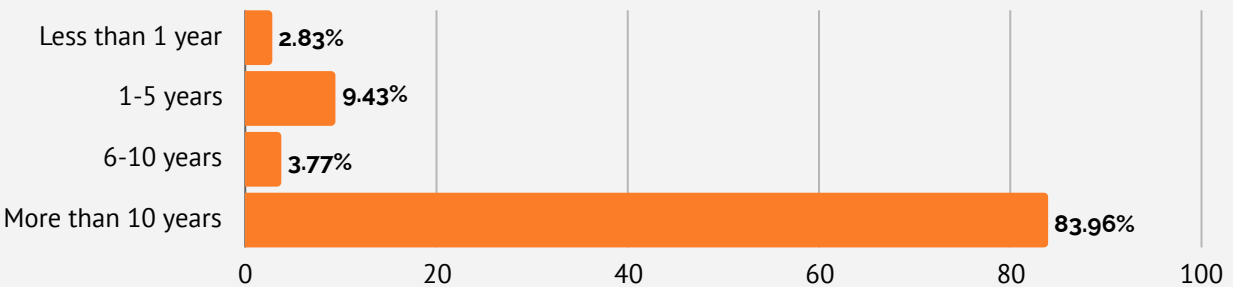


↳ Of seasonal resident respondents to the survey, 35% were employed full-time, 12% employed part-time, and 48% retired.

51% of seasonal resident survey respondents were over the age of 65, 36% were between the ages of 55-64, and 8% were between the ages of 45-54.

HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU BEEN A SEASONAL RESIDENT IN THE TOWNSHIP OF LAKE OF BAYS?

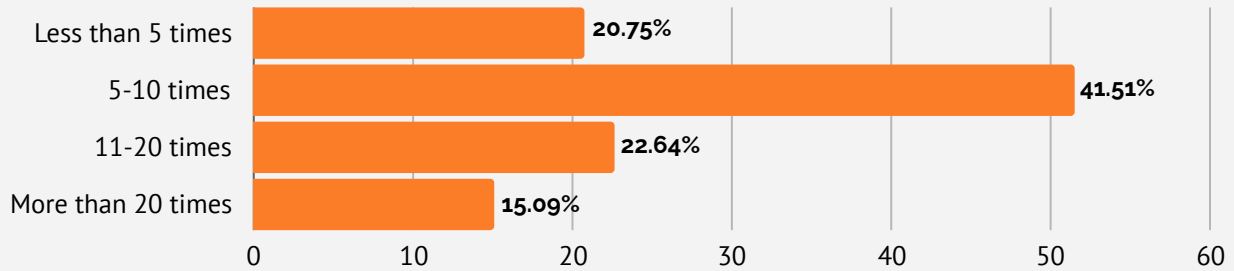
ANSWERED: 106 SKIPPED: 169



↳ 84% of seasonal resident survey respondents have been seasonal residents for more than 10 years.

ON AVERAGE, WHEN RESIDING IN THE TOWNSHIP, HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU VISIT RECREATIONAL AMENITIES, ATTRACTIONS, RESTAURANTS, OR SHOPS IN THE TOWNSHIP OF LAKE OF BAYS PER MONTH?

ANSWERED: 106 SKIPPED: 169



↳ When asked how frequently seasonal residents visit recreational amenities, attractions, restaurants, or shops in the Township of Lake of Bays per month, 42% indicated 5-10 times a month, 23% visit 11-20 times a month, 21% visit less than 5 times a month, and 15% visit more than 20 times per month. When asked about how many times they visit those same amenities outside of the Township per month, 51% indicated less than 5 times.

Seasonal resident survey respondents were asked to rank their top economic development priorities. Priorities were ranked in the following order:

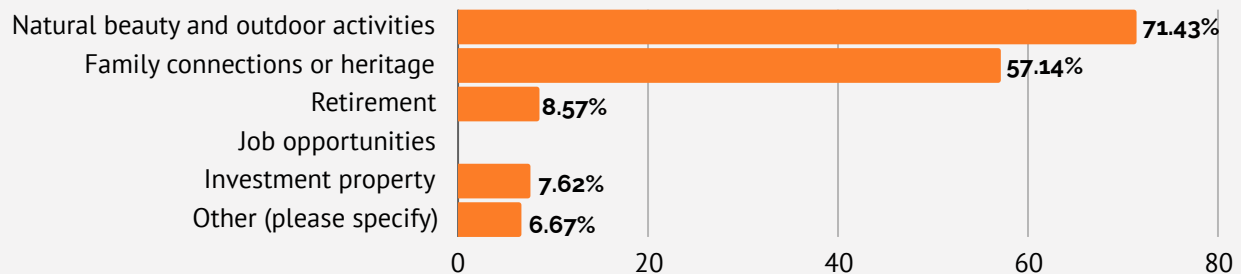
- 1 Small business support
- 2 Attracting new retail and service businesses to the community
- 3 Attracting or creating new events and festivals for the community
- 4 Affordable housing
- 5 Access to health care services
- 6 Beautifying Lake of Bays communities
- 7 Infrastructure improvements (such as roads and public transit)
- 8 Environmental sustainability initiatives
- 9 Creating more interesting and fun public spaces
- 10 Helping businesses stay open or attracting businesses that are open on a year round basis
- 11 Education and skills training
- 12 Tourism and cultural development
- 13 Attracting new jobs to the community
- 14 Communication with residents about businesses and events in the community

Seasonal residents are generally satisfied with their current access to services in the Township of Lake Bays, with 13% of respondents indicating that they are very satisfied, 36% indicating that they are satisfied, and 35% indicating they are neutral. Less than one percent of respondents indicated that they were very dissatisfied. When asked about what retail or services they would like to see more of, restaurants and cafes, grocery, gas stations, hardware, health care, general retail, and animal care all received multiple mentions. When asked about recreational amenities and attractions that they would like to see in the community, seasonal residents also indicated more parks and recreational spaces such as pickle ball courts or spaces to socialize.

Seasonal residents were asked about when they were normally utilizing their property in the Township of Lake of Bays. The top answers were, unsurprisingly, July and August, both with 97% of respondents indicating that they were in the Township during that time. 92% of residents indicated they visited the Township in September, followed by 91% of respondents in June, and 78% in May and October. Beyond those months visitation drops off significantly, with 38% of respondents visiting in April.

WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO BECOME A SEASONAL RESIDENT IN THE TOWNSHIP OF LAKE OF BAYS? (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)

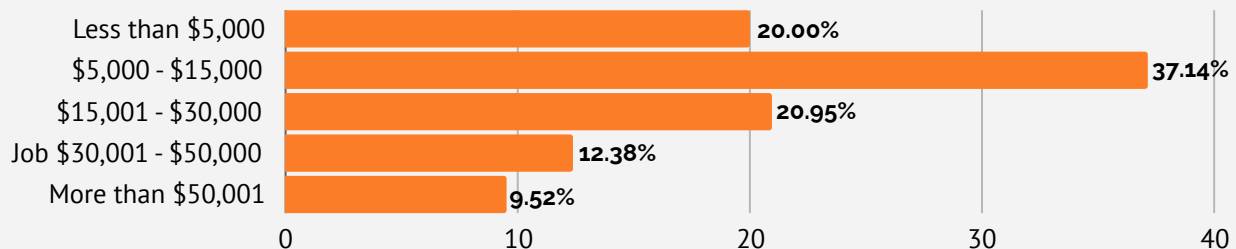
ANSWERED: 105 SKIPPED: 170



↳ 71% of seasonal residents survey respondents indicated natural beauty, and outdoor activities were their primary motivator for locating within the Township of Lake of Bays. 57% indicated they were here due to family connections or heritage.

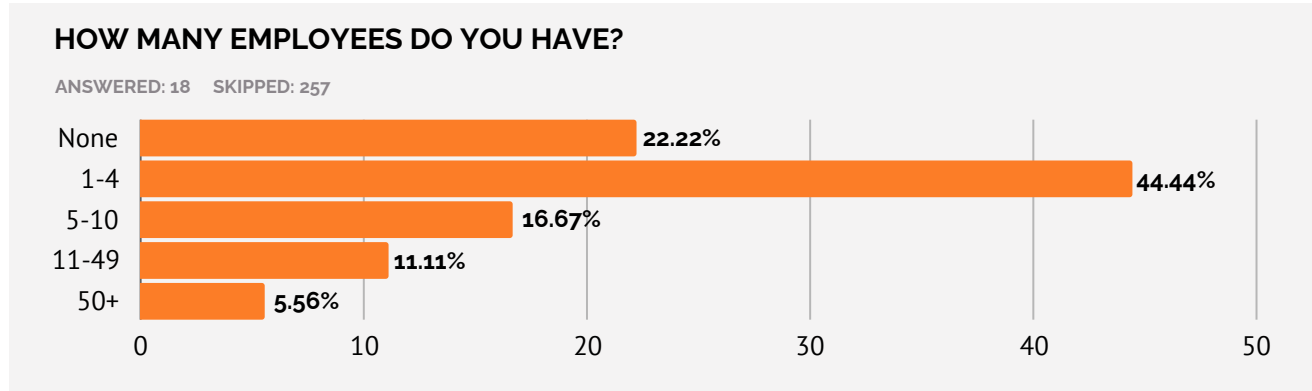
ON AVERAGE, HOW MUCH MONEY DO YOU ESTIMATE YOU SPEND ANNUALLY IN THE TOWNSHIP OF LAKE OF BAYS? (INCLUDE HOUSING, GROCERIES, DINING, SHOPPING, AND OTHER NON-TAX RELATED EXPENSES)

ANSWERED: 105 SKIPPED: 170



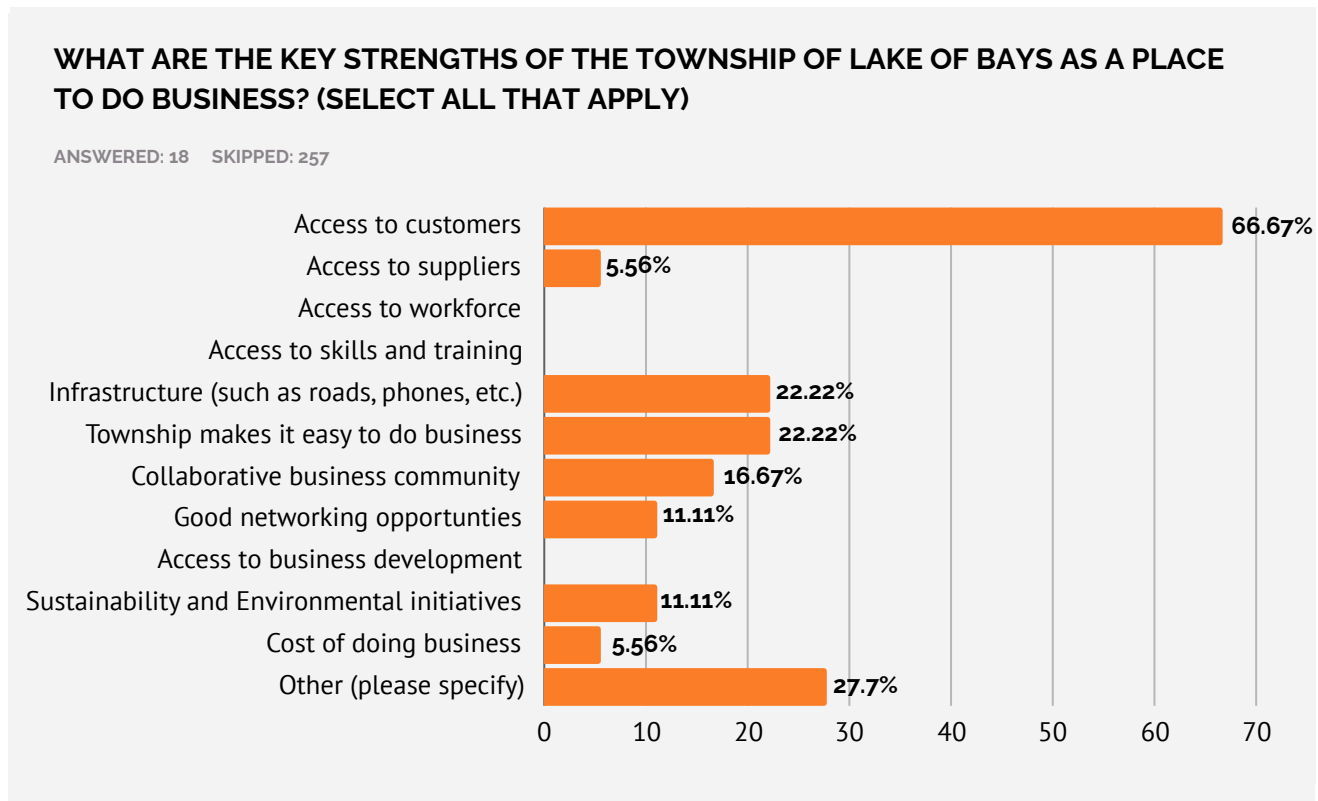
↳ When seasonal residents were asked how much they spend annually, on average, within the Township of Lake of Bays, 37% of survey respondents spent between \$5,000 and \$15,000, 21% spent between \$15,001 and \$30,000, and 20% indicated they spent less than \$5,000.

BUSINESSES

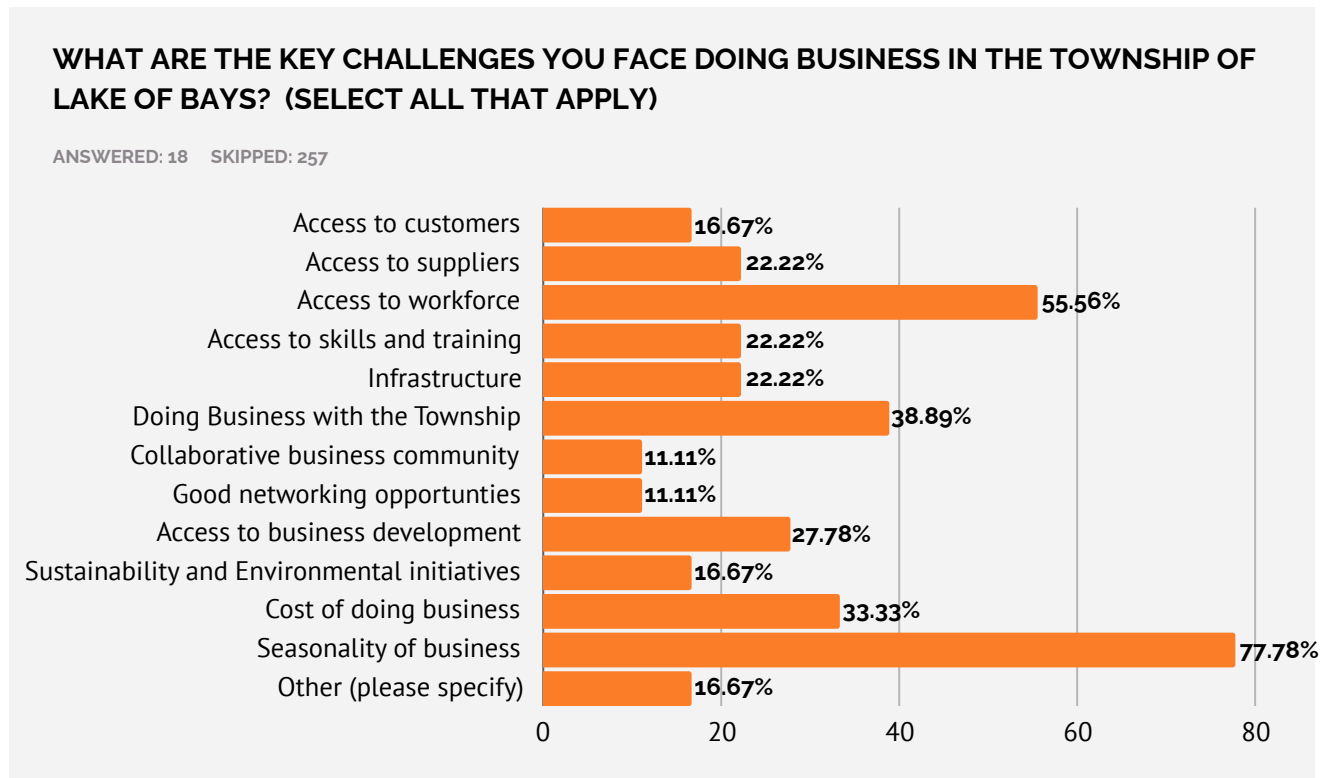


↳ The majority of business survey respondents were small with 44% having 1-4 employees, 22% having no employees, and only one firm indicating that they had over 50 employees.

78% of businesses who responded to the survey have been operating in the community for more than 10 years.



↳ When asked about the key strengths of the community as a place to do business, 67% of business respondents selected access to customers; 22% selected infrastructure such as roads, phone, and internet; 22% also selected the Township making it easy to do business, including answering questions, and the building and permitting process; and 16% of respondents selected a collaborative business community.



↳ When asked about top challenges as a place to do business, 78% of respondents selected the seasonality of business; 56% of respondents selected access to workforce; 39% selected doing business with the Township; 33% selected the cost of doing business; and 28% selected access to business development resources.

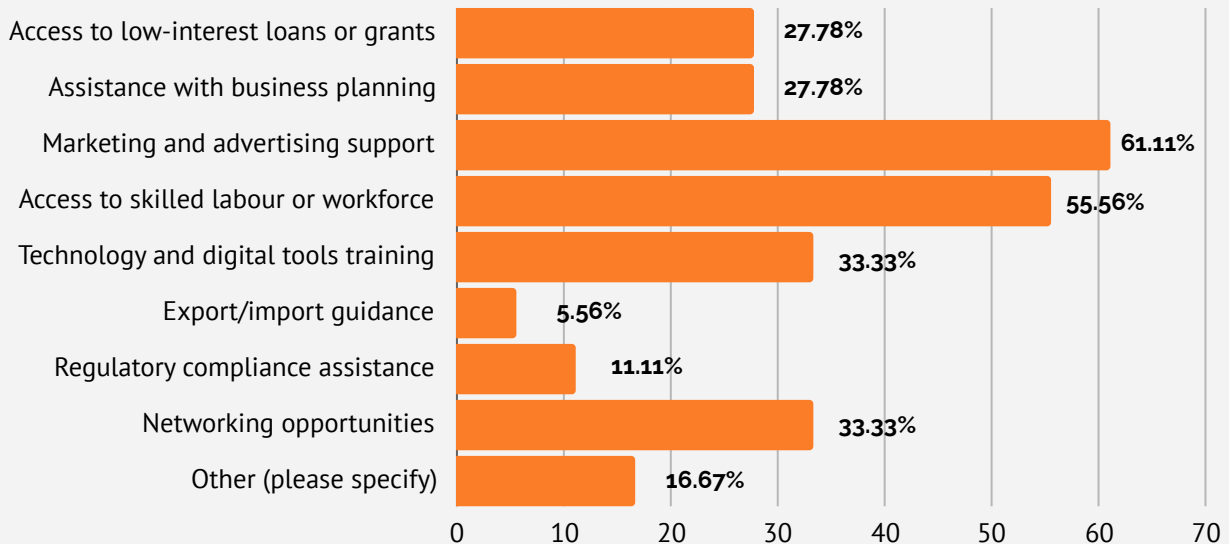
Business survey respondents identified the most important economic development needs as:

- 1 Small business support
- 2 Affordable housing
- 3 Attracting new retail and service businesses to the community
- 4 Infrastructure improvements (such as roads and public transit)
- 5 Attracting or creating new events and festivals for the community
- 6 Helping businesses stay open or attracting businesses that are open on a year round basis

- 7 Access to health care services
- 8 Beautifying Lake of Bays communities
- 9 Creating more interesting and fun public spaces
- 10 Education and skills training
- 11 Environmental sustainability initiatives
- 12 Tourism and cultural development
- 13 Attracting new jobs to the community
- 14 Communication with residents about businesses and events in the community

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING SUPPORT AND RESOURCES WOULD HAVE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT POSITIVE IMPACT ON YOUR BUSINESS'S SUSTAINABILITY AND GROWTH? (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)

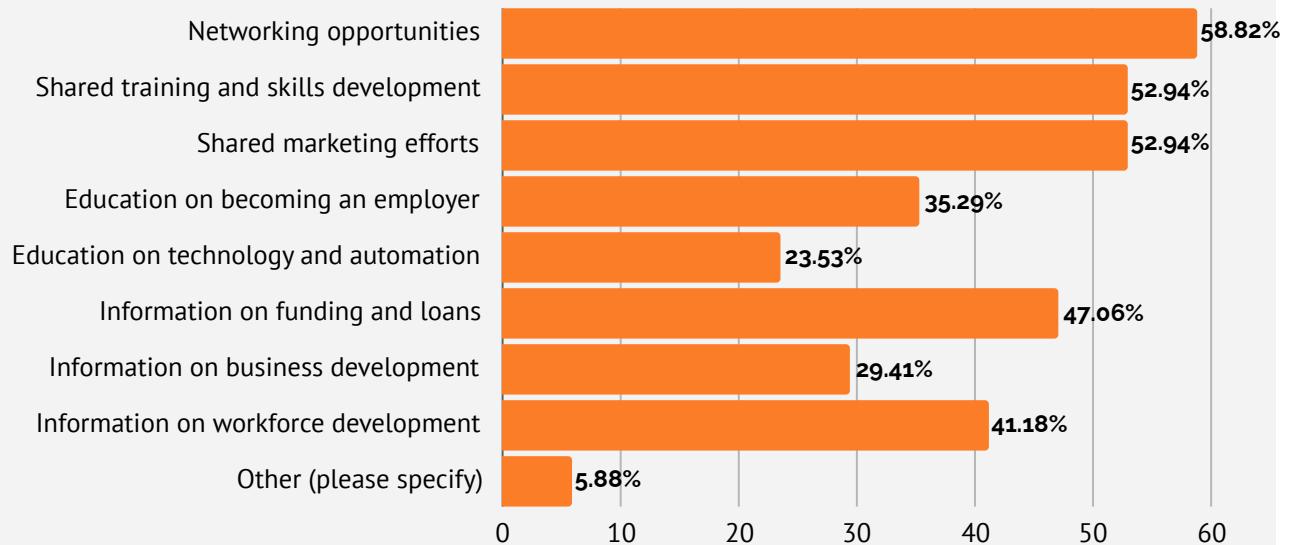
ANSWERED: 18 SKIPPED: 257



↳ When asked about support that would be most helpful for their business, 61% of respondents identified marketing and advertising support, 56% identified access to skilled labour or workforce development programs, and 33% identified technology and digital tool training, as well as networking with other businesses. Additionally, 28% of respondents identified that access to low interest loans or grants, and assistance with business planning and strategy would be helpful to their business. These could be considered as part of potential business development support provided to the community, in partnership with key stakeholders and partners.

WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN ACCESSING ANY OF THE FOLLOWING POTENTIAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUR BUSINESS?

ANSWERED: 17 SKIPPED: 258



↳ 59% of business respondents were interested in partaking in networking opportunities, 53% were interested in partaking in shared training and skills development for staff, as well as, shared marketing efforts, 47% of businesses were interested in information on funding and loans, 41% of businesses were interested in information on workforce development best practices, and 35% were interested in education on becoming an employer of choice. These could be considered as part of potential business development support provided to the community, in partnership with key stakeholders and partners.

94% of respondents indicated that email was their preferred choice of communication.

Organizations

There was not enough usable data from responding organizations to provide a meaningful summary. Feedback provided was reviewed, summarized, and incorporated as part of the data analysis process.

Key Consultation Themes

The following section provides an overview of the key themes identified through the data collection process. Long-form summaries of these themes can be found in Appendix B.

Themes are shared under a framework that identifies them as strengths, weaknesses, or opportunities to guide the development of the updated strategy. Each theme is accompanied by a high-level summary of commentary from the data.

No specific threats were identified as part of the consultation process so none are included as part of the key themes section, however there are consistent external threats that can impact any local economy, including that of Lake of Bays. These include things like changes to federal and provincial government policy and spending, supply chain impacts on local businesses, climate change, changes in the value of the Canadian dollar, or the unknowns, like a global pandemic.

STRENGTHS

Natural Beauty/Environment

Lake of Bays is celebrated for its enviable natural surroundings, integral to the area's charm and critical for the livelihoods of local businesses, including artisans and tourism operators. The community prioritizes environmental preservation and is increasingly attentive to the impacts of climate change, emphasizing proactive measures to safeguard both the economy and the environment. There is an opportunity to partner with organizations such as Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit to operationalize climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Seasonal Residents

Lake of Bays sees a substantial number of seasonal residents, greatly outnumbering permanent ones. These residents, often skilled and well-connected, positively impact the community and drive demand for environmental advocacy, dining, shopping, and entertainment. As they near retirement, their economic contribution grows, leading to an increased need for at-home services such as trades, property management, and healthcare. There's a noted interest among these residents for a service directory to facilitate access to these local services.

Highway 60

Highway 60 is a crucial route through Hillside and Dwight in Lake of Bays, linking Central Ontario to Ottawa and Algonquin Park, which saw over a million visitors in 2022. This road offers local businesses a chance to benefit from the heavy camper traffic. Yet, enhancing this corridor to improve the sense of arrival and community engagement necessitates extensive consultations with the Ministry of Transportation (MTO), as it manages the road.

Provincial Parks

Algonquin Park, a world-class tourist destination near Dwight, attracts over a million visitors yearly and offers extensive outdoor recreation, supported by local businesses along Highway 60. Arrowhead Provincial Park, located close to Dwight and Hillside, welcomes almost 300,000 visitors annually, providing camping and trails. Bigwind Lake Provincial Park, south of Baysville, is set to be the newest full-operating park and is planning to open with 250 car campsites and recreational amenities.

Regional Partners - Economic Development Stakeholder Community

Stakeholders are dedicated to supporting the Township of Lake of Bays businesses but face challenges in engagement due to geographical distances. They aim to increase engagement and involvement within the community and welcome partnership opportunities. Regional economic development activities, taking place in partnership with other Muskoka municipalities present an attractive avenue for regional promotion and workforce development and should be continued.

WEAKNESSES

Affordable Housing

The Township faces significant affordable housing issues, with a critical shortage of rental options due to the prevalence of short-term rentals. High housing costs and restrictive lot sizes further hinder the development of new, more affordable housing solutions, challenging workforce attraction and retention.

Transit

The Township of Lake of Bays has no public or private transit, limiting job access for lower-wage workers and preventing residents, particularly young people, from easily reaching essential services in larger centers without a vehicle.

Workforce

Businesses in the Township of Lake of Bays struggles to attract and retain workers, especially for tourism and seasonal industries, due to inadequate housing and lack of transit. Full-time, year-round employment with competitive wages tends to attract more stable staffing. The community's aging population and limited job prospects deter younger residents, while issues with diversity and inclusion challenge newcomer integration. Retired and semi-retired residents present an underutilized workforce potential.

Youth

The Township faces an aging demographic and a lack of appealing and diverse employment prospects for youth, who often turn to nearby larger communities for social and recreational activities due to insufficient local amenities.

Sense of Arrival

The four communities in the Township lack a clear sense of arrival, as commercial zones are not prominently placed to attract visitors or engage residents.

Diversity of Businesses

The Township of Lake of Bays has a small business community, offering under 1,500 jobs primarily in tourism, construction, and arts, with notable employment in wholesale trade and food services. Despite a range of sectors, the employment across industries is limited and, in some sectors, heavily affected by seasonal fluctuations.

Seasonality

In the Township of Lake of Bays, seasonality heavily influences business operations, with most activity concentrated in the 10-12 week summer peak. This seasonal peak challenges businesses, requiring extensive off-season preparations like staffing and property maintenance. Despite some extension into the fall, significant drops in visitation from November to April sharply reduce demand, especially in retail, and tourism sectors.

Job Quality

In the Township, wages for many jobs do not match the cost of living, with many holding the perspective that employment is typically lower-paying and seasonal. Residents express a desire for more sustainable, year-round job opportunities. Conversely, employers providing well-paying, year-round positions experience fewer issues in attracting and retaining staff.

Access to the Lakes

Public access to Lake of Bays' waterfront is limited to just a few designated areas like Dwight Beach, Norway Point and Dorset Beach Park, which restricts opportunities for non-waterfront property owners and visitors. This limited access is often perceived as being preferred by waterfront property owners, but limits the recreational enjoyment of all residents and visitors.

Diversity of Community

The Township of Lake of Bays is currently not a diverse community, which hampers efforts to attract immigrant investment and influences resident perceptions of minority visitors. The community perceives that day-trippers from the Greater Toronto Area use local amenities without contributing economically. There is a belief that encouraging immigrant entrepreneurs to establish businesses could help fill existing gaps, fostering greater investment and enhancing the area's vibrancy, as has been a recent trend in rural areas. However, the community needs to establish itself as a more welcoming place to ensure the sustainability of any newcomer investment.

OPPORTUNITIES

District Road 117 and Highway 35: The “Shortcut” to Algonquin Park

District Road 117 and Highway 35 was at one time marketed as the “scenic shortcut” to Algonquin Park. The drive itself is beautiful and connects the communities of Baysville, Dorset, and Dwight and its many assets. There is the opportunity to revisit establishing marketing and promotions to direct traffic travelling along Highway 11 to Algonquin Park through this route.

Enhance Planning and Building Processes

The Township of Lake of Bays has opportunities to improve clarity and support for development by promoting a clear vision for desired investments and developments through policies, messaging, and incentives. Despite advancements like an online permitting system and a streamlined Community Planning Permit System, the development process is still perceived as confusing and costly by some. This presents a chance for public education to simplify and explain these procedures more effectively, building on the recent surge in construction activity.

Engagement With and Between Business Community

Engagement within the Township's business community is notably low, evidenced by poor participation in focus groups and the survey. Businesses report feeling disconnected from local and regional economic development activities since the discontinuation of a newsletter and regular pre-COVID meetings with other businesses, Township staff, and council. These meetings, which facilitated action coordination and community networking, are greatly missed. There's a strong opportunity to reinstate these gatherings and improve communication channels, which could enhance connectivity not only within individual hamlets but across the entire Township, supporting broader economic and community development strategies.

Aging Population

The aging population in the Township offers both challenges and opportunities. Retirees represent a potential part-time workforce, providing an opportunity to stay active. Additionally, the growing need for home and health care services in this rural area highlights opportunities for innovation in service delivery and strategic investments to support aging at home and fill workforce gaps.

Retail and Service Development

Since COVID-19, residents of the Township, particularly in Baysville, have perceived a decline in retail and service options. Residents express a strong desire for more diverse shopping choices, including general stores, groceries, waterfront restaurants, and cafes, as well as a range of services like veterinary, hardware, home maintenance, landscaping, trades, elder care, health care, and education. This demand represents an opportunity to revitalize and expand the local retail and service sectors.

Opportunity for Targeted Investment Attraction Campaign Related to Opportunities

Currently, the Township of Lake of Bays lacks a proactive strategy for attracting investment. There exists a notable opportunity to launch a targeted investment attraction campaign to address the identified retail and service gaps. A potential focus for this campaign could be attracting newcomers to Canada, leveraging their unique perspectives and entrepreneurial potential to enrich the community's economic landscape.

Arts and Culture

Lake of Bays is home to renowned artists and an active theatre scene, yet lacks a dedicated venue, leading to the creative use of spaces like churches. Developing a specialized venue using existing community assets could boost local arts engagement. The Lake of Bays Arts Loop, aimed at increasing gallery visits, would benefit from more effective promotion. There's also potential to support artists whose workshops thrive elsewhere but lack local attendance, suggesting a need for better marketing and transportation solutions for visitors from areas like the GTA. Implementing the decade-old cultural strategy and improving infrastructure and promotion could significantly enhance the local cultural sector and attract more visitors.

Tourism

The Township of Lake of Bays boasts a robust tourism sector, with many long-standing lodges and a high concentration of tourism-related businesses. While some establishments benefit from multi-generational repeat guests and traditional practices, there's significant untapped potential in enhancing marketing and developing experiences around local arts, history, and natural attractions like the S.S. Bigwin and Dwight Beach. Currently, the area suffers from a lack of coordinated marketing efforts, presenting an opportunity to better promote these assets and expand the tourism offerings.

Land for Commercial and Industrial

The Township has a listing of available properties on their website, but overall land and space for, in particular, industrial use, is limited, and servicing is lacking in the Township.

Knowledge and Expertise Around the Lake

Many of the seasonal residents in the Township of Lake of Bays are high-powered business owners or advisors on a national or global scale. The knowledge and expertise around the lake is a huge asset – it is important to discover how to better engage those individuals in supporting strategic growth and development in Lake of Bays.

Four Hubs

The Township of Lake of Bays features four unique communities, previously marketed under common themes. Consultations suggest highlighting each area's distinctiveness instead, enhancing their individual appeal and attracting visitors looking for varied experiences.

Business Friendly Attitude

Businesses are seeking clearer assistance with planning processes and a well-defined vision for investment from the Township. Enhancing communication with the business community around the Township's development processes would help businesses better prepare for the application process and align expectations regarding costs, timelines, and processes. The development of the Community Improvement Plan, aimed at encouraging reinvestment in the Township's four communities, represents a step towards supporting local businesses and enhancing public spaces.

Awareness of Lake of Bays

Businesses in off-corridor areas like Baysville and Dorset feel unnoticed, lacking visibility from the main Highway 60 traffic. Enhancing marketing efforts to better link these communities with the main tourism activities along the Highway 60 corridor could significantly raise awareness of Lake of Bays' offerings and improve its identity as part of the Muskoka region.

Library, Service, and Recreation Clubs

The community highly values the offerings of local libraries and recreation clubs, like the Baysville Curling Club, which provide engaging programming and social activities for both full-time and seasonal residents. There is potential to further support and expand these programs, tailored to community needs, to enhance the quality of life throughout the Township and enhance the sense of community among residents and seasonal residents of all ages.

Short-term Rentals

Short-term rentals (STRs) are on the rise in the Township of Lake of Bays, offering both challenges and opportunities.

Although some renters disrupt local life and minimally engage with the tourism economy, the potential to collect and reinvest Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) fees from these rentals could significantly benefit tourism and placemaking initiatives. There's also an opportunity to better engage STR guests with local retail, services, and entertainment, enhancing their experience and integration into the community.

Community Improvement Plan (CIP)

The Community Improvement Plan in the Township of Lake of Bays provides financial support through grants and loans aimed at enhancing local businesses and the community's overall appeal. Key areas of focus include expanding and diversifying existing businesses, improving beautification and visual appeal, developing housing, boosting tourism and business growth, and fostering public art. This plan represents a strategic opportunity to drive economic and aesthetic improvements across the community.

Additional Economic Development Considerations for the Township of Lake of Bays

Sectors of Opportunity

While the Township of Lake of Bays' economy is fairly diversified, the employment base is small and that can make it more challenging for businesses to expand and for new businesses to locate in the area, particularly those that might be labour-intensive. Many business owners chose to locate in the community because they wanted to live in the community, or they had a family history in the area. Based on consultation and community data, the most viable investment attraction opportunities currently are those that were small, owner-operator-type businesses servicing existing marketplaces, such as the tourism industry or the short-term rental industry, as well as the residents that live here both seasonally and full time. There is also an opportunity to expand on the Township's existing strength in tourism both through experience, cultural tourism, and accommodation development, as well as better capitalizing on transportation corridors to capture tourist-related traffic visiting the parks. Furthermore, with a focus on preserving and protecting the environment, the Township could position itself as a hub for green sustainable and environmentally friendly businesses. There are several examples of those types of businesses that already exist in the community. Lastly, given the rural challenges facing the business community in terms of workforce and service delivery, there are business opportunities to further enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of product and service delivery within these identified sectors.

Tourism and Resident Property Maintenance Services

The Township of Lake of Bays is a prime destination for tourists seeking outdoor recreation and relaxation. The Township is home to seasonal residences, accommodators, and tourism-related businesses, as well as an increasing number of short-term rentals. This creates a strong demand for property maintenance services. All these properties require maintenance services ranging from cleaning to trades, such as plumbing and carpentry, to landscaping. Consultation revealed that there is demand for these services and in many cases, residents did not know where to find them. They were met with waits to access trades and property maintenance services, which presented an opportunity for business development. Attraction of these businesses should focus on sole proprietors, owner-operators, or those that can operate with a small team recognizing the staffing shortage that exists within the Township. By attracting these services, the Township can boost local employment, support small businesses, and solidify its reputation as a premier destination for both tourists and seasonal residents.

In-home Care and Health Services

In-home care and health services represent a vital area of opportunity for entrepreneurs in the Township of Lake of Bays, particularly given its older-than-average population and the increasing number of seasonal residents transitioning to permanent residents. As more seniors choose to age in place, the demand for in-home health care, including medical, personal, and supportive services is expected to grow. Establishing a robust network of in-home care providers can ensure that residents receive high-quality, accessible healthcare, improving their quality of life and allowing them to remain in their homes longer. The consultation revealed that those trying to access care for elderly parents, or as seniors themselves, struggled to find health and home care-related services within the Township. This presents a market opportunity for small sole proprietors, owner-operator-type operations, or those with a small number of employees to provide home health care and home care services. The increase in seniors within the Township also presents an opportunity to attract non-home-based public and private healthcare service providers as well, including those specializing in rural geriatric care, an area that will continue to grow in coming years. By investing in attracting in-home care and health services, the Township can enhance its attractiveness as a supportive and thriving community for both current and future residents.

Tourism Experiences and Accommodation

Tourism experiences and accommodation offer a significant growth opportunity for the Township of Lake of Bays. The region's breathtaking natural scenery, abundant lakes, and proximity to Algonquin Provincial Park make it an ideal destination for tourists seeking diverse outdoor activities and relaxation. Tourism-related industries are already the largest employers in the Township of Lake of Bays, and the Township is home to many tourism operators and high-quality and renowned artists, both visual and performing. These operators are already taking advantage of the natural beauty of the area for inspiration, and leveraging the parks to host experience-based tourism activities. Travelers are spending more on experiences and experience-based tourism tends to attract a more affluent traveler, thus creating additional tourism experiences and accommodation opportunities will attract more visitors to spend money and time in the community. Additionally, consultation revealed that there were concerns about the type of visitors using short-term rentals. Increasing the number of tourism experiences existing in and around the community can help shift the type of tourist visiting the area from those looking for a traditional cottage weekend on the dock to those looking to engage in arts, cultural, and nature-based experiences.

Expanding tourism experiences, such as guided nature tours, adventure sports, cultural festivals, culinary experiences, and arts events, can attract a wider range of visitors and enhance their stay. Developing a variety of accommodation options, including resorts, boutique hotels, bed-and-breakfasts, and vacation rentals, will cater to different preferences and budgets, encouraging longer stays and repeat visits. While accommodators will likely require additional staff, there are a number of tourism operators that exist in the area offering tours and other experiences that are sole proprietor owner-operator-based operations.

These sorts of operations present the most attractive investment opportunity within the tourism sector in the Township of Lake of Bays at the moment. Beyond this, it was noted anecdotally that more new Canadians were visiting the Township from areas like the GTA, but many were not stopping to shop and explore the community beyond the beach. There is an additional market opportunity to better service these communities as they visit as both day and overnight visitors.

Lastly, the Township itself could invest in the development of new tourism products, creating destination attractions along major transportation corridors, and developing events and festivals that bring residents and visitors together to celebrate what makes Lake of Bays great.

Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism, particularly Indigenous tourism, presents a unique and enriching opportunity for the Township of Lake of Bays. The region's rich Indigenous heritage, rooted in the traditions and histories of the Anishnaabeg and Haudenosaunee, including the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi Nations, offers a profound cultural experience for visitors. Promoting Indigenous tourism can involve developing cultural tours, educational programs, traditional arts and crafts workshops, and storytelling sessions led by Indigenous community members. These experiences not only provide visitors with a deeper understanding and appreciation of Indigenous cultures but also create sustainable economic opportunities for Indigenous communities. By embracing and showcasing its Indigenous heritage, the Township can attract culturally-minded tourists, foster cross-cultural understanding, and support the preservation and celebration of Indigenous traditions and knowledge.

Beyond Indigenous history in the Township, the area is also home to a rich settler history, steeped in the logging and tourism industries. There are many residents and businesses that have been in the community for generations and there may be an opportunity to build off these themes for future experience development.

Lastly, the Township lends itself well to arts-related tourism, with a number of renowned artists based in the community to leverage its natural beauty for inspiration and to draw customers to the region. There is an existing promotional tool for artists in the community already, via the Arts Loop website, but more investment and engagement could truly enhance the business opportunity for artists in the region, both to sell their art, and create enhanced tourism experiences. A venue for artists to showcase their visual and performance art would help elevate the profile of the sector and the opportunities that exist. Existing venues could be shared and/or repurposed for this.

Resident-Focused Retail and Service Businesses

Consultation data revealed that Township of Lake of Bays residents, both permanent and seasonal, desired additional community-based retail and service amenities to prevent them from leaving the community.

This ranged from more restaurants and cafes to hardware stores to veterinary services, to more entertainment options. The resident-focus retail and service options present opportunities for small owner operators interested in self-employment, as the permanent population base continues to grow.

Green/Sustainable/Environmental Business

Township of Lake of Bays residents are passionate about the environment and the community attracts many sustainability-minded people. Green, sustainable, and environmental businesses present a promising area of opportunity for the Township, aligning with Canada's 2030 emissions reduction goals. The Township's abundant natural resources and commitment to preserving its pristine environment create an ideal setting for eco-friendly enterprises and there are already examples of local residents developing green and sustainable focused business models including in construction and in the recreation industry. Encouraging the development of businesses focused on renewable energy, eco-tourism, and environmentally responsible products can drive economic growth while contributing to the national objective of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 40-45% below 2005 levels by 2030. These businesses can attract eco-conscious consumers and tourists, boost local employment, and promote sustainable practices within the community. By fostering a green economy, the Township of Lake of Bays can enhance its reputation as a leader in sustainability, support Canada's climate action targets, and provide a model for other communities to follow.

Businesses That Can Provide Adjacent Innovation in/to These Sectors

Businesses that can provide adjacent innovation to sectors such as tourism and seasonal resident property maintenance services, in-home care and health services, tourism experiences and accommodation, cultural tourism, and green/sustainable/environmental business present immense opportunities for full-time sustainable employment growth opportunities for Lake of Bays.

Adjacent innovations could include smart home technologies that enhance property security and energy efficiency, mobile apps for easy access to property maintenance services, and eco-friendly landscaping solutions. Companies can also offer integrated service packages that include regular property inspections, remote monitoring, and automated maintenance scheduling, making property care seamless for seasonal residents.

Innovations in telehealth can provide remote medical consultations and monitoring, while smart home devices can assist with daily living activities and ensure safety for aging residents. Businesses can also develop specialized software to coordinate in-home care services, manage health records, and streamline communication between caregivers and healthcare providers, improving the quality and accessibility of care.

Businesses can introduce augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) experiences to enhance tours and attractions, providing interactive and immersive experiences. Innovations in sustainable construction can lead to eco-friendly lodging options, such as green-certified hotels and vacation rentals. Additionally, developing mobile apps for booking, local recommendations, and virtual tour guides can enhance visitor experiences and convenience.

Technological advancements can be used to create virtual tours and digital storytelling platforms that share Indigenous history and traditions with a broader audience. Businesses can also develop partnerships with Indigenous communities to create authentic cultural experiences, incorporating traditional crafts and practices into tourism offerings. Moreover, sustainable tourism practices can be promoted through eco-friendly tours and conservation education programs.

Adjacent innovations in this sector could involve developing renewable energy solutions such as solar panels and wind turbines tailored for residential and commercial use. Businesses can also create products from recycled materials, promote sustainable agriculture practices, and develop waste reduction technologies. Additionally, smart grid technology and energy management systems can help optimize energy use and reduce carbon footprints.

By encouraging these innovative businesses, the Township can not only enhance its economic landscape but also align with sustainability goals, creating a thriving, forward-thinking community that attracts investment and improves the quality of life for its residents.

Capacity

The Township of Lake of Bays is a small municipality and as such does not have a significant amount of human resources to dedicate to economic development. However, they have a full-time position dedicated which should be sufficient to begin implementation of this Strategy. As initiatives become established and the demand for economic development services grows, there may be a need to explore additional resources.

The Township should anticipate working closely with partners to leverage their resources and expertise to support the local business community through different initiatives. The Township of Lake of Bays already works in partnership with municipalities across the District of Muskoka to undertake economic development and should continue these efforts to maximize resources and benefit from the regional economic development ecosystem.

Environmental Protection

Existing reports and plans as well as public consultation confirmed that environmental protection is considered critical to the future of the Township of Lake of Bays. Many residents chose the Township as a place to reside because of the beautiful landscape and natural environment. Many businesses also rely on the environment and the natural beauty of the community to sustain their business, particularly those that are tourism-oriented. As such, any future economic development within the Township must prioritize the protection of the environment and sustainability. The value placed on environmental protection also presents an opportunity to support business development around environmental and green technologies, having the natural facilities and spaces to do the necessary testing and ground truthing, while having a ready market within the community that are interested in supporting sustainability.

5-Year Economic Development Strategy

This section outlines a 5-year economic development strategy for the Township of Lake of Bays, which is focused on fostering a thriving community that balances quality of life, economic vitality, and environmental integrity. The strategy aims to enhance the operational environment for local businesses, attract strategic investments, and develop the area as a destination for both residents and visitors. This section presents the vision, goals, objectives, and detailed action items that guide this comprehensive approach.

The Vision

The economic development vision for the Township of Lake of Bays is to cultivate a thriving community where quality of life and economic vitality are harmoniously balanced with environmental integrity.

The Township of Lake of Bays aims to be a place where businesses not only thrive but also complement and enhance the local character and natural landscapes. Guided by this vision, the community is dedicated to fostering sustainable development that benefits residents, attracts visitors, and supports businesses, all while preserving the unique beauty and ecological health of the area.

Goals, Objectives, and Action Items

GOAL 1: ENHANCE THE OPERATING ENVIRONMENT FOR BUSINESSES IN LAKE OF BAYS.

This goal seeks to create and support an environment where small and medium-sized businesses can grow and thrive. It improves connection and communication between the business community and the Township, builds partnerships to improve connectivity and access to economic development resources, better connects employers to local and regional residents, and creates greater awareness of consumer-oriented service businesses within the community. This goal also seeks to create and promote pathways to future opportunities in the community for youth, vital to the future sustainability of Lake of Bays. Undertaking these efforts will enable businesses to connect to the resources, events, businesses, employees, and information in a more meaningful and accessible manner to achieve the underpinnings of the goal. Below, the rationale, objectives, actions, timelines, partners, resources, and potential performance measures are shared. Additional implementation notes that contain the rationale behind the action and considerations for implementation can be found in Appendix C.

RATIONALE ▼

- Businesses consulted want support for their efforts to grow, both through direct business development programming, and alignment of Township policies.
- Businesses consulted felt that communication with the Township was a challenge and that it was difficult to navigate challenges or maximize the opportunities before them. In some cases, they were unaware of or did not understand the Township's development processes.
- The population of the Township of Lake of Bays is aging, and finding available labour will likely continue to be a challenge in at least the short to mid-term, however, retail and service gaps also persist.
- Many youth envision career paths that take them out of the community.
- In the past, there were more organized networking events that connected businesses across the Township, as well as in their own community. The Township also used to host quarterly meetings with business leaders. Businesses would like more connections for business development, partnership, and planning purposes.
- There is significant demand for trades, handypersons, and property services in the community, but residents were mostly finding businesses via word-of-mouth.

Objective: Enhance communication and build a two-way relationship between the Township and the business community.

Actions	Timing	Lead	Partners	Resources
Maintain an on-going business visitation program to better understand business needs and respond to immediate opportunities and challenges.	Short	EDO	Muskoka Futures, Huntsville/Lake of Bays Chamber of Commerce, Muskoka Small Business Centre	Staff Time
Continue to enhance the Township website to become a central resource to share local, regional, and other important information related to business operation, development and supports. Engage businesses to provide feedback on usability as part of the enhancement process.	Short	EDO	Communications	Staff time, Budget for convening
Create a committee of business representatives to provide insight on implementation of the Economic Development Strategy. Ensure diversity on the business committee where possible (i.e. all sectors and demographics represented).	Mid	EDO	Muskoka Futures, Huntsville/Lake of Bays Chamber of Commerce	Staff time, Budget for convening

Re-establish a quarterly newsletter to share key initiatives and programs from the Township, new opportunities for the business community (i.e. funding), and local and regional events and happenings that would be relevant to them.	Mid	EDO	Communications	Staff time
Proposed Performance Measures				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of meetings with businesses • Number of red flags and green flag issues addressed • Engagement with business resources on the township website • Engagement of Lake of Bays businesses in local and regional economic development initiatives 				

Objective: Support entrepreneurship in the community, especially for youth.

Actions	Timing	Lead	Partners	Resources
Continue to celebrate and promote business owners in the community. This could be via purchasing and showcasing their work in community facilities, creating and hosting a video or blog series on the great and innovative things business owners in the Township of Lake of Bays are doing, or having Council come out to business-centric events in the community. These celebration and promotion opportunities could showcase entrepreneurship, or other regional career paths as well.	Short	EDO	Communications	Staff Time, Budget for celebration and promotion initiatives.
Continue to advocate for provision of high-speed internet across the Township.	Mid	EDO	Council, Communications	Staff time
Work with partners to promote entrepreneurship as a career path in schools and the library.	Mid	EDO	Muskoka Small Business Centre, Muskoka Futures, Library, School Boards	Staff time, Budget for initiatives
Work with partners to promote and enable access to more business development supports in the community, such as educational seminars.	Mid	EDO	Muskoka Small Business Centre, Muskoka Futures, Library	Staff time, Budget for events
Proposed Performance Measures:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment growth • Business expansions • Business start ups • Business feedback, anecdotal and sales • % of high-speed internet coverage • Cost of high-speed internet • Youth business start ups 				

Objective: Support workforce development and attraction within the Township.

Actions	Timing	Lead	Partners	Resources
Create opportunities to connect employers to residents in the Township of Lake of Bays and around the region. This could be through activities like job fairs, networking, and mentorship.	Short	EDO	Huntsville/Lake of Bays Chamber of Commerce, Town of Huntsville, YMCA, SM Skillforce, Regional Workforce Development Committee	Staff time, Budget to support initiatives
Create a directory of rental housing available for residents and seasonal employees and link Muskoka Job Board to the Township website.	Short	EDO	Communications	Staff time
Proposed Performance Measures:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved awareness of employment resources (# website redirects to job board) Employer feedback on initiatives, both anecdotal and # of employment positions filled Resident feedback on initiatives, both anecdotal and # of job connections made Youth feedback on initiatives, primarily anecdotal 				

Objective: Enhance connections between businesses in Lake of Bays.

Actions	Timing	Lead	Partners	Resources
Enhance connection between businesses in the Township of Lake of Bays and the regional business community through support and promotion for regional-level networking events. This could include the creation of a digital platform for businesses to network, share resources, and collaborate on projects.	Short	EDO	Communications	Staff time, Budget for potential platform
Facilitate hamlet-level and Township-wide business networking to better connect Township businesses for referrals, learning, and planning purposes.	Mid	EDO	Huntsville/Lake of Bays Chamber of Commerce	Staff time, Budget for events
Proposed Performance Measures				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employment growth Business expansions Business feedback, anecdotal # new partnerships, sales channels (\$ value), initiatives 				

Objective: Improve awareness of businesses in the community.

Actions	Timing	Lead	Partners	Resources
Develop a directory of consumer-facing service businesses to be distributed to residents and Lake Associations, by need (i.e. plumbing, landscaping, plowing, etc.). This should be printed and a real-time version should be housed on the Township website.	Mid	EDO	Huntsville/Lake of Bays Chamber of Commerce, Lake Associations, Business community	Staff time, Budget for any promotion and physical publication
Offer a resident-focused trade show to showcase local service providers. It is recommended this be partnered with well attended events like the Dwight or Baysville market. Explore ways to enhance the value of the event with a pre or post event workshop or business networking opportunity.	Mid	EDO	Huntsville/Lake of Bays Chamber of Commerce	Staff time, Budget to support event (Sponsorship opportunities)
Proposed Performance Measures				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anecdotal feedback from businesses and residents • Digital guide usage • Print circulation vs. usage • Business growth in featured sectors 				

GOAL 2: ATTRACT, SUPPORT, AND RETAIN STRATEGIC INVESTMENT INTO THE COMMUNITY.

As the community grows and more seasonal residents become permanent, the demand for retail and services also increases. Goal 2 aims to attract and retain investment in Lake of Bays to address immediate and future community needs, and to create value-added employment opportunities based on existing community strengths. This goal will help the Township prepare to welcome investment through improved communications on and assistance with navigating planning and building processes, and by pursuing new investment opportunities. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of having the necessary community infrastructure in place to support this growth. Ultimately, this goal positions the Township to attract meaningful and strategic investments that enhance the community while protecting the integrity of the environment. Below, the rationale, objectives, actions, timelines, partners, resources, and potential performance measures are shared. Additional implementation notes that contain the rationale behind the action and considerations for implementation can be found in Appendix C.

RATIONALE ▼

- Businesses expressed challenges when undertaking the development process, and ensuring the process is clearly outlined and easy to understand for local business would encourage development that adds value and is complementary to existing businesses and community needs.
- The Community Planning Permit By-law is now in effect which streamlines the planning processes Township-wide.

- Consultation revealed a perception that the Township of Lake of Bays does not have a lot of year-round, well-paying employment opportunities.
- Residents would like to see the retail and service mix improve.
- A recent municipal decision has left businesses and residents disappointed with the outcomes.
- Environmental protection and protection of natural assets are important to community members and businesses.
- The Township's Official Plan and Community Planning Permit By-law have strong policies and provisions that protect the environment, but at times businesses want less restrictions or don't understand how the existing regulations impact their plans.
- The biggest planning and development challenge in the Township is balancing competing interests between development and preserving and protecting the environment.
- Housing and transit are the two most significant barriers to attracting and retaining a workforce.
- Key areas of opportunity for investment were identified as businesses that provide high-quality employment in the following subsectors:
 - Tourism and seasonal resident property maintenance services
 - In-home care and health services
 - Tourism experiences and accommodation
 - Green/sustainable/environmental business
 - Businesses that can provide adjacent innovation in/to these sectors

Objective: Adopt a business-friendly attitude, where it aligns with the vision and needs of the community.

Actions	Timing	Lead	Partners	Resources
Develop a clear guideline document that outlines the support available to businesses from the Township.	Short	EDO	Planning	Staff time
Undertake an Official Plan and by-law review to ensure that planning and development policies align with economic development goals and vision, while balancing protection of the environment. Include consideration for economic development and the strategic economic development goals of the Township, as well as the Community Improvement Plan and Parks, Open Space, and Recreation Strategy in the update to the Township's Official Plan.	Mid	Planning	EDO	Staff time, Budget for by-law review

Establish a concierge service to assist strategic investment with development processes. Track and publish the performance metrics of the concierge service to promote transparency.	Long	EDO	Planning	Staff time
Proposed Performance Measures:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of informational engagements with the business community on planning and development issues • Business satisfaction, anecdotal and follow up survey • Permit values • Measures of environmental protection • Resident satisfaction, anecdotal and future surveys • Business expansions • Business startups 				

Objective: Better communicate Township Planning and Development processes and successes.

Actions	Timing	Lead	Partners	Resources
Update, promote, and share print and digital materials that clearly articulate the development process. Develop clear and concise communication material to promote any future changes to planning processes. Develop an annual event to educate businesses on the planning and development process.	Short	EDO/ Planning		Staff time, Budget for promotion
Share planning successes (i.e. reduced wait times for permitting, positive testimonials, etc.) with the community to change the broader perception.	Long	EDO/ Planning		Staff time
Proposed Performance Measures:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance at events • Anecdotal feedback from the business community • # of success stories shared 				

Objective: Attract investment to the Township of Lake of Bays that provides high-quality employment and is complementary to the community's industrial strengths, opportunities, and values to enhance quality of life.

Actions	Timing	Lead	Partners	Resources
Create marketing materials to promote strategic investment attraction opportunities. Clearly articulate the market opportunity and value proposition of locating in the community.	Mid	EDO	Communications	Staff time
Advertise opportunities at relevant trade shows and publications.	Mid	EDO		Staff time, Budget for promotional activities

Proposed Performance Measures:

- New businesses and employment in target sectors
- Engagement with investment attraction materials
- # of leads (opened and closed)

Objective: Enable the development of workforce attainable housing.

Actions	Timing	Lead	Partners	Resources
Actively promote incentives and opportunities for workforce-attainable housing development with developers and employers. This includes the Township CIP, and any programs available from other levels of government.	Short	EDO		Staff time, Budget for promotional activities
Through the update to the Township's Official Plan, ensure policy is supportive of the development of workforce-attainable housing in the community.	Mid	EDO	Planning	Staff time
Explore opportunities to support innovative housing solutions like a community land trust, with an explicit goal of creating workforce-attainable housing.	Long	EDO	Planning, District of Muskoka, Muskoka Land Trust	Staff time, Consider budget or in-kind allocations, including CIP budget
Proposed Performance Measures:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of new housing units developed • # of rental units 				

Objective: Work with partners to develop local transportation solutions.

Actions	Timing	Lead	Partners	Resources
Establish a transportation working group with key community partners, stakeholders, businesses, and residents to identify and explore rural and remote transportation solutions. This could include a rideshare program. Use community surveys and consultation to assess transportation needs and ensure solutions are user-centered.	Mid	EDO	District of Muskoka, Town of Hunstville, Local businesses, RTO12	Staff time, Budget for convening
Pilot solutions.	Long	EDO	District of Muskoka, Town of Hunstville, Local businesses	Staff time, Budget to pilot solutions
Proposed Performance Measures:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee participation • Resources generated • Solutions piloted and outcomes (i.e. lessons learned, ridership, anecdotal impact) 				

Objective: Support and promote regional economic development efforts that align with the Township's strategic goals.

Actions	Timing	Lead	Partners	Resources
Support the implementation of the regional workforce development strategy in the Township of Lake of Bays.	Short	EDO	District of Muskoka, Regional Muskoka municipalities, SM Skillforce, YMCA, Georgian College, School Boards	Staff time, Budget for partnership initiatives
Continue to participate with regional municipal partners to share information, as well as support Venture Muskoka and other strategic regional economic development efforts.	Short	EDO	District of Muskoka, Regional Muskoka municipalities, SM Skillforce, YMCA, Georgian College, School Boards	Staff time, Budget for partnership initiatives
Explore opportunities to partner with the RTO12 Catalyst Housing project to engage new workforce participants in the Township.	Long	EDO	RTO12	Staff time
Proposed Performance Measures:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linked to metrics from other objectives (new businesses, website visitation, anecdotal feedback from businesses related to workforce), as aligned with initiatives. 				

GOAL 3: DEVELOP LAKE OF BAYS AS A DESTINATION FOR RESIDENTS AND VISITORS.

Lake of Bays boasts natural beauty and a range of unique assets and attractions that contribute to its strength in the tourism sector. However, the community does not currently fully capitalize on the benefits of its location in a region known for tourism and its proximity to several provincial parks that attract over a million visitors annually. Goal 3 aims to establish Lake of Bays as a premier tourism destination, realizing its full potential.

At the same time, residents in this small community also want to enhance their amenities and access to entertainment options. Goal 3 also seeks to create a better quality of life for residents, both permanent and seasonal. It will achieve this by enhancing the quality of public spaces within the community, creating engaging areas for community life and space, and developing promotions and products that increase visitation across all seasons, especially during the off-season. Below, the rationale, objectives, actions, timelines, partners, resources, and potential performance measures are shared. Additional implementation notes that contain the rationale behind the action, and considerations for implementation can be found in Appendix C.

RATIONALE ▼

- The Township of Lake of Bays' largest employer and industry with the highest concentration of employment is the tourism sector, and there are a number of adjacent sectors that are dependent on tourism.
- The tourism sector has suffered significant setbacks in recent years as a result of COVID-19.
- More seasonal residents are becoming permanent and are increasingly looking for more opportunities and experiences to engage in and connect with the community.
- The Township of Lake of Bays has many natural and arts and culture assets, with world renowned artists, however there is very little knowledge, celebration, or promotion of this within the community.
- The Township of Lake of Bays attracts significant thru-traffic enroute to Algonquin Park.
- Residents have concerns about over tourism and want to ensure the natural environment is protected.

Objective: Enhance the quality of place and space in the four hamlets of Lake of Bays.

Actions	Timing	Lead	Partners	Resources
Create a detailed implementation plan for the Community Improvement Plan (CIP).	Short	EDO	Planning	Staff time, budget for incentives
Implement the MAT tax to enable public space enhancement, animation, and tourism promotion.	Short	Finance	EDO	Staff time
Create, beautify, and animate public spaces to encourage people to visit, gather, and linger in hamlets. Leverage local artists to support this.	Mid	EDO/ Parks & Facilities	Local artists and musicians	Staff time, budget for beautification and animation
Create signage and features, like public art, to capture the potential economic spin-off from the many visitors and residents driving the Highway 60, 35, and Muskoka District Road 117 corridors. Involve local artists in the design process for public spaces and signage.	Mid	EDO/ Parks & Facilities	Local artists	Staff time, budget for signage and local art
Create a welcoming environment for newcomers to Canada, including residents, businesses, and visitors.	Mid	EDO	District Local Immigration Partnership (if approved), SM Skillforce, Huntsville/Lake of Bays Chamber of Commerce	Staff time, budget for initiatives

Explore opportunities to enhance access to the natural environment, including lakes, waterways, trails, beaches, and parks.	Mid	Parks & Facilities	EDO, Planning	Staff time, budget for improvements
Create a "destination" in Baysville that will attract visitors to the Village to explore the Village and "destination" on foot.	Long	EDO	Planning, various Township departments	Staff time, budget for community engagement and destination development
Create a "destination" somewhere on or near Highway 60 in Dwight that will encourage traffic to stop and explore the "destination" and the Village of Dwight on foot.	Long	EDO	Planning, various Township departments	Staff time, budget for community engagement and destination development
Proposed Performance Measures:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business expansion • Business succession • Business start ups • Anecdotal feedback from business community (increased revenue in "off" season) • Visitation at events and festivals • Visitation to public spaces 				

Objective: Increase day and overnight visitors to Lake of Bays and maximize their community impact while protecting the natural environment.

Actions	Timing	Lead	Partners	Resources
Develop an arts, culture, heritage, and tourism strategy to coordinate, develop, and expand related assets in the community to maximize visitor spend and impact and celebrate the incredible assets based in the community. This should include a destination management and marketing plan to control the flow of visitors, maximize the benefit of visitation to the community, and minimize the impact on the natural environment. The strategy should include consideration for the impacts of climate change.	Mid	EDO	Local artisans and performers, Museums, Town of Huntsville, RTO12, Muskoka Tourism	Staff time, Budget for strategy
Develop and support the development of off-season activities, events, and experiences.	Mid	EDO	Parks & Facilities, Library, RTO 12, Muskoka Tourism	Staff time, Budget for event development
Collaborate with partners to enhance Lake of Bays tourism marketing and promotions efforts.	Mid	EDO	RTO12, Muskoka Tourism	Staff time, Budget for promotions
Support the development of spaces that celebrate and showcase the work of local businesses and history. This could include an appropriately scaled arts and culture centre to further focus on developing the arts and culture sector and provide a venue to showcase all local forms of art and culture.	Mid	EDO	Library, Parks & Facilities, Local artisans and performers, Museums, RTO12	Staff time, budget for facility development and/or enhancement

Identify specific off-season events and initiatives as examples for investment buy-in (i.e. "business in a box".)	Mid	EDO	Huntsville/Lake of Bays Chamber of Commerce, Muskoka Small Business Centre	Staff time, Budget for initiatives
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Proposed Performance Measures:

- Traffic Counts in different seasons
- Anecdotal feedback from business community (increased revenue in "off" season)
- Vacancy rate across seasons
- Visitation at events and festivals
- Visitation to public spaces
- Engagement with marketing and promotions

Concluding Thoughts

As the Township of Lake of Bays looks toward the future, the 5-Year Economic Development Strategy stands as a guiding document, inspired by a vision of sustainable growth and prosperity from the community. This Strategy presents the Township of Lake of Bays with a balanced approach to economic development, environmental stewardship, and community enhancement.

The extensive engagement process not only shaped this Strategy but also reaffirmed the passion, readiness, and needs of the community as the Township moves forward together. The path laid out in this document is designed to be adaptable and responsive to changing circumstances, ensuring that the Township's approach remains relevant and effective in meeting the goals identified.

The Township of Lake of Bays is poised at a significant juncture; with the solid foundation of this Strategy, the Township is ready to tackle existing challenges and embrace new opportunities that will strengthen the economic landscape. By enhancing the operating environment for businesses, attracting strategic investments, and developing the Township of Lake of Bays as a vibrant destination, the Township can ensure that it remains a place of opportunity, enjoyment, and enduring charm.

As the Township implements this strategy over the next five years, it will be essential to maintain the spirit of collaboration and innovation that has been the hallmark of this planning process. The Township of Lake of Bays should continue to forge partnerships, engage with the community and its businesses, and lead with foresight and adaptability. Together, the community will build a future that honors its heritage and secures a prosperous legacy for generations to come.



LAKE OF BAYS

APPENDIX

Appendix A: Background Reports (Long Form)

Appendix B: Key Consultation Themes (Long Form)

Appendix C: Implementation Notes by Action



Appendix A: Background Reports (Long Form)

Tapestry of Place (Cultural Tourism Strategy)

The Tapestry of Place was a cultural strategy created in 2013 to guide the development of cultural tourism in the Township of Lake of Bays and the Town of Huntsville. While much of the plan was not actioned in Lake of Bays, many of the recommendations are still relevant today and further consideration should be given as to how to unlock cultural tourism as an economic driver within the community. An overview of relevant elements of the plan is provided below.

Cultural tourism has been identified as a significant niche market for development in Huntsville and Lake of Bays. This type of tourism focuses on experiencing the local environment, history, and arts, appealing to tourists who travel more frequently and spend more per trip compared to non-cultural tourists. The Ontario Arts Council highlights that 22% of overnight tourists in Ontario engaged in arts and culture activities, spending nearly double the amount of typical tourists. The majority of cultural tourists are baby boomers, a demographic that continues to grow and exert economic influence.

Historically, cultural tourism in North America centred on attractions like museums, theatres, and historic sites. However, a place-based approach is recommended, which emphasizes marketing a collective array of cultural experiences rather than a single attraction. This approach capitalizes on the intrinsic allure of a destination, including its history, heritage, narratives, landscapes, and community.

The Plan identified a number of key characteristics that could frame the cultural tourism product available in Huntsville/Lake of Bays, including:

- **Heritage Intangibles:** The area is known for its relaxed attitude, community engagement, adventurousness, resilience, rejuvenating environment, respect for nature, hospitality, humour, authenticity, and slower-paced lifestyle.
- **Place Attributes:** Unique flora and fauna (e.g., grey wolf, black bear, moose), distinctive landscapes (e.g., granite rock outcroppings, glacial lakes), cultural symbols (e.g., cottages, Muskoka chairs), and notable personalities (e.g., Tom Thomson, Hawksley Workman).
- **Potential Narratives:** Stories include the Anishinaabeg People and Turtle Island, the Hudson Bay Company, Muskoka Cottage Country, and the area's role in hosting the G8 summit.

The plan also identified five key cultural themes derived from over 100 assets to build visitor products and experiences around including:

- Muskoka Memories: Agriculture, Industrial, and Human Heritage
- Kiln & Canvas, Loom: Arts
- Muskoka à la Carte: Cuisine
- Curtain Rising: Performance Arts
- Our Nature Revealed: Natural History
- Cultural Tourism Strengths and Weaknesses

The Plan provided a SWOT assessment of the region for cultural tourism sector development which included the following:



Overall the plan provided 3 key recommendations:

- Establish a Cultural Tourism Coordinating Committee

- Initiate a Product Development Process
- Focus on the timing and nature of cultural tourism marketing campaigns

A number of meaningful considerations can be derived from the Tapestry of Place document and applied to the Economic Development Strategy such as:

Economic Diversification

Cultural tourism can diversify the local economy by attracting high-spending tourists and providing year-round economic benefits, reducing reliance on seasonal tourism.

Community Engagement and Identity

Emphasizing cultural tourism reinforces community identity, promotes local heritage, and enhances community pride, which can attract both residents and visitors.

Increased Tourism Revenue

By targeting cultural tourists who spend more per trip, the strategy can boost local businesses, increase visitor spending, and stimulate the economy.

Sustainable Tourism Growth

A place-based approach ensures sustainable tourism growth by promoting a comprehensive cultural experience that leverages existing assets and reduces pressure on individual attractions.

Promotion of Local Artists and Businesses

Developing cultural tourism provides a platform for local artists, artisans, and businesses, fostering a vibrant local arts scene and encouraging creative entrepreneurship.

Collaborative Opportunities

Establishing committees and partnerships fosters collaboration among local stakeholders, enhancing the effectiveness of cultural tourism initiatives and ensuring a unified approach to economic development.

Marketing and Branding Building

A focus on cultural tourism strengthens the region's brand as a cultural destination, attracting a wider audience and distinguishing it from competing destinations.

Integrating cultural tourism into the economic development strategy of Lake of Bays can harness these benefits, driving economic growth, enhancing community well-being, and creating a sustainable, vibrant future for the area. Lastly, it is worth noting that Huntsville has been supporting the implementation of some elements of the plan and should be considered as a potential partner for future cultural tourism initiatives.

Community Improvement Plan

The Township's Community Improvement Plan (CIP) has been completed and adopted by Council. The purpose of the CIP is to enhance buildings, housing, streets and parks, initiate growth through private sector development, create a sense of community and attract tourism, business investment and economic development opportunities.

The CIP will enable the Township to provide incentives for businesses to encourage physical improvements through co-financing/grants and provide direction to the Township for enhancements to streets and parks.

The CIP focuses on the designated settlement areas in the Township of Lake of Bays, being the Communities of Baysville, Dwight, Dorset, and Hillside.

Surveys utilized during the consultation process asked respondents to identify their top 3 priorities for incentives related to private business and they were (in order of priority):

- 1 Encourage New Business
- 2 New Multi-unit Affordable Housing
- 3 Enhance Landscape
- 4 Upgrade Existing Business
- 5 Upgrade Energy Efficiency
- 6 Add Residential Units
- 7 Add Public Arts
- 8 Improve Industrial Sites

Within the CIP report, seven categories of recommendations were created that had implications both across the entire community, as well as community-specific recommendations for Baysville, Dorset, Dwight, and Hillside. The recommendations broadly fall across the following categories:

- 1 **Signage, Wayfinding, Marketing:** The Township has an existing brand/wayfinding/signage program, with welcoming signage to the 4 core communities. Online surveying revealed that there was support for the enhancement of wayfinding signage, and this could be used to direct to key community assets and settlement areas.

- 2 **Active Transportation - Walking, Cycling:** Ensuring safe and accessible pedestrian routes within the communities. Cyclists were also flagged as a consideration in the development of active trail infrastructure. The District of Muskoka has the Active Transportation Reserve Fund which should be accessed to support these activities.
- 3 **Parking:** As is typical when discussing any settlement area, parking is a key concern of the community. The consultation revealed that there were concerns parking requirements might be inhibiting the development of new or expansion of existing businesses.
- 4 **Parks and Community Facilities:** The CIP carried forward the recommendations found in the Parks, Open Spaces, and Recreation strategy completed in 2023 across the 4 settlement areas.
- 5 **Streetscape and Landscape:** Consultation received strong support for streetscape enhancement in Dorset, Dwight, and Baysville. In alignment with improvement of pedestrian corridors, the District of Muskoka's Active Transportation Reserve Fund could be leveraged to support those efforts.
- 6 **Infill Development/Redevelopment:** To meet affordable/attainable housing objectives the Township should look at opportunities to encourage infill in CIP areas with new rental, ownership, or tourist accommodation. While Baysville is the only settlement area with services, and could therefore be a focal point of infill and redevelopment, modest infill in all areas on private services should be explored.
- 7 **Incentives and Improvement:** The CIP includes the programs below to encourage private sector investment into the business community, beautification, and housing development.

Program	Fee Rebate	Project Grant	Loan	Tax Increment Financing
A. Encouraging Expansion and Diversification of Existing Businesses	✓	✓	✓	✓
B. Encouraging Beautification and Visual Appeal	✓		✓	
C. Encouraging Housing Development	✓	✓	✓	✓
D. Encouraging Tourism and Business Development	✓	✓	✓	✓
E. Fostering Public Art		✓		

The CIP contains several meaningful takeaways for the economic development strategy, including:

Incentives for Business Development:

- Encourage new businesses and upgrades to existing businesses through co-financing and grants.
- Focus on enhancing landscape, upgrading energy efficiency, and adding residential units to attract private sector investment.

Housing Development:

- Promote the development of multi-unit affordable housing.

- Support infill development and redevelopment in designated settlement areas, particularly in Baysville due to its existing services.

Community Enhancements:

- Improve streetscapes, parks, and community facilities, leveraging existing funds such as the Active Transportation Reserve Fund.
- Enhance signage, wayfinding, and marketing to attract tourism and improve navigation to key community assets.

Active Transportation and Accessibility:

- Develop safe pedestrian and cycling routes to encourage active transportation.
- Address parking concerns to facilitate business development and community accessibility.

Tourism and Business Investment:

- Attract tourism through community beautification, public art installations, and improvement of industrial sites.
- Utilize incentives to stimulate economic development and business investment in key settlement areas: Baysville, Dwight, Dorset, and Hillside.

Parks, Open Space and Recreation Plan

The Parks, Open Space, and Recreation Plan was completed in March 2023 and has been received by Council. The plan's purpose was to identify culture, recreation, parks and facility service priorities in the Township of Lake of Bays and guide Council and staff on park planning, facility redevelopment, facility expansion, partnership development and the delivery of programs, events and services. It is a short- and long-range planning document that provides direction over a 20-year period. The Strategy relates directly to the Township's economic goals. Thus, the Strategy is a key tool for implementing the Township's strategic priorities and directing investment in recreation services. The strategy was completed in five phases including background review and research, community consultations, and the preparation of the final report.

To leverage the community's knowledge, ideas and expertise on current and future delivery of the Township's parks and recreation services, an engagement strategy was conducted from fall 2021 until winter 2023. Consultation activities focused on gathering feedback from the following groups:

- 1 Residents
- 2 User Groups (groups that facilitate programming and/or use Township facilities or parks to provide their programs and activities)
- 2 Municipal Council and Staff

Community Consultation Highlights

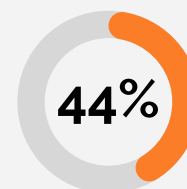
65%

reported they are satisfied with the existing recreation programs in Lake of Bays.

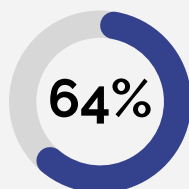


71%

reported that they would travel to Dorset, Dwight or Baysville for recreation opportunities.



of user groups provide both seasonal and on-going programs.



facilitate programming and events for all age groups/families

64%

of user groups also indicated that the Township of Lake of Bays could better assist them in developing and providing their programs, activities or events – in particular with marketing and promotions



73%

agree that the Township could better solicit the business sector to improve community attractiveness

51%

of respondents were interested in new recreational opportunities but many of those did not know what they were interested in.



73%

suggested more major events should be held to attract visitors and tourists and the Township should solicit more support from local businesses

This strategy developed a number of recommendations including:

The creation of a Program Developer/Coordinator position to facilitate program and event development and the administrative aspects of coordinating their provision.

The opportunity to partner with the Township of Algonquin Highlands on opportunities around the Dorset Recreation Centre, which provides additional recreational opportunities for the Township's residents.

The area in and around Lake of Bays and the Oxtongue River has Indigenous significance. Muskoka is the traditional territory of the Anishnaabeg, which includes the Ojibwe, Odawa and Potawatomi Nations, collectively known as the Three Fires Confederacy. The Huron-Wendat and the Haudenosaunee Nations also walked on this territory over time. According to the Ontario Heritage Trust,

"The area that is now Dorset was a special, spiritual place abundant in natural resources. For thousands of years the Anishinaabeg set up small camps here harvesting maple syrup and birch bark, fishing and trading in the spring and summer, and hunting and trapping during the fall and winter." [6]

The rich Indigenous history of Lake of Bays should be highlighted and shared with locals and visitors alike. The Township has an opportunity to celebrate, honour and integrate this culture and heritage through placemaking and placekeeping. Placemaking is an international movement, defined by the Project for Public Spaces as the following:

"[P]lacemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value...Placemaking pays close attention to the myriad ways in which the physical, social, ecological, cultural, and even spiritual qualities of a place are intimately intertwined, and we continue to be inspired by the visionary placemakers who have worked to promote this vision for generations."

Placekeeping focuses on the "long-term maintenance and management of public spaces" through quality partnerships, participation and governance [7]. In comparison to placemaking, placekeeping adopts a more active role, promoting stewardship and care, "prioritiz[ing] ecological, historical and cultural relationships. [8]" Initiatives rooted in placekeeping present opportunities to co-design with Indigenous communities through creative engagement, "address[ing] Indigenous worldviews, ways of knowing and methodologies that can reveal the local narratives at the heart of place... and shape a holistic environment that is meaningful." [9]

[6] Lake of Bays Parks, Recreation and Open Space Strategy, p15.

[7] Ibid, 17

[8] Ibid, 18.

[9] Ibid, 19.





The Township of Lake of Bays actively shares truth and reconciliation initiatives on social media and recently created video content to highlight historic portage routes in the area. There is opportunity to further build relationships with local First Nations communities and integrate Indigenous traditions, knowledge and practices with recreation and placemaking. This may include art, events, activities, tours/walks, smudging ceremonies, sharing circles, informational plaques, outdoor education, etc. When consulting with Indigenous communities, the Township should maintain a Nation-to-Nation/government-to-government approach that acknowledges Indigenous self-governance.

There is an opportunity to create “animating” outdoor programming that attracts existing and new users – including vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations – and has been identified as a best or “next” practice by leaders. It was recommended the Township explore integrating public art installations or cultural activities on trails. The self-directed Dorset Heritage Walking Tour, developed by the Lake of Bays Heritage Advisory Committee, is an existing example.

There is an opportunity to explore enhanced use of other assets such as beaches and waterfronts for swimming lessons and boating rentals, and trails as locations for guided hikes and interpretive signage, and using public spaces at trailheads to host events. Hiring lifeguards has proven challenging as Canada experiences a shortage of qualified lifeguards.

The Township can develop indoor programming for the arena floor during ice-out such as tennis, badminton, group fitness, ball hockey, children’s games, shuffleboard, bingo, line dancing, arts and crafts, etc. There is also the opportunity to expand arts-based programming, especially in the Township’s public spaces such as parks and beaches. Events such as “art in the park,” book clubs, speaker series, storytelling and craft clubs can help establish a strong sense of place and community and engage both permanent and seasonal residents.

The strategy recommended the Township examine how to enhance access to funding and resources for third-party groups to better enable the delivery of new events and experiential-based tourism initiatives. Several recommendations were put forth under this banner:

-  SD 25. Consult with volunteer groups to identify opportunities to simplify/help with the process to meet requirements in delivering special events and/ or participating as vendors.
-  SD 26. Consider a distinct stream of funding for visitor-oriented arts, culture and heritage services that can be allocated funding through the economic development budget.
-  SD 27. Work with the District of Muskoka to access funding for experiential-based tourism initiatives.
-  SD 28. Include an appropriate predetermined review period (e.g., every five years) in each policy.

The plan noted that as a general rule, signage should be provided at major parks, trailheads, along major routes, water access points, facility entrances, and throughout the sites as needed. Aside from increasing awareness and user experience, signs contribute to building the community's sense of place when consistent, unique signage is used throughout the Township. It was suggested that Lake of Bays should develop a consistent sign design for parks, trails, water access points, and facilities that reflects its brand. Signs should be AODA compliant.

The Baysville Riverfront Park comprises a group of connected parks, that for all intents and purposes, function and appear as one park system: Baysville Riverfront Trail, Baysville Docks East and West, Robertson Parkette, and Grist Mill Park. The Park has seen considerable investment from the community for the bandstand, walkways, light standards, seating, signs, and more, and can rightfully be described as a core public space of the Township. As such, given the importance of major parks such as this one for tourism, it was recommended that continued investment from the Township and community should be made to maintain the appearance, quality, and accessibility of this park.

The strategy also detailed different ways in which the Township might consider supporting its local arts, culture and heritage sector including:

A Direct Product Provision: This method of support is where the municipality chooses to directly provide facilities, programs or services to ensure opportunities for cultural engagement. Examples of this at present in Lake of Bays include the support of the library, museums, and the Baysville Walkabout. Similarly, in 2024, the Township partnered with the Muskoka Community Foundation to create the Lake of Bays Community Fund.

A Suggested Activities:

- i. Investigate the feasibility of a small public art gallery that would showcase the works of local artists. This could be located at Dwight, Dorset or Baysville (ex. Gallery in the Park, Altona, MN)
- ii. Explore the development of more walking tours with an arts, culture and heritage focus. Coupled with smartphone interpretation, (ex. Thunder Bay heritage walking tours, Port Hope Driving Tours)
- iii. Explore the creation of more local festivals featuring local musicians and artisans. Baysville has the Walkabout but there is nothing equivalent in Dwight or Dorset. Ex. Brookfield Ice Harvest and Winter Carnival
- iii. Explore the feasibility of a Community Arts Centre or Creative Hub. Public consultation revealed a desire for a "community arts centre" of some form. This would consist of space for arts groups, perhaps a small performing arts space, etc, Artist studio space could be considered as part of the hub. (ex. Jasper Habitat for the Arts, Artscape Wychwood Barns)

- B Public Realm Improvements:** This type of support is shown in terms of arts and culture-related improvements to the public realm; for example, maintenance of vistas and viewpoints (e.g., the Dorset Fire Tower), community plaques, public art, and attractive/historic signage in communities.

 - A** Create a percentage for public art mechanisms. Many smaller communities have a “percentage for public arts” policy where a certain proportion of the cost of public works projects is dedicated to public art projects and improvements made to public spaces. Usually the percentage ranges from 1 to 2 percent.
 - B** Implement improvements to Ragged Falls. Some in the consultation process mentioned that Ragged Falls is an “amazing asset” to the community, but in need of improvements to make it even more attractive as a public space. N.B. Ragged Falls is not located within the Township.
 - C** Continue distinctive signage throughout the community. The Township has some distinctive and attractive signage in place (e.g., village signs in Dwight, Dorset and Baysville) but there is an opportunity to extend this branded signage and create a greater “sense of place” in other areas in the community.

- C Capacity-Building:** This form of support is where the municipality (sometimes in partnership with other organizations) provides assistance to arts and culture organizations, “helping them help themselves.” This often takes the form of workshops and seminars on topics such as marketing, membership development, fundraising, organization and Board development, etc. At the moment, an organization does exist (Lake of Bay Arts – LOBarts) and the Township provided seed funding for the development of their website in the past.

 - A** Consider an arts and culture development officer position. Some smaller communities have an arts and culture development officer position in place to work with individuals and organizations involved in providing arts, crafts and historical opportunities to the community

- D Investment Encouragement and Attraction:** As previously mentioned, arts, culture and heritage can be a major attraction for tourists and visitors to come to a community. The Township of Lake of Bays does have an economic development strategy, and the tourism industry is one of the key focal points contained within it. Investment in arts, culture and tourism through an initiative such as a cultural tourism plan can not only act as a tourism generator in the community but also clearly benefit local artisans, performers and craftspersons.

 - A** Investigate hotel investment potential. While only indirectly related to arts, culture and heritage, the point was raised on occasion during the consultation process that Lake of Bays has no clearly defined “hotel” operation, or even many bed and breakfast-type operations (this is particularly an issue in the south end of the municipality).

B Encourage private sector provision of arts and culture opportunities. The consultation process suggested that there are certain types of cultural activities for which there is a substantive market; for example, several mentioned that there was likely a market for the provision of drama and arts to children

E Marketing and Promotion: A fifth way that a municipality can benefit its local arts and culture sector is through the promotion of local artisans and events, which can increase exposure and sales opportunities for local artisans

A Promote arts, culture and heritage opportunities to the large seasonal population

B Promote "Fall Colour" along Hwy 117

C Promotion of local enterprise. There are many local enterprises that add considerably to the sense of place in Lake of Bays Township (Lake of Bays Brewing, Robinsons, Langford, etc.). These are all potential partners with the Township for activities, events, facility operation, etc.

The strategy recommends the Township work with the Town of Huntsville to undertake a new arts, culture and heritage strategy. Chemainus, BC, and Three Rivers, PEI were listed as good examples to leverage.

Dorset Waterfront Plan and Downtown Study

The Dorset Waterfront Plan & Downtown Study was prepared in June 2016 by urbanMetrics inc. in association with Dillon Consulting Limited. The study was undertaken on behalf of the Township of Lake of Bays, the Lake of Bays Marine Museum & Navigation Society, and the Dorset Community Partnership, along with the funding partner, FedNor. The Township of Algonquin Highlands was also involved in the study as Dorset is split between the Township of Lake of Bays (District Municipality of Muskoka) and the Township of Algonquin Highlands (Haliburton County), with Main Street serving as the boundary between the two townships.

The study aimed to offer the local community a comprehensive long-term vision for Dorset's waterfront and downtown area, focusing on stimulating tourism, economic development, and job creation. It examined both public and private assets within the community, identifying existing synergies and proposing future initiatives to boost tourism and economic growth in Dorset and the surrounding region. The goal of the study was to attract new investments and establish new partnerships with potential collaborators.

The study evaluated opportunities for promoting economic development, tourism, and job creation in Dorset. The ultimate goal being to develop a comprehensive long-term strategy for Dorset's waterfront and downtown area that attracts investment and fosters lasting community partnerships.

The primary objective of the study was to establish a refined land use concept that achieved the following outcomes:

- 1 Enhance pedestrian connections and walkability between public assets and attractions.
- 2 Promote tourism, economic development, and job creation.
- 3 Maintain and improve shoreline preservation.
- 4 Improve public access and visitation from cottagers and tourists.
- 5 Ensure public and private assets are well-positioned to support enduring community-based partnerships.
- 6 Ensure the plan is financially sustainable for stakeholders, including taxpayers.

Community consultation included: community surveys, an information booth at the Snowball Winter Carnival, key stakeholder interviews, and public workshops. The key findings from community engagement included:

- 1 Seasonality is a major challenge in Dorset. While regular (i.e. daily or weekly) visitation is strong during the Summer, it declines significantly during the shoulder seasons and further during the Winter. Moreover, the majority of revenues (i.e. 70 – 80%) for local business are generated during the Summer season.
- 2 Shopping and restaurants are the primary drawing features. Boating/fueling, tourism attractions and community facilities have also been identified as popular drawing features.
- 3 Cars and boats are the most common modes of transportation to travel to/from Dorset. Snowmobiles have also been identified as a common mode of transportation to/from Dorset.
- 4 The improvements that would have the greatest impact on the waterfront and downtown area in Dorset include: (not listed in order)
 - A Promoting tourism and/or commercial development
 - B Developing arts and culture
 - C Shoreline preservation and environmental protection
 - D Enhancing pedestrian connections
 - E Improving docking availability and boating accessibility
- 5 The most significant obstacles impacting the future of Dorset, include:
 - A Seasonality and low population – potential solutions include: (1) adding more retail and services, and (2) adding more year-round attractions are the best ways to address seasonality and low population
 - B Quality and variety of shops and services – potential solutions include: (1) increasing the variety of businesses, and (2) adding more services are the best ways to improve shops and services
 - C Quality and variety of attractions – potential solutions include: improving marketing and communication is the best way to improve attractions

- 6 The preferred investment priorities from the perspective of local residents and regular visitors are:
 - A S/W Quadrant (Parcel D) – includes public docks along the Narrows, the Marine Museum, former Clayton building and the marine railway used for maintenance on the S.S. Bigwin.
 - B N/W Quadrant (Parcel C) – includes Cedar Narrows Park, public docks along the Narrows, private property currently used for commercial purposes (i.e. Stares; Zachary's Restaurant; Johnson's; REMAX; former Northern D'Lites Ice Cream).
- 7 Consensus that the best course of action with respect to Parcel D is to repurpose the former Clayton building (1090 Main Street) with major modifications.
- 8 There is strong demand for the redevelopment of the former Northern D'Lites ice cream store.
- 9 Adding new boat slips is crucial to enhancing tourism and economic development in Dorset.
- 10 Consensus that enhancing pedestrian connections will have the greatest impact at the water's edge and along Main Street. There is also demand for the addition of new trails and pathways in key locations in the downtown and waterfront area.
- 11 Ensuring environmental sustainability is the top priority with respect to shoreline preservation along the waterfront in Dorset. Maintaining the scenic natural beauty of Dorset is also crucial to promoting tourism in Dorset.

The study presented three potential land use options designed to enhance Dorset's downtown and waterfront areas. These options aimed to leverage existing assets to make Dorset an attractive tourist destination:

OPTION 1

Modest Approach (i.e. short-term actions; least intervention; lowest cost – approximately \$1 million):

This approach included extending the dock at the Marine Museum, restoring and repurposing the former Clayton building, and adding multiple pedestrian crossings for safety. Enhancements also involved connecting key public assets with designated paths and wayfinding signs, creating a welcoming gateway at the north end of Main Street, and improving pedestrian movement and economic exposure along Highway 35 and Bonfield Street.

OPTION 2

Transitional Approach 'Transitional' (i.e. medium-term actions; moderate intervention; moderate cost – approximately \$3 million

Building on the modest improvements, this approach envisioned an all-season covered structure at the Marine Museum for the S.S. Bigwin, maintaining the former Clayton building's heritage façade, and constructing new docking and boardwalks. Additional features included improved parking and picnic facilities, a pedestrian underpass connection under Highway 35, and enhanced connections between local establishments and recreational areas.

OPTION 3

Transformative Approach (i.e. long-term actions; most intervention; highest cost – approximately \$4.7 million):

The transformative approach included all improvements from Option 1 and further developed the area with additional docking at Trading Bay and Johnson's water edge. It proposed a new footprint for the former Clayton building, an extended all-season structure at the Marine Museum, enhanced wayfinding along Main Street, and upgrades to the skating rink for year-round use. This option also included an electric vehicle charging station and additional parking south of the Main Street bridge.

These options collectively aimed to promote tourism, economic development, and job creation in Dorset, ensuring that public and private assets supported enduring community partnerships and financial sustainability for all stakeholders. The study also recommended building on the findings and recommendations and provided next steps required to make various enhancements a reality including:

- A** Shoreline engineering, costing and geotechnical studies (Options 1, 2 and 3);
- B** Environmental impact assessment studies for new docks, underpass connections, SS Bigwin structure and redevelopment of the former Clayton property (Options 1, 2 and 3);
- C** Structural engineering study – former Clayton building (Option 1);
- D** Pro Forma Analysis – former Clayton building Redevelopment (Options 2 and 3);
- E** Suggested/required feasibility and engineering studies (e.g. former Clayton building) (Options 1, 2 and 3);
- F** Waste water management/sanitary disposal studies (Options 1, 2 and 3);
- G** Confirmation of incremental changes in legal and insurance liability (Options 1, 2 and 3); and,
- G** Parking feasibility and/or location studies.

The plan was received but not adopted by Council.

Official Plan

The Lake of Bays Official Plan (OP) was adopted by the Township Council on January 12, 2016 – by By-laws Nos. 2016-005 and 2016-049. An Official Plan (or OP as it is sometimes called) is a policy document that guides the short-term and long-term development in your community. It applies to all lands within the municipal boundary and the policies within it provide direction for the size and location of land uses, provision of municipal services and facilities, and preparation of regulatory bylaws to control the development and use of land. These types of policies are considered necessary to promote orderly growth and compatibility among land uses. An official plan may address issues such as where new housing or industry can be located; where roads, water mains and sewers will be needed; and what parts of a community will grow. Generally speaking, an Official Plan consists of three parts:

- 1 Policies that describe specific uses that are allowed in each designation, and criteria for evaluating specific types of applications or developments (new plans of subdivision, for example).
- 2 Schedules (or maps) of all lands in the municipality, with colours or patterns used to represent each land use designation.
- 3 Appendices which provide further information, add clarification and are contained in the document for ease of reference.

Specifically, the Official Plan is intended to assist Township Council in:

- Implementing the Township vision;
- Promoting the wise stewardship of the Township's natural and cultural heritage and character;
- Providing for orderly growth that is environmentally and economically sustainable;
- Protecting the resources of the Township;
- Preserving the quality of life in the Township by fostering healthy, active and safe communities;
- Providing for predictable, open and integrated decision making; and
- Interpreting and applying Provincial and District of Muskoka policy within the context of the Township.

The policy direction within the Lake of Bays Official Plan has been based on a twenty-year time frame, but the Plan has no specific terminal year. However, the Planning Act, which regulates all land use planning in Ontario, requires municipalities to regularly review their Official Plan. The Township is in the process of reviewing and updating the Official Plan.

The overarching goal of Lake of Bays' OP is to provide quality living space and foster a sound economy by nurturing and sustaining the health and allure of the environment, and encouraging growth that enhances economic opportunity while respecting the character and heritage of the Township of Lake of Bays.

It is broken down into twenty objectives centred around thirteen categories. The goal and objectives are the foundation on which the policies of the Official Plan are built.

Category	Objective	
Environment	1	To conserve the rich landscape of lakes, forests and wetlands, and safeguard the health and integrity of the water, air, forests, shorelines and natural habitat.
	2	To preserve the natural panorama and setting of the land and lakes.
Economic	3	To strengthen the economy through land use and development which builds upon and complements the existing economic base of the Township in a fiscally, socially and economically sound manner.
	4	To recognize and support the development of the tourist commercial, service commercial, cultural arts and associated business, and recreational sectors as vital components of the Township's economic base.
Settlement and Growth	5	To recognize and build upon the pattern of land use in the Township of Lake of Bays by accommodating compatible land uses and sustainable growth.
	6	To enhance the role, function, and vitality of the existing communities as the focal points for growth and development.
	7	To recognize and enhance the "small town" appearance and basic character which contributes to a sense of identity in each community.
	8	To recognize the rural area as a low density, small scale, space expansive, resource and recreational area, and accommodate development which is compatible with the overall rural, rustic and natural setting that can be sustained by the available level of rural infrastructure.
	9	To conserve the waterfront as a valuable resource and accommodate development which respects the basic character and traditional mix of uses, and maintains the natural and aesthetic qualities of the area.
Open Space and Recreation	10	To encourage the identification, maintenance and establishment of recreational and community facilities, parkland and trails as well as natural areas and open space.
Cultural Heritage	11	To preserve the cultural heritage of the Township, including historic areas, buildings and sites, landmarks and landscapes, and archaeological remains, for its cultural, historical and economic value and contribution to the community's sense of identity.
Resources	12	To protect the primary resources of the Township, where appropriate and promote responsible, controlled and sustainable resource extraction.
Access, Services, and Infrastructure	13	To ensure that development is provided with adequate and efficient access, services and infrastructure which can be functionally and economically sustained over time.
	14	To preserve and enhance the safety, function, quality and character of our countryside and cottage roads, while ensuring security to residents by providing appropriate access to essential emergency services.
Energy Conservation	15	To support energy conservation, green energy infrastructure and initiatives and plan for the reduction of greenhouse gasses and the impacts of climate change.
Aboriginal Interests	16	To recognize Aboriginal interests in land use planning.

Category	Objective	
Charter of Rights and Freedoms	17	To build an inclusive community that recognizes the diversity of the cultural, ethnic and social makeup and respects the values embedded in the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.
Healthy Communities	18	To build an active and healthy community which supports measures for active transportation, safe neighbourhoods, accessible services and conserves the ecological attributes of the natural environment. Long range planning will include the identification of community-wide safe routes to workplaces, public facilities and services, commercial areas, places of worship, cultural and recreational spaces.
Housing	19	To provide for an appropriate range and mix of housing.
Natural Hazards	20	To direct development away from hazard lands that are unsafe for development such as flood prone and wildland fire areas.

The plan outlines the basic framework for growth and development within the Township, and includes the basis and principles for growth, identification of the overall settlement pattern and definition of the basic land use designations. Policies, which would apply to growth and development in all designations such as open space, transportation and servicing, are also included.

The Township recognizes that it is a composite of small communities, waterfront and rural areas, each of which has been recognized as a separate land use designation which has their own unique character and values which needs to be maintained (though are evolving and not static). Growth is identified as being primarily directed to areas of waterfront, rural and community settlement; while the areas of remote, relatively undeveloped land without appropriate public road access would be preserved for conservation, resource-based uses, and recreational activities such as hiking, canoeing, hunting, trapping, or fishing.

The Township is split into three designations:

- 15 Community
- 16 Rural
- 17 Waterfront

The location, extent and boundaries of each community designation are shown and were not expected to be expanded during the life of the Plan to accommodate projected growth needs.

Muskoka Second Home Study

The Muskoka Second Home Study was completed in June 2023 by the Municipality of the District of Muskoka (Lake of Bays is one of six of the District's Lower-tier Municipalities). The study was compiled to capture important information about the District of Muskoka's seasonal residents. It was based on survey responses to various questions covering demographics, housing characteristics, cottage use and visitation, plans for permanency, recreational activities, and spending habits.

The study gradually evolved from focusing solely on the economic impacts of seasonal residents to a more comprehensive analysis of their habits, preferences, and the frequency of second-home usage. These studies consistently demonstrated that the seasonal population significantly contributes to Muskoka's economy through expenditures, uses a wide variety of municipal services, and provides opportunities for visitation by friends and family. Second homes accounted for approximately 47% of all households in Muskoka. A key objective of the 2023 Second Home Survey was to obtain information related to household size in order to estimate the seasonal population of Muskoka.

The 2023 Study included new questions related to healthcare, solid waste services, and usage of the Muskoka Airport to better understand the potential impacts of key services on the seasonal population. Recognizing the importance of these results to the District, area municipalities, public agencies, and the business community, the District committed to conducting an updated Second Home Study every five years.

According to MPAC figures from Q3 2022, there were 22,377 second homes in Muskoka. The 2021 Census confirms 28,571 permanent dwellings, meaning approximately 47% of Muskoka's 50,948 dwelling units are used seasonally. The proportion of seasonal to permanent dwellings varies significantly among Muskoka's municipalities, ranging from 23% seasonal in the Town of Huntsville to 82% in the Township of Georgian Bay. Second homes outnumber permanent residences in all three townships, with the Township of Muskoka Lakes having the highest proportion of second homes at 32%. While most municipalities saw a decrease in second homes, Lake of Bays (13.5%) experienced the largest increase since 2017, adding 66 new second homes. The vast majority (96.7%) of respondents indicated that their Second Homes are located on waterfront property (Lake of Bays is the third largest Lake in the District).

Seasonal residents in Muskoka enjoy various entertainment opportunities, with restaurants and bars being the most popular, increasing in patronage from 85% in 2017 to 87% in 2023. However, participation in activities such as festivals, special events, movies, theatre shows, fall fairs, and art/studio tours has declined, likely due to the social distancing and closures from the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2023 study introduced questions about the use of farmers markets and parks/conservation reserves, which have proven to be very popular among seasonal residents.

Second-home households access a variety of public services. The use of public parks and beaches increased from 60% in 2017 to 72% in 2023. However, the popularity and use of public libraries decreased from 55% to 44%, and the use of community centers dropped from 28% to 17%. There was also a slight decrease in the use of rinks and arenas. These declines are likely due to the social distancing and closures resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, second-home households engage in various recreational activities while at their second homes. Boating slightly increased in prevalence, with 76% of households participating in 2013, 83% in 2017, and 85% in 2023. Participation in hiking, walking, jogging, fishing, and golfing remained relatively stable from 2017 to 2023. Canoeing and kayaking saw significant growth in popularity, increasing from 66% in 2013 to 80% in 2017, and, including paddle boarding, remaining steady at 77% in 2023.

64% of Second Home households seek health care services outside Muskoka while residing at their Second Home. However, the most utilized local healthcare services included emergency department care (61%) and paramedics services (35%). In some instances, a lack of health care service availability in Muskoka also limits the amount of time Second Home households spend in Muskoka. This was the case for 17% of survey respondents.

The 2023 Second Home Study also asked respondents a series of questions about their use of the Muskoka Airport. While a relatively low proportion of respondents reported use of the Muskoka Airport currently (approximately 6%), the idea of offering commercial services has gained traction in the last few years, particularly through the efforts of Regional Tourism Organization (RTO) 12.

80% of Second Home households purchase the majority of their common household purchases in Muskoka with the majority of respondents who do not shop locally indicating it is simply a matter of convenience to shop outside of Muskoka (71%). Urban centres of Bracebridge (36%), Gravenhurst (23%), and Huntsville (20%) account for the largest shares of expenditures. Lakes of Bays' Dorset was the only Lake of Bays community to make the list with only 2% of respondents indicating their largest share of expenditures in that community.

The 2023 Second Home Study filled a gap in data collection by other entities and played a crucial role in monitoring trends related to the characteristics and preferences of the seasonal population over time. The study demonstrated that the second-home population continued to have a significant influence on the character, culture, and economy of Muskoka. In summary, it showed that second-home households consistently interacted with and shaped Muskoka's economy, culture, and society in various ways. These trends were set to be monitored and reported in future iterations of the study.

Muskoka Regional Workforce Development Strategy

The District of Muskoka adopted a regional workforce development strategy and implementation plan in May, 2024. The strategy was developed by Oosterbaan Strategy and involved extensive community consultation including a community survey, interviews with key stakeholders, and small group discussions with businesses and job seekers/employees to understand the workforce barriers facing the region from multiple perspectives.

The Muskoka regional workforce development strategy and implementation plan lays out the foundation for which the District, its partner municipalities, and related stakeholders will pursue a collaborative approach to attracting, retaining, and training the workforce Muskoka will require today and into the future.

The strategy noted that the workforce issues facing the District of Muskoka stem from multiple external and internal factors which included:

- Access to Housing
- Coordination and Leadership
- Cost-of-living
- Labour Supply
- Childcare
- Skills Training and Development
- Engagement Fatigue
- Supports for Newcomers
- Job Quality and Work Environment
- Mental Health
- Transportation
- Youth
- Apathy in the Workplace
- Service Delivery Challenges

These factors are further complicated by a lower-than-average household income, a higher-than-average percentage of the population working in part-time and seasonal work, and an older than average population.

The regional workforce strategy consists of three key goals designed to address the unique and not-so-unique challenges and opportunities currently facing the workforce across the region. The goals were summarized across the following three infographics:

Strategic Goal 1:

Provide the coordination and leadership required to facilitate, implement, and support initiatives related to workforce attraction, development, and retention.

Strategic Goal 2:

Create the conditions to enable Muskoka to attract and retain workers within the regional municipalities.

Strategic Goal 2:

Build the talent development pipeline within the region to support improved awareness, training, and skill development opportunities for regional employment opportunities.

A key challenge facing the implementation of this strategy is the allocation of appropriate resources. The success of the strategy is dependent on the successful implementation of goal 1, to provide coordination and leadership, essentially to be the “lightning rod” that shares and sparks activities amongst and with partners that directly support workforce development. There is a rich ecosystem of workforce development partners both within the region that are eager to support and partner on initiatives that have been proposed. It was highly recommended to involve partners in the implementation of specific actions as well as the overall strategy to leverage a broader suite of expertise, resources, and communication channels.

As part of the implementation process, partners have established an implementation plan from the strategy with the current resource allocation.

Lake of Bays 2017 Economic Development Strategy

The 2017 Lake of Bays Economic Development Strategy is the last formal strategic economic development strategy created for the Township’s Administration and Council. It was created by McSweeney and Associates and provided direction and tangible actions to Township staff, community organizations, and elected officials. It included specific calls to action for residents, businesses, and economic development partners to support the plan’s immediate (2018), short-term (by the end of 2020), and medium-term (by the end of 2022 implementation).

The development of the strategy consisted of a document review, data analysis, a situational analysis report, consultations (including interviews, online surveys, and focus groups), a summit & community sounding, the development of a draft strategy, an additional round of consultations, and the development of the final strategy.

The document identified 5 strategic themes and associated objectives with 22 specific action items listed.

Strategic Theme	Objective	Action Items
Business Support and Development	Provide support to existing businesses and help entrepreneurs to start, expand, or grow a business.	1.1 Annually review the investment readiness assessment to ensure that no new issues or actions arising that impact Lake of Bays’ investment readiness. 1.2 Annually update the Lake of Bays Community Profile with new data and/or community information 1.3 Continue with the annual business survey 1.4 Build an online directory to facilitate networking and service demands. Explore synergies with existing local directories created by volunteers and regional organizations. 1.5 Create an inventory of market ready industrial/commercial land and buildings available in the community and update quarterly.

Strategic Theme	Objective	Action Items
		<p>1.6 Undertake an assessment of the industrial/commercial land and buildings and determine if the Township has sufficient lands/buildings to accommodate local business expansion and new business start-ups.</p> <p>1.7 Create a business visitation program.</p> <p>1.8 Create a business welcome program that celebrates new businesses by supporting a grand opening/ribbon cutting etc.</p> <p>1.9 Undertake a "best practices review" of the Township's home-based business policy. If it is determined that the Township can make improvements, update and revise to be more business-friendly.</p> <p>1.10 Create a plan to address any shortfalls in the Lake of Bays industrial/commercial land and buildings inventory.</p> <p>1.11 Create the Lake of Bays value proposition (rationale as to why to choose Lake of Bays as a community in which to locate a business).</p>
Communications, Marketing and Branding	Enhance communication and marketing tools to help facilitate community connections and promote economic development assets.	<p>2.1 Produce an electronic Lake of Bays Economic Development newsletter as a communication tool to disseminate information to the local business community about grant opportunities, business support services, events etc.</p> <p>2.2 Redevelop Municipal website to include new sections for Economic Development, business support, tourism, and links to social media.</p> <p>2.3 Undergo a branding exercise to unite the Lake of Bays community while celebrating the unique attributes of each hamlet.</p> <p>2.4 Host a photo contest to capture images of the community to be used in Lake of Bays promotion and communication efforts.</p>
Community Infrastructure	Improve community infrastructure that helps drive economic and community development.	<p>3.1 Continue working with internet service providers and funding partners to help bring accessible and affordable high-speed broadband to Lake of Bays</p> <p>3.2 Undertake a housing needs study to determine the actual housing demand in Lake of Bays. If demand exists, create a strategy to diversify the housing mix so there are affordable options for every income segment of the population.</p>
Tourism	Support growth of the tourism industry through marketing and partnerships to encourage year-round visitation to Lake of Bays.	<p>4.1 Develop a Lake of Bays passport program or travel guide to build on the Lake of Bay scenic drive promotional piece and encourage movement around the tourism network across various hamlets.</p> <p>4.2 Create an asset inventory of the tourism sector in Lake of Bays to help plan for growth. Engage local businesses, tourism providers and arts, culture, and heritage resources in this process.</p> <p>4.3 Create and implement a Lake of Bays tourism wayfinding signage program.</p>

Strategic Theme	Objective	Action Items
Workforce Development, Retention, and Attraction	Encourage the development of a skilled workforce to address labour attraction and retention challenges.	<p>5.1 Explore best practices to identify opportunities for rural transportation solutions. Explore collaborations with the District of Muskoka's Community and Social Services department, Huntsville/Lake of Bays Chamber of Commerce, RTO 12, Simcoe Muskoka Workforce Development Board and local businesses.</p> <p>5.2 Create a workforce development plan to help address labour attraction and retention challenges and training needs in partnership with external organizations.</p>

Appendix B: Key Consultation Themes (Long Form)

SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS

Natural Beauty/Environment

- Lake of Bays is located in a beautiful area of Ontario with many natural assets.
- Many in the community value the environment and want to preserve it.
- Many businesses (i.e. artisans, tourism operators) depend on the natural environment to sustain their livelihoods.
- It was suggested the municipality should consider and prepare for climate from an economic and environmental perspective.

Seasonal Residents

- The population of seasonal residents in Lake of Bays outweighs permanent residents significantly with 12,548 seasonal residents estimated in 2022, and 3,759 permanent residents as of the 2021 census.
- There are some incredibly knowledgeable, skilled, and connected business people around the community.
- Three strong Lake Associations around the Township, who are primarily concerned with protecting the peace, quiet, and natural environment of the lakes (advocate for planning policy).
- Seasonal residents who are retired or semi-retired are more likely to get out and spend money in the community than those up for just a weekend while working in the city. They are looking for more restaurants, cafes, lake-accessible shopping and entertainment, and social/recreation experiences.
- As more seasonal residents spend more time at their seasonal home and move closer to retirement, they are looking for more at-home services and support. This includes services like trades, home and property management, and home healthcare. They don't know how or where to find these services, and information is most commonly found via word of mouth. They would welcome access to some sort of directory of service providers.

Highway 60

- In 2022, Algonquin Park (via all entrances) attracted just over a million paid visitors, with the majority of those being campers (backcountry and car-camping) who enter the Park via the Highway 60 corridor, which connects Highway 400 to the Park, and traverses directly through the Communities of Hillside and Dwight within the Township.
- There is a huge opportunity to capture a percentage of that traffic
- This is a Ministry of Transportation (MTO) controlled road and it will require extensive consultation with MTO officials to create a greater sense of arrival and community.
- This is also a key corridor between Central Ontario and Ottawa (the scenic route).

Provincial Parks

Algonquin Park

- As noted, Algonquin Park attracts over a million visitors annually and is considered a world-class tourism destination.
- The Park is 5 minutes from Dwight to the West Gate of the Park, 3 hours from Toronto, and 4.5 hours from Ottawa - very large marketplaces.
- Offers camping, trails, and outdoor recreation opportunities and is serviced with outfitters within the Park, off the Highway 60 corridor.
- Several businesses, in particular, those that offer experiential tourism, utilize the Park to host workshops, events, or for artistic inspiration.
- In addition to Highway 60, Lake of Bays is also home to the "scenic shortcut" to Algonquin Park via Highway 35 and District Road 117 through Baysville and Dorset.

Arrowhead Provincial Park

- Attracts over 100,000 visitors a year.
- Located approximately 20 minutes from Dwight and Hillside.
- Offers camping, trails, and recreation opportunities.

Bigwind Lake Provincial Park

- Will become the first new full-operating provincial park in 40 years.
- Located a half hour south of Baysville.
- Proposed plan includes up to 250 car campsites, 25 backcountry campsites, and 25 roofed accommodations.

Regional Partners - Economic Development Stakeholder Community

- Those consulted were committed to supporting businesses in Lake of Bays.
- They noted a lack of engagement with their organizations overall, perhaps due to how far away they are located.
- They are interested in spending more time in the community, connecting with businesses and the municipality.
- Collaboration is on-going with Muskoka Tourism and Venture Muskoka partners for regional promotion and workforce development purposes.

WEAKNESSES

Affordable Housing

- Consultation indicated that there are people experiencing homelessness in the Township (living in tents, cars, couch surfing).
- The cost of housing is very high and rental housing is essentially non-existent (much of it displaced with Short-term Rentals or STRs).
- This is a significant barrier to attracting a workforce - people cannot afford to live in the area.
- Residential lot sizes limit the potential to build new housing options (i.e. multi unit/multi-storey dwellings).

Transit

- There is no form of public or private transit. Given the lack of workforce-attainable housing in Lake of Bays, this makes it extremely complex for lower-wage workers to access employment opportunities in the Township.
- Additionally, the lack of transit limits opportunities for residents to access services in larger centres (grocery, medical, employment, education, social and recreation activities) without a vehicle (in particular, for young people).

Workforce

- Finding employees is a significant challenge, especially for tourism-reliant and seasonal businesses. As noted, much of this is driven by the lack of housing and transit.
- The most desirable type of employment was year-round, full-time employment, especially if the wages were relatively high (employees could afford to live in Lake of Bays).

- Employers that offer full-time, year-round employment appeared to find it less difficult to attract and retain labour.
- Lake of Bays population is aging and many young people do not see a future in the community with limited employment opportunities.
- Lake of Bays is not a diverse population and is not always welcoming to newcomers.
- There are experiences retired and semi-retired people in the community that might be interested in employment opportunities.

Youth

- The community is aging, and youth fail to see future opportunities in the community.
- The community lacks amenities for youth and their social and recreational circles are based in larger, neighbouring communities (Bracebridge and Huntsville).
- The 4 communities really lack a sense of arrival when entering them. Commercial areas are set back, or based on side streets that do not draw visitors (or community members in).

Diversity of Businesses

- The strongest sectors by employment concentration are (by location quotient): Arts, Entertainment and Recreation (7.47), Wholesale Trade (2.74), Accommodation and Food Services (2.49), Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas (1.87), Construction (1.79), Administrative and Support, Waste Management and Remediation Services (1.56).
- The largest sectors by number of employees are: Accommodation and Food Services (264), Wholesale Trade (180), Arts, Entertainment and Recreation (177), Construction (162), and Retail Trade (127).
- The business community is very small, with less than 1,500 employment positions. While employment opportunities are diverse, options are limited overall and impacted by seasonality.
- Beyond tourism and construction, Lake of Bays lacks a true industry sector of strength.

Seasonality

- Seasonality is a major issue facing the sustainable operation of many businesses in Lake of Bays. In many cases this can be attributed to a drop in demand for services and retail over the course of the winter. Many businesses conduct the bulk of their business in the 10-12 weeks of the "on" season, when visitation traffic peaks.
- Business owners find it hard to remain viable through the "off" seasons, and then need to prepare for a significant ramp up to the "on" season, with staff training and recruitment, preparing properties and equipment, etc.

- Seasonal business trends were particularly pronounced with homecare services, retail, and tourism operators.
- Seasonal resident visitation decreases significantly between November and April.
- The tourism visitation season has been extending further into the fall with the fall colour season.

Job Quality

- It was generally considered that wages available for many jobs in the community did not align with the cost of living. Jobs generally lower paying and seasonal.
- Residents noted they would like to see more sustainable, year-round employment opportunities.
- Employers that offered year-round, well-paying employment did not have any issues attracting and retaining staff.

Access to the Lakes

- Public access to the waterfront for both non-waterfront property owners and visitors was fairly limited, with only Dwight Beach, Norway Point Beach, Grassmere Beach and Dorset Beach Park.
- There was a perception that waterfront property owners prefer the limited access.

Diversity of Community

- Lake of Bays lacks diversity.
- This has been a challenge when trying to attract immigrant investment (can I see myself in your community?), and when managing resident perceptions and expectations of visitors who are visible minorities.
- There is a perception that people come from the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) for the day, bring everything, use the beaches and the bathrooms, spend nothing or next to nothing locally, and then go home.

OPPORTUNITIES

Enhance Planning and Building Processes

- Both residents and businesses would like to see the Township actively stewarding an articulate vision of the types of investment and development they would like to see and then support it through policy, investment attraction activities and messaging, and/or incentives.

- The Building Department has implemented an online permitting system for Building Permit applications.
- The Township has the Community Planning Permit System in place Township-wide, which is designed to combine and replace the zoning, site plan, and minor variance processes into one streamlined process.
- The Township has experienced record building permits and construction activity over the last 3 years.
- Currently, businesses and residents claim that they find the development process confusing, frustrating, slow and costly. Given that Lake of Bays has a streamlined development process, public education can be utilized to share information and demystify the process.

Engagement with and between Community

- Participation in focus groups was poor (7 in total). Participation in the survey was slightly higher (31 in total).
- Some of the businesses that participated in consultations feel they are not receiving information about local and regional happenings related to economic development, which they used to receive via a newsletter.
- The business community is disconnected from its stakeholders - participation on key stakeholder boards of directors, or engagement at networking events is low from Lake of Bays businesses.
- Prior to COVID-19, there used to be regular meetings between business leaders in the community and Township staff (and occasionally Council). These no longer happen but are missed. Businesses saw it as a great way to coordinate action to support businesses across the Township, get to know one another, and more clearly articulate their challenges and opportunities to the Council and staff. These meetings can help support the implementation of strategies like this (as well as culture, recreation, etc.).
- Businesses felt disconnected from businesses that were located outside of their hamlet of operation (i.e. Baysville businesses did not know what was going on in Dorset or Dwight) and would like to better get to know the business community across the Township.

Aging Population

- The aging population, in some ways, presents a challenge for the future of the workforce. In other ways, retirees represent a perfect workforce market for part-time work - those that just want to get out of the house and do something for a few hours.

- A population aging in rural and more remote areas also requires service delivery, and the potential for innovation in service delivery. Home and health care providers would be beneficial to the community and enable more people to age at home. This also presents a strategic investment attraction opportunity to service this growing need. With a more remote population, the opportunity exists to develop innovative technologies to fill the in-person workforce service gap.

Retail and Service Development

- There is a perception that the Township has experienced a loss of business, or business service levels (i.e. reduction in retail stock or service options) since COVID-19, particularly in Baysville.
- Residents would like to see more stores in general, as well as general stores, grocery, restaurants (especially on the water), cafes, veterinary services, and hardware stores.
- There was also a desire for additional services - home and property maintenance, landscaping, trades, elder care, health care, and education in the community.

Opportunity for Targeted Investment Attraction Campaign Related to Opportunities

- Lake of Bays is not actively and strategically pursuing an investment attraction campaign at the moment.
- There is an opportunity to pursue a targeted investment campaign to fill some of the retail/service gaps identified. It was suggested that targets for that campaign could include newcomers to Canada.

Arts and Culture

- Lake of Bays is home to top quality, world-renowned visual artists, and a robust suite of performance theatre.
- Demand for theatre experiences from locals is high and even though no proper venue exists, a production company has adapted and partnered with churches to use their space.
- A space for performance and to showcase and celebrate art would be an asset to the community. Something like this could be developed within existing space and community assets (library, community centres).
- There was the Lake of Bays Arts Loop, organized by local private artists, to encourage local gallery visitation, but it is unsigned and not well promoted, beyond a maintained website.
- Artists offer workshops, which are not celebrated and instead are poorly attended in the community, so they host them in other markets – like Sault Ste. Marie or Burlington, where the workshops sell out and the talks are packed.

- Many people struggle to make the drive from the GTA for a workshop day – especially if it starts early. How can we establish more of an overnight marketplace for those interested in arts and culture?
- A culture strategy was developed for Lake of Bays and Huntsville almost a decade ago and remains largely unimplemented.
- The Parks, Open Spaces, and Recreation Strategy identified a number of opportunities to enhance, leverage, and maximize the impact of the arts, culture, and heritage sector and assets to both improve community wellbeing and maximize visitor spend. These included direct product provision, public realm improvement, enhancing capacity to support the sector and its development, related investment attraction, and marketing and promotion.
- It was recommended the Township undertake a new arts, culture, and heritage strategy.

Tourism

- Lake of Bays has a high concentration of tourism-related businesses and employment opportunities.
- There are many lodges (accommodation) that have been owned for generations. Some are resistant to change, or the mainstay of their business are repeat guests, who have been coming since their parents and/or grandparents came to that resort.
- There are a lot of great products in Lake of Bays (i.e. SS Bigwin, Dwight Beach, Limberlost, Access to Crown Land), and even more that could be unlocked with the right marketing, promotion, and experience development (i.e. arts and culture, local history, natural environment).
- There is little coordinated marketing of the community and its assets.

Land for Commercial and Industrial Use

- The Township has a listing of available properties on their website, but overall land and space for, in particular, industrial use, is limited, and servicing is lacking in Dwight.
- Respondents who would be interested in expanding their operations noted that they were unable to do so due to current servicing capacity and requirements (on Highway 60).

Knowledge and Expertise Around the Lake

- Many of the seasonal residents in Lake of Bays are high-powered business owners or advisors on a national or global scale. The knowledge and expertise around the lake is a huge asset - we need to figure out how to better engage those individuals in supporting strategic growth and development in Lake of Bays.

4 Hubs

- There are 4 unique and distinct communities in Lake of Bays.
- The consultation revealed that previous strategies have tried to create cohesion between the 4 in terms of visitation themes, however, the sentiment was that each place is quite unique, and should be positioned and celebrated for its uniqueness and the many unique experiences one can get in Lake of Bays.

Business-friendly Attitude

- Many respondents felt that Lake of Bays did not have a business-friendly attitude.
- Many made comments that if and when they look to expand, they will look to do so outside of the Township.
- The number one reason why successful businesses were in operation in Lake of Bays - their owner was both there, or wanted to live there after vacationing in the area as a child.
- Businesses would like more assistance navigating planning processes.
- Businesses would also like the Township to articulate a vision for investment – and then support it appropriately.
- The development of the Community Improvement Plan represents part of that vision and is meant to support businesses in the Township's four communities. This incentive program is aimed at encouraging reinvestment in privately owned properties located in the CIP project areas, being the Township's four settlement areas (Baysville, Dorset, Dwight and Hillside), especially where it will enhance the public realm and make a positive contribution to overall vitality.

Awareness of Lake of Bays

- Businesses, particularly those in Baysville and Dorset (off the Highway 60 corridor), did not feel like people knew of Lake of Bays, the business community, or its amenities. They also felt that as people were driving along Highway 60 there was no sense you were driving through a community.
- It would benefit the Township to be better linked with initiatives and marketing that connect Lake of Bays to the bulk of tourism activity in Muskoka along the Highway 60 corridor.

Library, Service, and Recreation Clubs

- Are engaged and do a lot for the community.
- Businesses, stakeholders, and residents value the library and the excellent programming they offer.

- Recreation clubs, such as the Baysville Curling Club, are providing social activities for people to do throughout the year, that are well received by full-time and seasonal residents alike.
- There could be opportunities to provide additional support and coordination to partner and expand some of this programming, based on community needs, to enhance the quality of life across the communities.

Short-term Rentals

- Are numerous and increasing.
- Recent changes were made to the STR By-laws.
- Can be disruptive - many current renters are not participating in the tourism economy of the area and are, at times, being disruptive.
- There is little recourse to stop disruption, as homes are rented for such a high cost, that the penalty/fine has little impact.
- They present a lucrative opportunity to collect Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) to reinvest in tourism and placemaking in the community.
- Opportunity to better connect with STRs to showcase the retail, service, and entertainment that exists to support their stay in the Township and region.

Community Improvement Plan (CIP)

Has been developed to offer financial support (grants and loans) for the following categories:

- Encouraging Expansion and Diversification of Existing Businesses
- Encouraging Beautification and Visual Appeal
- Encouraging Housing Development
- Encouraging Tourism and Business Development
- Fostering Public Art

Appendix C: Implementation Notes by Action

Goal 1: Enhance the operating environment for business in Lake of Bays.

Objectives	Actions	Implementation Notes
<p>Objective: Enhance communication and build a two-way relationship between the Township and the business community.</p>	<p>Maintain an on-going business visitation program to better understand business needs and respond to immediate opportunities and challenges.</p>	<p>Businesses that were part of the engagement process felt their connection and communication with the Township could be enhanced. These meetings can be an opportunity to share information about economic development related initiatives and opportunities to better engage the business community.</p> <p>Connecting with businesses on a regular basis within your community will help establish a two-way relationship, where businesses feel that they can reach out to the Township for support on challenges or opportunities they are facing. This relationship facilitates business expansion and retention.</p> <p>An ongoing business visitation program can happen in a structured way, by leveraging a pre-defined interview guide, like the resources available through OMAFRA, or unstructured way, essentially getting to know each business through informal conversation that highlights their unique challenges and opportunities and supporting them to address any immediate issues.</p> <p>An ongoing business visitation program also presents an opportunity to collect data from the business community in a semi structured way, regardless of the format of the program, these discussions should involve the identification and information collection of key benchmark questions to measure business perceptions of the community.</p>
	<p>Continue to enhance the Township website to become a central resource to share local, regional, and other important information related to business operation, development and supports. Engage businesses to provide feedback on usability as part of the enhancement process.</p>	<p>Consultation revealed that many businesses did not know how to find out about business development events and resources in the community or across the region.</p> <p>The Township has a website with business resources on it and it should be enhanced to ensure that it includes information related to business operations, business development, and supports.</p> <p>To ensure the website information is presented in a format that businesses find easy to understand, businesses themselves should be engaged as part of the development process.</p> <p>Identify five businesses across sectors to partake in a website review session.</p> <p>Organize a consultation session to review the website and identify ways to improve access to the information resources on there for the business community. This should look at the types of information on the website and how easy it is to access that information.</p> <p>Adjust website content as identified.</p>

	<p>Create a committee of business representatives to provide insight on implementation of the economic development strategies. Ensure diversity on the business committee where possible (i.e. all sectors and demographics represented).</p>	<p>Businesses consulted indicated they were involved with a group of business leaders who met quarterly in the past. Those meetings were facilitated by the Township and were considered very valuable for networking, partnering, and ensuring the Township understood local business needs.</p> <p>A quarterly meeting with businesses would be valuable to ensure activities within this strategy are implemented in away that is accessible and engaging to the business community.</p> <p>This group of businesses could also serve as champions within the community to help engage other businesses to participate in economic development initiatives and broader community development initiatives.</p>
	<p>Re-establish a quarterly newsletter to share key initiatives and programs from the Township, new opportunities for the business community (i.e. funding), and local and regional events and happenings that would be relevant to them.</p>	<p>Businesses wanted more communication from the Township about news, information, and opportunities that relate to them.</p> <p>Businesses did not know where to find information on broader regional economic development initiatives that provide support to the business community.</p> <p>This newsletter can be emailed but should also be hosted on an online platform. Economic development staff should explore opportunities to engage artificial intelligence tools to support the development of the newsletters.</p>
<p>Objective: Support and promote entrepreneurship and small business ownership in the community, especially for youth</p>	<p>Continue to celebrate and promote business owners in the community. This could be via purchasing and showcasing their work in community facilities, creating and hosting a video or blog series on the great and innovative things business owners in Lake of Bays are doing, or having Council come out to business-centric events in the community. These celebration and promotion opportunities could showcase entrepreneurship, or other regional career paths as well.</p>	<p>Businesses consulted, in particular artisans, given their number in the community, felt the Township could better showcase and celebrate their work. They suggested existing Township facilities could be enhanced with local artwork and/or other exciting elements from businesses around the community.</p> <p>Businesses consulted did not currently have positive sentiments towards the Township. By actively celebrating local businesses, within the community and throughout community facilities, the Township can clearly demonstrate their commitment and enthusiasm for local businesses. This could help shift the perception of the Township and create local business champions that can assist in increasing support and buy in for small business around the community.</p> <p>Businesses consulted noted that they wanted increased support from the Township to help their business grow, and one such way is promotion and helping to showcase their business in the community. Other ways businesses desired support was having more opportunities to share their experiences with Council members, and opportunities to promote local career pathways to youth and the broader community.</p>
	<p>Continue to advocate for provision of high-speed internet across the Township.</p>	<p>Access to high-speed Internet was still a critical importance to residents and businesses in the community, in particular home-based businesses.</p> <p>To best advocate for the provision of high-speed Internet across the Township, it will be useful to better understand the specific needs of the community and to map coverage areas of concern across the Township.</p>

		Prepare advocacy materials based on identified needs to support council and partner efforts to advocate to other levels of government and service providers for increased provision of high-speed Internet across the Township.
	Work with partners to promote entrepreneurship as a career path in schools and the library.	Residents noted their children did not always envision a future in Lake of Bays due to existing employment opportunities. Two local organizations support entrepreneurship and business development, Muskoka Futures and the Muskoka Small Business Centre. The Township should work with these partners to create engaging material and activities targeting youth to promote entrepreneurship as a career path in schools, the library, and in the broader community. The Muskoka Small Business Centre offers the Starter Company program, which consists of seed funding and business development support geared towards summer small business start-up for youth. Connect with the library and school boards to build buy in and support for these materials and activities.
	Work with partners to promote and enable access to more business development supports in the community, such as educational seminars.	Lake of Bays is somewhat remote, not directly connected to the Highway 11 corridor, and some communities a 30-minute drive away. This can make it challenging for businesses to participate in or access programming to support business growth and development offered across the District of Muskoka and beyond. It was noted the programming and service delivery was almost never based within the Township leading to additional financial and time constraints to participate. There was a desire for Lake of Bays-centric events. Partners and service providers were interested in working more closely with the Township to better engage the local business community in understanding and accessing their services. They noted that participation from Lake of Bays businesses was lower than that of communities along the Highway 11 corridor. This was also true of participating in leadership level roles, such as organizational boards of directors. Participating in those opportunities are important to ensure Lake of Bays business needs are considered when developing future activities to support the regional business community and workforce, and was something the consulted organizations wanted to address.
Objective: Support workforce development and attraction within the Township.	Create opportunities to connect employers to residents in Lake of Bays and around the region. This could be through activities like job fairs, networking, and mentorship.	56% of employer survey respondents noted that access to workforce was considered a key challenge facing the business community. Seasonality was a significant challenge to workforce retention. Creating opportunities to connect employers to residents both within the community and external to the community, has the potential to catalyze new relationships that translate into future employment. It's recommended that project partners go beyond traditional job fairs to try and create more personal connections between employers and job candidates, both current and future. Consider how to engage youth to explore different career paths and employers.
	Create a directory of rental housing available for residents and seasonal employees and link Muskoka Job Board to the Township website.	Regional partners have worked together to develop a Muskoka-specific job board that is currently not linked to the Township website. It includes an agglomeration of multiple feeds that share jobs from across Muskoka and allow users to search by specific characteristics including geography. It should be featured on the Township website in a location that is accessible for both businesses and residents.

		<p>Access to housing was considered a significant barrier to finding a job. Consultations noted that today there is very little rental housing available in the municipality, however, if objectives that relate to enhancing the supply of attainable and affordable housing are realized, this should increase the housing supply to a level where hosting a listing is feasible. Many employers noted that if they needed to recruit from outside of the community, access to suitable housing was a barrier.</p>
<p>Objective: Enhance connections between businesses in Lake of Bays</p>	<p>Enhance connection between businesses in Lake of Bays and the regional business community through support and promotion for regional-level networking events. This could include the creation of a digital platform for businesses to network, share resources, and collaborate on projects.</p>	<p>Sharing information on networking opportunities that are already taking place is cost effective and ensures that you're not duplicating activities with other organizations.</p> <p>While demand is high for some products and services (i.e. trades) within Lake of Bays, it is a smaller marketplace than the broader District of Muskoka. Connecting the local business community to the regional one creates new opportunities for knowledge sharing, B2B sales, partnerships, and initiatives.</p> <p>Business respondents did not know how to find out about networking events.</p> <p>Partners noted that when they did hold events that were region wide, it was very challenging to get Lake of Bays businesses to come out and participate. However, when events were offered within the Township itself, it was equally challenging to get other regional businesses to participate. Consideration should be given to creative ways to get over this divide (i.e. transportation, technology, creative networking tactics).</p> <p>Networking experiences should seek to go beyond the typical unstructured social format to provide additional value to attendees (i.e. incorporating some speed-networking sessions or hosting speakers and facilitated discussion on topics of interest).</p>
	<p>Facilitate hamlet-level and Township-wide business networking to better connect Township businesses for referrals, learning, and planning purposes.</p>	<p>Just under 60% of business survey respondents noted that they were interested in partaking in local and regional networking events.</p> <p>Consultation with businesses revealed that they felt disconnected from businesses within the Township and within their hamlet. There was a desire to participate in more events and activities that could better connect them to other businesses in the community.</p> <p>Networking experiences should seek to go beyond the typical unstructured social format to provide additional value to attendees (i.e. incorporating some speed-networking sessions or hosting speakers and facilitated discussion on topics of interest).</p>
<p>Objective: Improve awareness of businesses in the community.</p>	<p>Develop a directory of consumer-facing service businesses to be distributed to residents and Lake Associations, by need (i.e. plumbing, landscaping, plowing, etc.). This should be printed and a real-time version should be housed on the Township website.</p>	<p>61% of businesses indicated they would like support with marketing initiatives, and 53% of businesses indicated that would like to participate in shared marketing initiatives.</p> <p>Anecdotally, Lake of Bays is home to a number of contractors that are small, independent, and in some cases, not publicly listed.</p> <p>Consultations revealed a significant demand for things like plumbing, landscaping, snowplowing, and other household tasks. However, in many of those cases residents did not know where to find information about the various service providers in the community. Word of mouth, via social media posts, was the de facto method many were using at the time of consultation.</p>

		To maintain accuracy, a real time list could be hosted on the Township or Chamber of Commerce website. The Township should also consider doing a limited print run or print by order for distribution, given that some of the population that may prefer materials in print.
	Offer a resident-focused trade show to showcase local service providers. It is recommended this be partnered with well attended events like the Dwight or Baysville market. Explore ways to enhance the value of the event with a pre or post event workshop or business networking opportunity.	<p>A trade show offers a different, more personal way, for residents and businesses to connect with service-based business in the community.</p> <p>To encourage participation and engagement in a trade show, it was suggested that one could be paired with popular local events, such as the Dwight or Baysville Markets. To add additional value to the businesses, there could be additional time after the main event dedicated to business education and networking.</p>

Goal 2: Attract, support, and retain strategic investment into the community.

Objectives	Actions	Implementation Notes
<p>Objective: Adopt a business-friendly attitude, where it aligns with the vision, needs, and plans of the community. Cohesively articulate your vision for the future of Lake of Bays and what that means for the current and future business community, and champion that vision.</p>	Develop a clear guideline document that outlines the support available to businesses from the Township.	<p>Many businesses were not aware of the type of support available to their business from the Township. At times they did not reach out to the Township when it would have been appropriate to provide assistance.</p> <p>The clear guideline document would help them better understand the type of support and resources that the Township can provide to support their business, and how to access them.</p>
	Undertake an Official Plan and by-law review to ensure that planning and development policies align with economic development goals and vision, while balancing protection of the environment. Include consideration for economic development and the strategic economic development goals of the Township, as well as the Community Improvement Plan and Parks, Open Space, and Recreation Strategy in the update to the Township's Official Plan.	<p>Consultation revealed that both businesses and residents perceived that, at times, municipal decisions did not align with the future they felt the Township was trying to embody for Lake of Bays. Much of this conversation related back to a decision on parking regarding a prominent business in the community.</p> <p>Those consulted felt that the Township could play a greater role in supporting and stewarding the type of investment alliance with the Township's vision, and resident needs. There is the opportunity to undertake a review of existing bylaws to ensure that they align with the Township's vision for growth and development and also take into consideration the goals of this strategy, the Township, as well as the community improvement plan, and the parks, open space, and recreation strategy.</p>

	<p>Establish a concierge service to assist strategic investment with development processes. Track and publish the performance metrics of the concierge service to promote transparency.</p>	<p>Businesses consulted perceived they faced challenges when working through planning and development processes, and establishing a concierge service to support strategic and value-add investment in the community can assist growing businesses in navigating those processes.</p> <p>A concierge service, led by economic development, could get involved at a pre consultation stage of planning and development processes, and be an additional contact for the business community to navigate those processes should they experience any challenges.</p>
<p>Objective: Better communicate Township planning and development processes and successes.</p>	<p>Update, promote, and share print and digital materials that clearly articulate the development process. Develop clear and concise communication material to promote any future changes to planning processes. Develop an annual event to educate businesses on the planning and development process.</p>	<p>Several businesses consulted noted that they face challenges ranging from small to significant when working with the municipality to undertake planning and development processes. Much of this seemed to stem from a lack of understanding of existing regulation, and planning and development processes.</p> <p>Effective communication regarding planning and development processes could help mitigate negative sentiments from businesses that need to undertake those processes. Despite the municipalities quick turn around for community planning permitting, the perception still exists that planning and development processes in Lake of Bays are timely and costly.</p> <p>An annual event for those who want to develop or expand businesses in the community would be useful to enable them to understand the process and build relationships with relevant contacts at the municipality.</p>
	<p>Share planning successes (i.e. reduced wait times for permitting, positive testimonials, etc.) with the community to change the broader perception.</p>	<p>There was a perception amongst those consulted that the planning and development processes in Lake of Bays was difficult. However, Lake of Bays has one of the fastest permitting processes available.</p> <p>By sharing the successes and experiences, including timelines, with the broader community this can help modify the perception of challenging planning and development processes, and encourage more businesses and residents to reach out and follow proper process to avoid disappointment.</p>
<p>Objective: Attract investment to Lake of Bays that provides high-quality employment and is complementary to the community's industrial strengths, opportunities, and values to enhance quality of life.</p>	<p>Create marketing materials to promote strategic investment attraction opportunities. Clearly articulate the market opportunity and value proposition of locating in the community.</p>	<p>Lake of Bays does not have an active investment attraction program at the moment, including developed investment attraction materials.</p> <p>Several strategic areas to attract investment were identified as part of the development of this strategy, and present attractive opportunities to undertake investment attraction. To do so the Township must be prepared with the relevant materials to support business location decisions.</p>
	<p>Advertise opportunities at relevant trade shows and publications.</p>	<p>Hosting materials to promote the community on the Township's website is a starting point, however, many beyond the Township, and perhaps even within the Township itself are unaware of the opportunities that exist within Lake of Bays.</p> <p>There will be a need to explore advertising opportunities to promote investment attraction opportunities in the community. These could be through trade shows, such as events geared to the sectors of opportunity, or specific publications targeting sectors of opportunity, or other marketing avenues.</p>

<p>Objective: Enable the development of workforce attainable housing.</p>	<p>Actively promote incentives and opportunities for workforce-attainable housing development with developers and employers. This includes the Township CIP, and any programs available from other levels of government.</p>	<p>The Township's new CIP program provides financial assistance to the development of affordable housing. Part of the economic development role will be to promote those incentives both locally and to developers further afield.</p> <p>Active promotion of these incentives from the Township, as well as any other programs available, can assist in attracting new housing development. Consideration should be given to how these attraction efforts relate to your broader investment attraction efforts.</p> <p>It was noted that the Township permits non-permanent structures to act as temporary housing on a seasonal basis. The Township should ensure businesses and residents are aware of this policy, should they wish to create additional units.</p>
	<p>Through the update to the Township's Official Plan, ensure policy is supportive of the development of workforce-attainable housing in the community.</p>	<p>Housing is one of the largest barriers facing workforce attraction and retention in Lake of Bays, particularly for seasonal employment. It was ranked the most important economic development needed by residents and seasonal residents.</p> <p>Lake of Bays is not home to a diverse housing mix, making it challenging for persons of different ages and income levels to reside within the community. While some jobs in the community are full time and well-paying others are part time and seasonal and close to minimum wage.</p> <p>Consultation revealed that there are regulatory barriers to the development of a diverse and tenable housing mix including limitations on residential lot sizes which need to be addressed through the official plan update.</p>
	<p>Explore opportunities to support innovative housing solutions like a community land trust, with an explicit goal of creating workforce-attainable housing.</p>	<p>Housing is a topic of concern across municipalities in Muskoka and in the broader province of Ontario. As with the provision of other services, housing will likely go to larger marketplaces first, and in order to address the housing crisis within the community, Lake of Bays should consider pursuing more out-of-the-box and innovative housing solutions to create more workforce attainable housing.</p> <p>There are many stakeholders around the country and region that are trying to address the shortage of attainable housing. One such solution that is being explored regionally is the Muskoka Land Trust, who aims to purchase and steward land for the purposes of creating permanent affordable housing solutions.</p>
<p>Objective: Work with partners to develop local transportation solutions.</p>	<p>Establish a transportation working group with key community partners, stakeholders, businesses, and residents to identify and explore rural and remote transportation solutions. This could include a rideshare program. Use community surveys and consultation to assess transportation needs and ensure solutions are user-centered.</p>	<p>Access to transportation around the community and to and from Bracebridge and Huntsville is a barrier in Lake of Bays to current and potential employees based in those communities, as well as to youth and residents who access, or want to access, those communities for education, retail, and service purposes.</p> <p>While the development of transportation solutions will likely be private sector led, the Township can play a key role in coordinating stakeholders and establishing a conversation around what's needed and what is possible.</p> <p>The development of transportation solutions for the Township should explore engaging both residents and businesses, as well as community partners and stakeholders, to identify and explore transportation solutions that are feasible for the community. This can include an assessment of transit needs. As part of the exercise, the Township should explore partnering with third party apps, the role of ride sharing, and best practices and rural and remote transportation.</p>

	Pilot solutions.	When solutions are proposed, the Township should work with partners to undertake short term pilots and evaluate the outcomes to determine which transportation solution might best address the community's needs.
Objective: Support and promote regional economic development efforts that align with the Township's strategic goals.	Support the implementation of the regional workforce development strategy in the Township of Lake of Bays.	<p>The District of Muskoka and its municipal partners has recently adopted a new regional workforce development strategy and implementation plan.</p> <p>With the strategy completed, project partners are now looking to move into the implementation phase and will be looking for support from the Township to implement initiatives.</p> <p>The strategy focused around three key goals including coordination and leadership, creating the right conditions to attract and retain employees, and developing the future workforce of Muskoka.</p>
	Continue to participate with regional municipal partners to share information, as well as support Venture Muskoka and other strategic regional economic development efforts.	<p>As noted above, a partnership has formed between the regional lower tier municipalities in Muskoka for economic development purposes. This group has been collaborating on investment attraction initiatives, such as the development of the Venture Muskoka website, as well as the above noted workforce development strategy, and the related Muskoka Job Board. The group intends to continue meeting to drive forward strategic regional economic development efforts and the Township should remain connected and active in participation to support their economic development efforts.</p> <p>Working with partners that have similar goals enhances the scope of the product promoted as well as the capacity to undertake the promotion or any other related economic development activities. This capacity can be human resources, expertise, and or financial.</p>
	Explore opportunities to partner with the RTO12 Catalyst Housing project to engage new workforce in the Township.	<p>The workforce development strategy noted the ongoing conflict between peak demand for housing that overlaps with peak demand for employment and peak demand for visitation. This means at peak residency and tourism seasons, there is an almost certainty that the region will not have enough housing to accommodate the required workforce.</p> <p>To begin to address this conundrum, RTO12 has developed an innovative housing project that combines training and housing for the tourism sector under one roof, to create its own centre of training excellence for the hospitality and tourism industry. This project is in its pilot phase and the Town of Huntsville has agreed to host the initial site for the Catalyst Housing project. There is an opportunity to explore if linkages can be made to the project, particularly related to transportation that connects to employees. Further activity could explore expanding the project to include a Catalyst site within the Township itself.</p>

Goal 3: Develop Lake of Bays as a destination for residents and visitors.

Objectives	Actions	Implementation Notes
<p>Objective: Enhance the quality of place and space in the four hamlets of Lake of Bays.</p>	<p>Create a detailed implementation plan for the Community Improvement Plan (CIP).</p>	<p>A CIP was recently adopted by the Township, designed to support that expansion and diversification of existing businesses, the beautification and visual appeal of the community, enhanced housing development, tourism and business development, and public art.</p> <p>A detailed implementation plan will help guide the next steps to implement the program and consideration should be given to how the program should be promoted to maximize awareness, as well as ensuring the application process is accessible to the business community. It is recommended to engage a small group of businesses to provide insight and recommendations on a proposed process and application form.</p>
	<p>Implement the MAT tax to enable public space enhancement, animation, and tourism promotion.</p>	<p>Staff have been directed by Council to implement the municipal accommodation tax, which will be a useful tool to enhance tourism efforts and puts it on an equal playing field to many other municipalities in Ontario.</p> <p>High value accommodation within the municipality means there's the potential for the MAT tax to generate significant revenue. It's estimated that the Township will generate over \$1.68 million annually.</p> <p>Consideration should be given as to how best to apply the MAT tax across promotions and community enhancement, including things like animation and public space enhancement, all key elements to enhancing Lake of Bays as a resident and visitor destination.</p>
	<p>Create, beautify, and animate public spaces to encourage people to visit, gather, and linger in hamlets. Leverage local artists to support this.</p>	<p>Survey and consultation revealed that residents wanted more public spaces that encouraged people to visit, gather, stay, and explore in Lake of Bays communities, as well as to enhance the suite of leisure activities available.</p> <p>Well-used public space encourages visitors to stop and explore the community.</p> <p>Consultation indicated that the sense of arrival within Lake of Bays communities could be improved. Currently communities lacked features that encouraged the many people driving through to stop and explore as pedestrians.</p> <p>The community has a rich heritage, and many local artisans and cultural organizations. The Township should see to engage those elements as they seek to create vibrant public spaces in their communities.</p>
	<p>Create signage and features, like public art, to capture the potential economic spin-off from the many visitors and residents driving the Highway 60, 35, and 117 corridors. Involve local artists in the design process for public spaces and signage.</p>	<p>Signage was noted as a weakness throughout the consultation.</p> <p>There was a perception that there was minimal signage directing to attractions, businesses or other reasons in the community, outside of the tourism oriented directional signage that was very costly.</p> <p>Creating signage and additional features such as public art will encourage visitors and residents to stop and better enable the Township to capture economic spinoff related from the significant number of visitors driving through their community during the year.</p>

		These features should be connected to economic spinoff opportunities in the community (i.e. place art and wayfinding at direct-consumer-facing businesses)
	Create a welcoming environment for newcomers to Canada, including residents, businesses, and visitors.	<p>Lake of Bays welcomed 10 immigrants in the decade preceding 2021. Only 10% of Lake of Bays population is made-up of immigrants.</p> <p>Consultation noted concerns from residents that visitors were coming from outside of the community to use the recreational assets and then return without contributing.</p> <p>Consultation also revealed perceptions that new Canadians had a desire to explore business ownership in more rural and remote communities, and while other communities have been successful in attracting them, Lake of Bays has not seen the same uptick in interest.</p> <p>This creates an opportunity to help generate a more welcoming community be it via promotional campaigns, events, or spaces that celebrate the diversity of residents and visitors with the ultimate goal of creating a community that embraces people who are new and different for the value that they bring and their unique skill sets.</p>
	Explore opportunities to enhance access to the natural environment, including lakes, waterways, trails, beaches, and parks.	<p>Lake of Bays is home to exceptional natural beauty and assets including lakes, waterways, trails, beaches, and parks.</p> <p>Consultation noted that despite the presence of these fantastic natural assets, if you were not a property owner, particularly one on the waterfront, it was challenging to find access to those natural assets.</p> <p>By enhancing and promoting certain natural assets to increase access into the natural environment, the Township could attract more visitors while also controlling the flow of traffic, and directing to economic spin-off opportunities.</p>
	Create a "destination" in Baysville that will attract visitors to the village to explore the village and "destination" on foot.	As noted above, well used public space will attract visitors and encourage the spending of money. Creating a destination attraction links to well used space and retail and services can help enable visitor spending and encourage visitors to stop and explore the community.
	Create a "destination" somewhere on or near Highway 60 in Dwight that will encourage traffic to stop and explore the "destination" and the village of Dwight on foot.	As noted above, well used public space will attract visitors and encourage the spending of money. Creating a destination attraction links to well used space and retail and services can help enable visitor spending and encourage visitors to stop and explore the community.

<p>Objective: Increase day and overnight visitors to Lake of Bays and maximize their community impact while protecting the natural environment.</p>	<p>Develop an arts, culture, heritage, and tourism strategy to coordinate, develop, and expand related assets in the community to maximize visitor spend and impact and celebrate the incredible assets based in the community. This should include a destination management and marketing plan to control the flow of visitors, maximize the benefit of visitation to the community, and minimize the impact on the natural environment. Strategy should include consideration for the impacts of climate change.</p>	<p>A culture strategy was completed in partnership with the Town of Huntsville in 2013, but few recommendations have been implemented by the Township.</p> <p>The Township has a significant cluster of artisans and cultural actors, such as performers, as well as cultural assets that are not being promoted and leveraged in a coordinated and strategic way. The creation of an arts, culture, heritage, and tourism strategy that includes a destination management will help maximize the impact of the tourism sector, as a whole, as well as the economic impact of the arts and culture businesses in the community. This will support the development of a more vibrant community, as a whole. It could also give consideration to how to more cohesively integrate District Road 117 and Provincial Highway 35 into the overall tourism product and promotion within the Township.</p>
	<p>Develop and support the development of off-season activities, events, and experiences.</p>	<p>78% of business survey respondents indicated the number one challenge facing their business was seasonality.</p> <p>While businesses noted that the high season was increasing in length, it was also noted that off season activities such as snowmobiling, which used to sustain year-round tourism businesses, are in decline due to climate change. It should be anticipated that the ability to promote and leverage snow-based sports will decline over the coming years.</p> <p>The Township, in partnership with the business community and RTO 12, should explore opportunities to enhance the off season through the development of new attractions, promotions, and events and festivals.</p>
	<p>Collaborate with partners to enhance Lake of Bays tourism marketing and promotions efforts.</p>	<p>Businesses were interested in opportunities to partner on marketing and promotions.</p> <p>Businesses were interested in learning more about marketing and promotions and how to apply it to their business.</p> <p>There seemed to be a general lack of awareness about Lake of Bays and the tourism assets within the community.</p> <p>There's the opportunity to enhance community marketing efforts for tourism. There is an existing brochure on the website that could be promoted. Additional considerations should be given to social media marketing, support for product packaging between operators in the region, and how to incorporate the scenic route to Algonquin Park via 117 and 35.</p> <p>Additional consideration should be given to the identity of each of the four communities within Lake of Bays, and associated branding and positioning within the marketing materials. Marketing and promotions efforts should seek to encourage visitors to move around the lake, where possible.</p>

	<p>Support the development of spaces that celebrate and showcase the work of local businesses and history. This could include an appropriately scaled arts and culture centre to further focus on developing the arts and culture sector and provide a venue to showcase all local forms of art and culture.</p>	<p>The region attracts over a million visitors enroute to and through Algonquin Park to experience the beautiful natural environment of the area.</p> <p>The Township is home to a number of artisans and cultural performers, as well as significant, meaningful, and interesting local history. Local artisans and cultural performers could be featured around the community and within a specific dedicated space should the budget exist.</p> <p>Without the development of additional space, the Township should examine creative ways to integrate art and culture into their existing spaces, such as libraries and community centres. As part of destination development in Baysville and Dwight, consideration should be given to the development of performance and art spaces.</p> <p>Showcasing local artisans in community facilities will help establish the community as an arts and culture hub and create interest in visiting the community to experience new art. It is highly recommended that development in the arts and culture space focus on leveraging existing talent within the community.</p>
	<p>Identify specific off-season events and initiatives as examples for investment buy-in (i.e. "business in a box".)</p>	<p>The off season poses a significant challenge for many seasonal businesses to retain employees and remain viable over the winter.</p> <p>Identifying unique offseason events or initiatives to help keep the business community engaged with their client base even when not visiting the community could help bolster economic sustainability year-round. This could include things like "business in a box "where local businesses create a monthly curated content box to share with clients and customer base to recreate the experience they would normally get in the on-season, or looking at ways to create digital experiences.</p>