



November 2024

Town of Gravenhurst

# Economic Development Strategic Plan



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## Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the First Peoples, who, for thousands of years before us, were and are still the keepers and caretakers of this land where we now live and work and in particular the Chippewas of Rama, Wahta Mohawk First Nations and the Moon River Metis. We are dedicated to honouring Indigenous history and culture and committed to moving forward in the spirit of reconciliation and respect with all First Nation, Metis and Inuit people. We recognize all the generations of Indigenous people and their historic connection to this place and we are grateful for the opportunity to gather here at this time.



# Table of Contents

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<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Town of Gravenhurst Strategic Plan Alignment</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Economic Development Vision and Guiding Principles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Economic Development Strategic Plan Priority Actions</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Goal 1: Review And Realign The Investment Attraction Program Foundation.</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Goal 2: Support Local Business.</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Goal 3: Foster Heritage, Arts, and Culture.</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Goal 4: Build On The Tourism Sector.</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Goal 5: Support The Retail Sector.</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Process Followed</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Step 1: Discover</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Step 2: Define</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Step 3: Develop</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Step 4: Deliver</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Appendix One: Issues Outside the Scope of the Strategic Plan</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Appendix Two: SCOAR® Analysis</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Appendix Three: Community Analysis Snapshot</b>	<b>33</b>



## Executive Summary

The Town of Gravenhurst, located in the District Municipality of Muskoka, is considered the 'Gateway to Muskoka.' Gravenhurst has a unique economic outlook due to its large geography and mix of permanent and seasonal residents. Gravenhurst strives to build off its seasonal base and build year-round local economic capacity.

This comprehensive Economic Development Strategic Plan will help guide future decisions in economic and community development. The plan outlines relevant goals, objectives and priorities and presents realistic and doable actions. The focus of this Strategic Plan is setting the foundation for success in the Town of Gravenhurst; identifying core aspects of economic development that need improvement and supporting Economic Development Staff in addressing those shortcomings.

The process for the Economic Development Strategic Plan began with a quantitative analysis through a document review and Community Analysis, presenting a thorough introductory understanding of the economic and social situation in Gravenhurst. Additional qualitative context was gathered through community consultations, which provided valuable local insight into the strengths, challenges, opportunities and aspirations within the community.

Following this introductory analysis, the remainder of the process involved transitioning from ideas to action. First, key themes were identified arising from the qualitative and quantitative analysis. Next, stakeholders were again consulted to develop a set of preliminary actions related to those themes that were realistic, doable, and supported by the community. Finally, draft actions were presented to staff and refined before being presented to Council within this Strategic Plan.



## Town of Gravenhurst Strategic Plan Alignment

The Town of Gravenhurst completed a Strategic Plan 2023–2027 that articulates Council’s strategic direction, guides staff in their planning activities and provides a comprehensive road map for the town.

Three pillars were established:

- Community Vibrancy
- Sustainable growth
- Effective municipal Services

Within two of the three pillars the following goals support Economic Development and Tourism. The Economic Development Strategic Plan aligns with these goals and the actions were developed to achieve the Town’s vision.

### Community Vibrancy

**Goal Two |** Establish the downtown and wharf as a local meeting point and attraction.

**Goal Three |** Continue to foster the Town’s Indigenous, cultural and heritage assets.

### Sustainable Growth

**Goal Eight |** Create an “open for business” environment across the Town to support job and business growth.

To review the Corporate Strategic Plan in full, see the [Town’s website](#).



## Economic Development Vision and Guiding Principles

The following states the vision, values and guiding principles for Gravenhurst's Economic Development Division. These have been crafted based on input from the community through the consultation process and supported by Town staff.

These statements are designed to guide the Economic Development Division through the next five to 10 years and through the implementation of this Strategic Plan.

### Vision

Gravenhurst will fulfill its economic potential, building off its unique history and natural assets, to support the growth of business and economic success. The Economic Development Division will focus on perfecting the fundamentals of economic development, supporting the needs of local businesses, and communicating clearly with the broader Gravenhurst community.



## Key Values and Guiding Principles

**Fundamentals:** We will focus on doing “the little things right” within our economic development work.

**Grounded:** We will remain centred on completing the reasonable and doable actions in the Strategic Plan, avoiding being distracted by flashy-but-less-attainable pursuits.

**Communication:** We will be open and transparent with the Gravenhurst business community.

**Collaboration:** We will collaborate within the District, Division, Town, business community, and with other stakeholders.

**Respect:** We will ensure that respect for our residents and businesses informs every decision we make and guides us through our work daily.

**Determined:** We will achieve the goals and objectives outlined in the Strategic Plan with determination, overcoming any challenges that hinder our capabilities.





## Economic Development Strategic Plan Priority Actions

The following are the Priority Actions based on discussions with the Town of Gravenhurst's Senior Leadership Team. There is a total of 45 doable actions under the following, equally important, goals:



### Goal One

Review and Realign the Investment Attraction Program Foundation.

### Goal Two

Support Local Business.

### Goal Three

Foster Heritage, Arts and Culture.

### Goal Four

Build on the Tourism Sector.

### Goal Five

Support the Retail Sector.



## **Goal 1: Review And Realign The Investment Attraction Program Foundation.**

Local economic development is about making a community a good place to invest. There are foundational items that need to be in place to have an effective economic development program. It is important to have Town staff and elected officials on the same page with regard to processes, policies and creating a welcoming business environment. The Town needs to have a can-do reputation and be known as a municipality that is open to helping businesses.

### **Objective 1: Build foundational investment attraction assets.**

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1. Ensure the Town's economic development website has current, relevant and easily accessible investment attraction information for investors.
2. Build a cohesive investment attraction marketing plan focused on business and residential attraction, that succinctly tells the Gravenhurst story.

### **Objective 2: Elevate the potential of existing employment/industrial land.**

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1. Continually update the database of all employment/industrial landowners (ensure accurate contact information including name of owner, telephone number and email address).
2. Bi-annually (at a minimum) follow up with each landowner to confirm their intentions regarding their property.
3. Continually update the list of land for sale or lease to ensure these lands get exposure to potential investors.

4. Upload and continually update the listing of lands for sale or lease on the Town's website.
5. Craft sell sheets for each available shovel ready piece of property.
6. Continually reach out to the Muskoka District, neighbouring municipalities and Invest Ontario to begin tracking investment inquiries in an attempt to best understand the business types looking to invest in the region as well as their locational requirements.
7. Share all desirable investment opportunities with existing landowners to build excitement around development potential within the Town's industrial/employment areas.
8. Work with one landowner within the Town's industrial/employment areas to certify one site under Ontario's Investment Ready: Certified Site Program.
9. Explore the use of potential incentives such as reduced or deferred Development Charges, expanding the Town's CIP catchment area to include Urban and Rural Employment/Industrial Areas, and/or implementing a Brownfields Tax Incentive Program to allow certain types of businesses some tax relief/assistance if they clean up specific brownfield properties.
10. Promote the above incentives online and other advantages with existing landowners.



## Objective 3: Prepare for future employment/industrial land opportunities.

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1. Build off the recently completed Situational Analysis/Community Analysis to undertake a Target Market Analysis with an aim of identifying those desired business types best suited for Gravenhurst's employment/industrial lands.
2. When updating the Town's Official Plan, complete a best and highest use study of the existing employment/industrial lands to examine opportunities for better more efficient/effective use of the Town's employment/industrial land.
3. Examine the possibility of the Town purchasing existing employment/industrial land to ensure a supply of shovel ready land is available to potential investors.

## Objective 4: Prioritize economic development.

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1. Keep Town staff and elected officials informed and engaged in new economic opportunities through regular communication tools.
2. Proactively promote buy-in and understanding of the value of economic development efforts across the corporation in relation to various studies and initiatives.



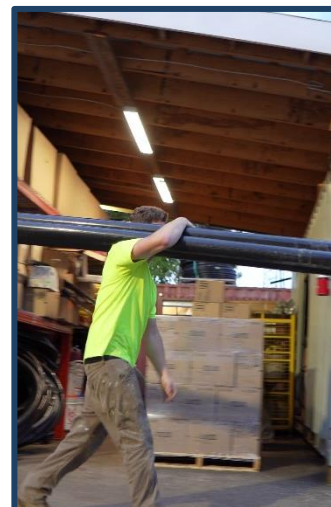
## Goal 2: Support Local Business.

Small business is the backbone of the community. These entrepreneurial ventures provide jobs and are often strong supporters of the community (providing local jobs, fundraising, supporting local sports teams, etc.). As a seasonal community with a cottage population that doubles the population over the summer season is well supported. Gravenhurst would benefit from increasing the number of year-round businesses to support its year-round population.

### Objective 1: Promote Local Business.

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1. Revisit the local currency program that supports shopping local.
2. Continue to develop regular communications with the local business community, providing them with information regarding relevant Town initiatives (i.e., construction impacts, events, etc.).
3. Continue to educate the local business community on the relevant business incentives (i.e., training programs, federal and provincial incentives).
4. Sign up for Digital Main Street to help small businesses create and enhance their online presence.



## Objective 2: Build partnerships to support local business.

1. Develop a formal business visitation program to develop business networks, retain and grow local business and to better understand the needs and opportunities in the Gravenhurst business community.
2. Partner with the Chamber of Commerce, or another business organization, to coordinate an annual business event to provide an economic update and other business information to the business community.

## Objective 3: Build regional capacity.

1. Continue to foster relationships at a regional level, identifying synergies and opportunities for collaboration and share this information with the business community.
2. Work with the regional business organizations (i.e., Muskoka Small Business Centre, CFDC) to connect them with local businesses and entrepreneurs for mentorship, and to help them start up and grow.



## **Goal 3: Foster Heritage, Arts, and Culture.**

Gravenhurst is known as the 'Gateway to Muskoka' but it offers so much more. The community's unique history and cultural assets help differentiate Gravenhurst from the surrounding Muskoka Region. The Opera House, Muskoka Steamships and Discovery Centre, and Bethune Memorial House are cultural centres of historic significance. Along with these cultural centres, Gravenhurst has a thriving artist's community that can be expanded and celebrated.

### **Objective 1: Build on the thriving artist's community in Gravenhurst.**

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- 1.** Develop better coordination internally between Economic Development Division, and the Arts, Culture and Recreation Division.
- 2.** Assist with the development of educational opportunities for heritage, arts, culture and tourism operators.
- 3.** Undertake a Culture Inventory to better understand and promote the cultural assets of the town and how the Town can leverage these assets.
- 4.** Work with the Arts, Culture and Recreation Division to participate in Ontario Culture Days to celebrate the arts, culture and heritage of Gravenhurst.
- 5.** Develop a Public Art Program, including a potential formal placemaking initiative.

## Goal 4: Build On The Tourism Sector.

Tourism is a key sector in Gravenhurst and a significant focus of the Economic Development Division. As there is a Tourism Destination Plan in place that the Economic Development Division has been implementing, the Economic Development Strategic Plan understands the value of the tourism sector on Gravenhurst but does not focus on it. The following actions are in the Town of Gravenhurst Tourism Destination Plan or complement the Plan.

1. Clearly define the role of the Town as a Destination Manager and the roles of other tourism stakeholders in the community.
2. Facilitate product development incentives and promotional opportunities for tourism operators in Gravenhurst to increase visitor engagement.
3. Educate the tourism community on the variety of grants available to them in Gravenhurst.
4. Consider the development of a tourism brand that unifies the community under a common trademark that is distinct from the corporate identity.
5. Continue to review the Municipal Accommodation Tax program and coordinate with Gravenhurst Tourism, to adjust where needed to ensure maximum reinvestment of tourism dollars.
6. Investigate a Wayfinding Program that helps direct visitors, cottagers and residents throughout the community.



## Goal 5: Support The Retail Sector.

The Retail Corridor is made up of Historic Downtown Gravenhurst, Muskoka Wharf and Gravenhurst South End, which is where the majority of the retail and commercial businesses are located. Each of the three retail districts offer a unique shopping and dining experience but with all of them tied together they offer a wide variety of shops, services and restaurants that supports residents as well as cottagers and visitors.

A Retail Gap Analysis was completed as part of the Economic Development Strategic Plan and resulting in several actions. These actions, also found in the Retail Gap Analysis, are listed below.

### Objective 1: Plan for a desirable mix of businesses.

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1. Review current land use planning documents to ensure commercial spaces are aligned with their best and highest use, specifically within the retail corridor.
2. Take an active role in strategically attracting a mix of retailers in the retail corridor by working with property owners, local realtors, and local businesses to provide opportunities for businesses to open.

### Objective 2: Make the Retail Corridor a unique and vibrant centre.

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1. Undertake a formal review of the Gravenhurst Business Improvement Area (BIA) and examine opportunities to strengthen its effectiveness and present the results to Council.
2. Review the Community Improvement Plan program, streamline the process and promote the program to be at full capacity.

3. Work with retail businesses to identify ways to encourage more visitation in the Retail Corridor (beautification, pedestrian accessibility, public art, events, etc.).

## **Objective 3: Connect the Retail Corridor.**

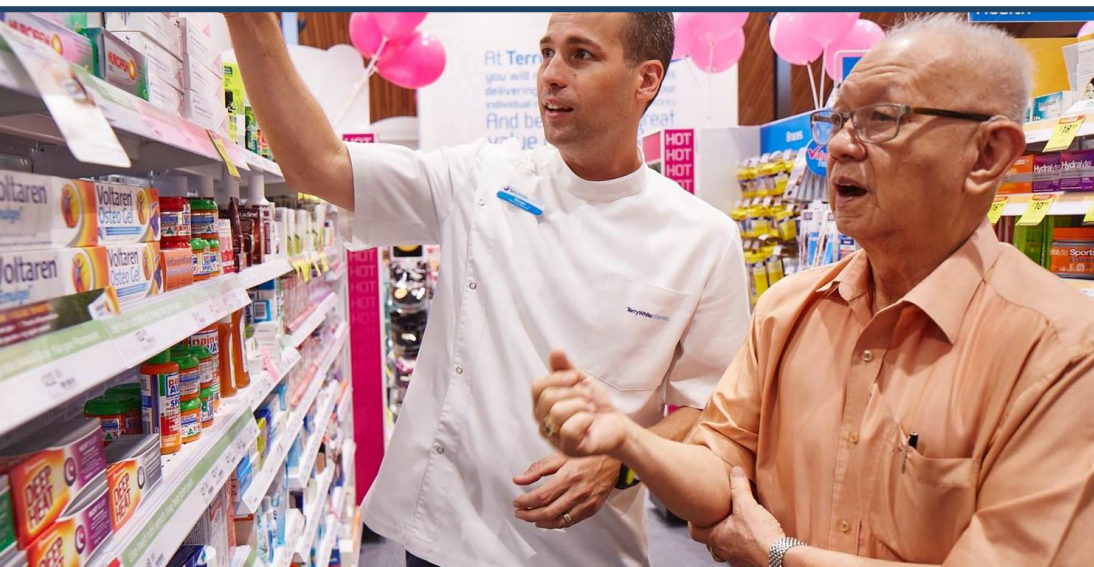
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1. As part of the overall Wayfinding Program, develop specific tactics that moves visitors, cottagers and residents throughout the Retail Corridor.
2. Develop safe and efficient pedestrian access throughout the downtown and wharf area to encourage residents, cottagers and visitors to walk throughout the corridor.

## **Objective 4: Market the Retail Corridor.**

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1. Develop a targeted Marketing Strategy for the Retail Corridor and work with local business associations (Gravenhurst BIA, Chamber of Commerce, Muskoka Wharf Association, etc.) to implement the strategy.
2. Coordinate marketing efforts across the Retail Corridor to promote Gravenhurst retailers.



## Process Followed

The Strategic Plan was completed over a six-month period between May and October 2024. Throughout the process there was considerable opportunity for consultation, discussions and verification of the final document, to ensure that it considered the critical actions required for the success of Gravenhurst, with final approval from staff, elected officials and the Economic Development Steering Committee.

### STEP 1: DISCOVER

#### Current Status Review.

- » Document Review.
- » Employment/Industrial Land Review.
- » Community Analysis.
- » Situational Economic Analysis.
- » Informal Investment Readiness Assessment.

### STEP 2: DEFINE

#### Stakeholder Engagement.

- » One-on-one Interviews.
- » Online Survey.
- » Focus Groups.
- » Staff Priority Setting Session.

### STEP 3: DEVELOP

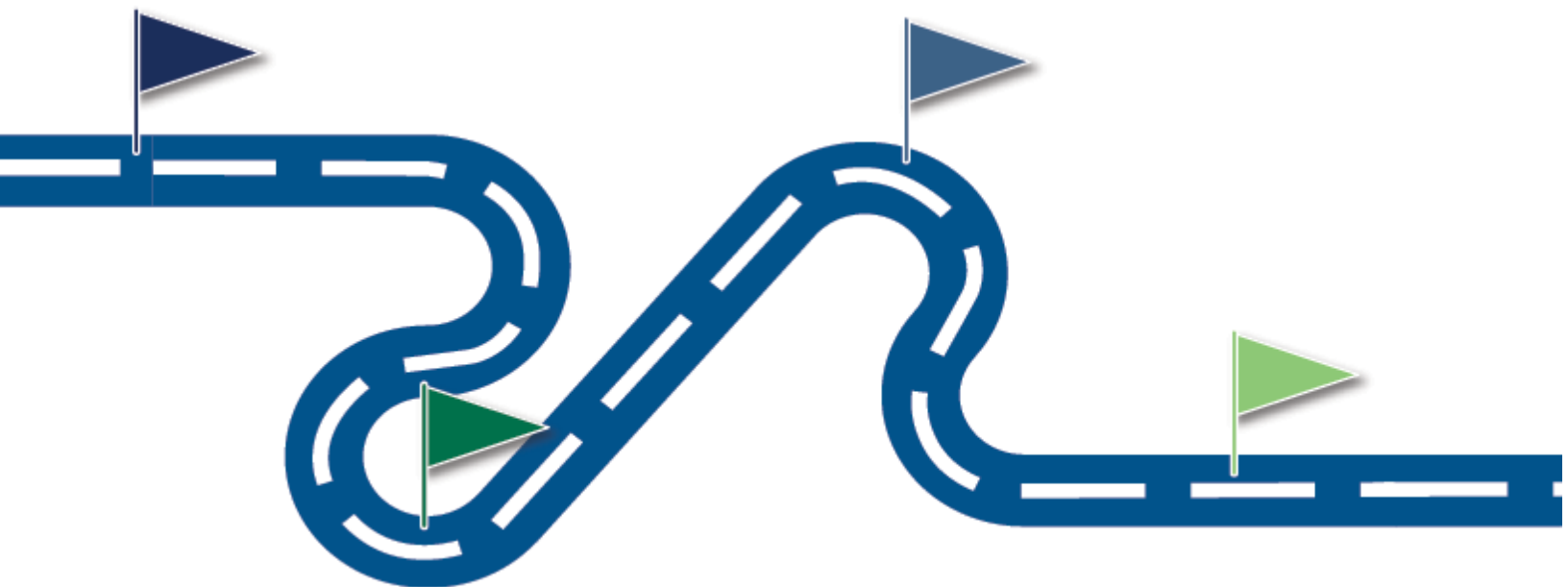
#### Strategic Development & Implementation Plan.

- » SCOAR®.
- » Working Session.
- » Strategic Action Planning Session.
- » Draft Strategy.
- » Implementation Plan.

### STEP 4: DELIVER

#### Present the results.

- » Final Strategy.
- » Presentation to Council.



## Step 1: Discover

### Background Review and Analysis

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To begin the process, an in-depth review of the current situation in the Town of Gravenhurst was undertaken, through the development of a Community Analysis, Retail Gap Analysis, Document Review, Industrial and Employment Land Review and Informal Investment Readiness Assessment.

#### Community Analysis

The Community Analysis for the Town of Gravenhurst was completed as a compendium to this Strategic Plan. It is a background document that provides a snapshot of the community and assesses the Town of Gravenhurst through a quantitative lens (see **Appendix Three** for a snapshot of the available data).

The full document is available from the Town of Gravenhurst Economic Development Division.

#### Retail Gap Analysis

The Retail Gap Analysis was an additional document that was completed by McSweeney and Associates in order to have a better understanding of the retail landscape in Gravenhurst. The Analysis includes a data review of the retail sector, a summary of the qualitative findings from the broader Strategic Plan and the retail-centred focus group, as well as retail-focused actions. The retail-focused actions are similarly presented within this Strategic Plan document.

The full document is available from the Town of Gravenhurst Economic Development Division.

## Document Review

Relevant Town and regional documents were reviewed along with a thorough review of the Town's website was taken to have a better understanding of the Town of Gravenhurst from an economic development perspective. Documents reviewed include:

- Policy on the Dedication of Parkland 1997-49
- Town of Gravenhurst Age-Friendly Active Transportation Plan of Action, 2017
- District of Muskoka Second Home Study, 2023
- District of Muskoka Official Plan, 2023
- Town of Gravenhurst Parks, Recreation & Trails Master Plan, 2023
- Town of Gravenhurst Strategic Plan, 2023-2027
- Town of Gravenhurst Comprehensive Zoning By-Law, updated 2023
- Town of Gravenhurst Development Charges, 2024
- Town of Gravenhurst Official Plan, 2016
- Town of Gravenhurst Tourism Destination Plan
- Town of Gravenhurst Community Profile
- Town of Gravenhurst Muskoka Wharf Revitalization Plan



## Industrial and Employment Land Review

A review of the Town's Industrial lands (both Urban and Rural) was conducted. The following steps were taken.

1. A review of the Town's Official Plan Policies and Zoning Bylaws as well as the District of Muskoka's Plan Policies governing Industrial/Employment Land was undertaken to understand the location, supply and permitted uses of the Town's Industrial Lands.
2. This was followed up by a review of the Town's development and investment inquiry activity as well as a virtual/in-person assessment of the condition of the existing urban and rural industrial areas.
3. Finally, we examined how the land was being promoted to the broader market as well as the Town's overall level of investment readiness.

Attracting and growing investment is not a quick endeavour. It requires a long-term program that is proactive with a clear understanding of the end goal. Policies in the Official Plan (OP) need to be reflective of the vision of the community. During the OP Review, more comprehensive policies may need to be included.

## Informal Investment Readiness Assessment

An informal assessment of Gravenhurst's investment readiness was undertaken with economic development staff. The basic tools and assets required for investors was reviewed including the Economic Development website, investment marketing tools, employment lands, and the handling of the site selection request process.

Based on the information gleaned from the Community Analysis, Retail Gap Analysis, Document Review, Industrial and Employment Land Review, and Investment Readiness Assessment, it was determined that the Town should be taking a more proactive stance to improve the opportunities to attract, retain and grow business. The requirements that need to be undertaken to be 'investment ready' are reflected in the actions in the Strategic Plan.



## Step 2: Define

### Stakeholder Consultation

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The consultation process used to develop the Economic Development Strategic Plan was meaningful and inclusive, ensuring a range of community support and active engagement. Participants included key stakeholders from the community, business, culture, tourism, local organizations, Town staff and elected officials.

### Community Consultation

The consultation process included interviews, a community online survey and four focus groups and were based on six open-ended questions that captured the essence of the community's vision of the community.

There was also a staff priority setting session held with Town staff to discuss constraints, capacity, and opportunities within the Town.



**65** people participated in the consultation process.



## Step 3: Develop

### Progress Summary and Draft Strategic Plan

#### SCOAR® Analysis

Once the background research and initial consultations were completed, the ‘developing’ process began with a summation of the findings of the initial consultations and data analysis, presented through a Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results (SCOAR®) Analysis. The SCOAR® was used as the fundamental basis to determine the three themes and can be found in **Appendix Two**.



The SCOAR® is a detailed analysis of the current situation involving statistical analysis of the local economy, regional competitive outlook, trends and forecasts, investment readiness assessment, strengths/weaknesses/opportunities review using the McSweeney exclusive SCOAR® analysis.

A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis has a “50%” focus on “negative” aspects of analysis. A Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results (SOAR) analysis emphasizes the positive, though it fails to address barriers or challenges to economic growth that every community faces. This SCOAR® Analysis provides greater balance than either SWOT or SOAR analysis.



## Working Session

**Seventeen participants engaged in the half-day working session** to review findings from the previous consultative work and begin to draft realistic and doable actions. Participants included representation from: local businesses; tourism, culture, heritage and business organizations; and Town staff and Council.

The Strategic Working Session provided an opportunity for participants to begin to develop a set of draft strategic actions that would form the base of the Gravenhurst Economic Development Strategic Plan, inclusive of a 5-year action plan.

The following three themes were agreed upon that reflect the current and future need of the Town and were the basis of the discussions during the working session.



## Strategic Directions and Action Planning Session

Upon completion of the external consultation process, a draft set of strategic priority actions were prepared for review. To ensure that the actions aligned with the aspirations and vision of the Town of Gravenhurst, a virtual strategic planning session was held with Senior Leadership Team. This session refined the actions and ensured that members of Senior Leadership Team feel comfortable in the ability of staff to deliver on the actions presented.

The actions fall under the following five goals: Review and Realign the Investment Attraction Foundation; Support Local Business; Foster Heritage Arts and Culture; Build on the Tourism Sector; and Support the Retail Sector.

## Implementation Plan

An Implementation Plan is provided to the Economic Development Division, which lays out each of the actions and provides more detailed information on the lead and partners, financial implications and timelines. The Implementation Plan will be used as a working document to support the Economic Development Division's workplan over the next five years.

## Step 4: Deliver

### Final Strategic Plan and Action Plan

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This final Economic Development Strategic Plan was completed in October 2024 and presented to the Town of Gravenhurst at the November 2024 council meeting.

## Appendix One: Issues Outside the Scope of the Strategic Plan

During the consultative process, issues were discussed that are top-of-mind for Town of Gravenhurst residents and businesses but are outside of the scope of this Economic Development Strategic Plan. These are not necessarily economic development, tourism or culture initiatives but they do have an impact on businesses and their employees.

Economic Development Staff should be part of the process with regards to these issues, ensuring that business needs are met but Economic Development Staff can not be the lead on these initiatives.

### Housing

A consistent theme discussed repeatedly was the perceived lack of attainable housing, both owned and long-term rentals. This issue is not isolated to the Town of Gravenhurst, as it is pervasive in communities across Canada. A lack of attainable housing means young families struggle to move to the area, employers have difficulty filling roles, retired residents are forced out of their properties, and residents dealing with financial hardships face uncertain housing prospects, among other challenges.

### Public Transportation

Access to transportation was also discussed. There was acknowledgment that the Town understands the need for greater public transportation options, both internally within the Town of Gravenhurst as well as between neighbouring municipalities.

Public transportation was seen as an opportunity to help businesses attract employees more easily.

## Climate Change

### Today's Situation on Climate Change

Climate change has become a significant issue in today's situation. When referring to climate change, it is referred to as the phenomenon of human-accelerated global warming: an average global temperature rises without precedent in the planet's normal climatic cycle. Climate change has also come to serve as a proxy for referring to changes in other global systems because of human activities. Human activities, such as agriculture, deforestation, energy production and use, pollution, and more all have impacts on the earth.

### Climate Change in Canada

In Canada, oil and gas, transportation, and buildings are the top three sources of emissions. Domestic and international experts have increased scrutiny on Canada's lack of climate action, highlighting that we have the worst record of all G7 countries.

The impacts of this inaction are broad and can be observed in the increasingly severe and frequent extreme climate events occurring all over the world. In 2023, there were several record-breaking extreme climate events in Canada alone.

The current federal government and provincial governments have made commitments to reducing emissions and single-use plastics, increasing the number of electric vehicles, encouraging home retrofits, and adopting nature-based and technological solutions to clean up the environment and the



economy. However, municipalities are on the front lines of climate change, and it will ultimately fall on communities to mitigate and adapt to changing climates, with changeable levels of support.

### **Opportunities**

Despite the many unanswered questions and the stark realities faced by all, a changing climate presents some opportunities for positive change. The urgency of the situation makes it difficult to perceive these opportunities, but communities which are proactive in their approach to reducing their environmental impacts are increasingly perceived as desirable places to live by young and new Canadians alike.

Rethinking how communities are designed and how they ought to develop can be transformative not only for the quality of life of residents but for the long-term sustainability of the local economy. A brief list of potential areas to explore for the long-term prosperity of communities follows:

- Develop a Climate Action Plan and/or an Integrated Community Sustainability Plan to understand the ecological context and impact of the community and to develop strategies for hazards likely to occur in the community.
- Build partnerships with neighbouring communities, including First Nations.
- Circular economies and eco-industrial parks.
- Nature-based solutions (e.g., living versus manufactured fences, re-naturalization).
- Expanding public transit internally and with neighbouring regions.
- Expanding pedestrian-only zones and infrastructure.
- Natural asset management and stewardship.
- Adopt green energy solutions, such as single-home and community geothermal.



- Facilitate retrofitting homes and municipal buildings.

What we heard through the consultation process for consideration...

- A need to adapt to warmer winters and need to be less winter dependent.
- Plant more trees for greater urban tree coverage.
- Foster the next generation of water stewardship.
- Enforcement of upgraded septic systems.
- Increased number of 24-hour EV charging stations needed.
- Limitations as to how much private property can be on the lake fronts.
- Infrastructure in place to support extreme weather conditions.
- Move to the use of more electric vehicles.
- Better promote waste diversion and make it easier to dispose of waste.
- Restrict building on floodplains.
- Work with lake associations that advocate for the lakes.
- Education is required around climate change.



## Appendix Two: SCOAR® Analysis



The SCOAR® (Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results) is a detailed analysis of the current situation involving statistical analysis of the local economy, regional competitive outlook, trends and forecasts, investment readiness assessment, strengths/weaknesses/opportunities review using the McSweeney exclusive SCOAR® analysis.

### Strengths

**The talented residents take great pride in their community:** are tremendous ambassadors for the Town, eager to try new experiences and to support local business and are willing to offer themselves as volunteers to support the community.

**Offers a high quality of life “where others come to play”:** it is located within Ontario’s premier “cottage country”, with natural beauty, small town mentality, and strong sense of community.

**Closest Muskoka Municipality to the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and considered the ‘Gateway to Muskoka’:** with Highway 11 access making it much more accessible than many other areas in the Muskoka region and good access to Orillia, Bracebridge, Barrie, and the GTA.





**Muskoka Airport located in Gravenhurst:** operated by the District Municipality of Muskoka, contributes to the local economy and provides another mode of transportation in and out of the region.

**Population increases dramatically throughout the summer season and provides positive economic impact on the community:** the seasonal nature of Gravenhurst means that the Town benefits from a near-doubling of its population. Half of the seasonal homes are winterized.

**Retail sales increase during the summer months:** with seasonal residents spending while they are at their cottages.

**Adequate infrastructure to support additional residential growth:** is well suited to its current population and can support additional growth that is expected to come with diversity of housing.

**Sustainable year-round population growth:** After relatively slow growth from 2006 to 2016, the Town saw substantial growth from 2016–2023 a trend that is expected to continue through the next decade.

**A tourism destination offering unique attractions and events:** with resorts and seasonal accommodations, waterfront/water access with a marina and water events, 35 km of hiking trails, the Music on the Barge Concert Series, golf courses, arts and cultural activities and an annual triathlon.

**Rich history with assets to draw on:** including the Opera house, Muskoka Wharf, oldest operating steamship in North America, Muskoka Discovery Centre, arts and heritage tours, and Bethune Memorial House.

**Gravenhurst Industrial Park and the opportunity for additional employment lands:** to have shovel ready employment lands to develop an industrial subdivision.

**Nice mix of businesses to support the community:** including franchises, local brands, small manufacturers and services.

## Challenges

**A lack of attainable housing and alternative transportation makes it difficult to attract qualified workers:** short-term rentals in the summer months and expensive housing, along with limited (or no) alternative transportation options for those that cannot afford a car, puts affordability pressures on residents which subsequently puts pressures on businesses trying to afford workers.

**Business Improvement Association that is not being utilized to its full potential:** due to its low budget and its difficulty in getting support from the business community.

**Residents shopping outside of Gravenhurst results in leakage of dollars:** due to some missing services and retail, and some local businesses appearing not to offer hours that align with community needs.

**Feelings of apathy towards the future of Gravenhurst:** making it difficult to drive positive change. This stems from the sense that Gravenhurst has “plateaued” in comparison to nearby areas (Bracebridge, Huntsville) over the past few decades.

**Seasonality of population:** An influx of demand in the summer is a benefit but meeting those increased needs (and needing increased staff) is a challenge, while also creating significant challenges from the inactivity during other months.

**Seasonal retail demand:** is high for specific products in summer, but that demand is considerably reduced during the fall and winter, presenting difficulties for retailers to meet varied demand. It is similarly difficult for consumers, as there is a feeling that during peak season locals are “priced out” of the local stores who raise rates due to higher incomes from cottagers.

**Vacant, provincially owned lands that the Town has limited control:** with the Fire College, the Muskoka RC lands, and lands along Highway 11, sitting vacant but are subject to provincial mandate.

**Downtown Gravenhurst, Muskoka Wharf and the South Retail District effectively act as individual areas:** with little effort to work together and effectively support each other.

## Opportunities

**Increased awareness of the Town, better communications and telling the story to support economic growth:** Better marketing by telling the story of the Town both historically and currently, so that residents, cottagers and visitors feel part of something special in Gravenhurst.

**Create a 'shop local' program:** Encourage residents, cottagers and visitors to spend more time and money in Gravenhurst.

**Four-season economic engagement:** Support business growth during the offseason. Discover ways to draw people to Gravenhurst in the winter so that economic activity is more diffuse and can support a more even economy.

**Increased number of younger families living in Gravenhurst:** As affordability challenges continue to spike in the GTA, especially for youth, offering an alternative lifestyle with a lower cost of living could be a strength in Gravenhurst, if housing can be made available.

**Working with the province to ensure that the vast tracts of vacant provincial lands are developed:** and used as a catalyst for the local economy.

**Harnessing the coming population growth:** With projected increases of nearly 2,500 people from 2021 to 2033, significant economic and business

development opportunities may arise that the Town can leverage to help diversify the business community and strengthen the Town's local economy.

### Aspirations

#### The Town of Gravenhurst will...

- have a more diverse economy.
- be a four-season tourism destination.
- develop a brand that is well known outside of just being part of the Muskoka Region.
- be proactive in driving economic development.
- communicate the Town's economic development initiatives more effectively to residents.
- convey a clear vision and mission for economic development in the Town.
- have encouraged greater opportunities for local shopping across all seasons.

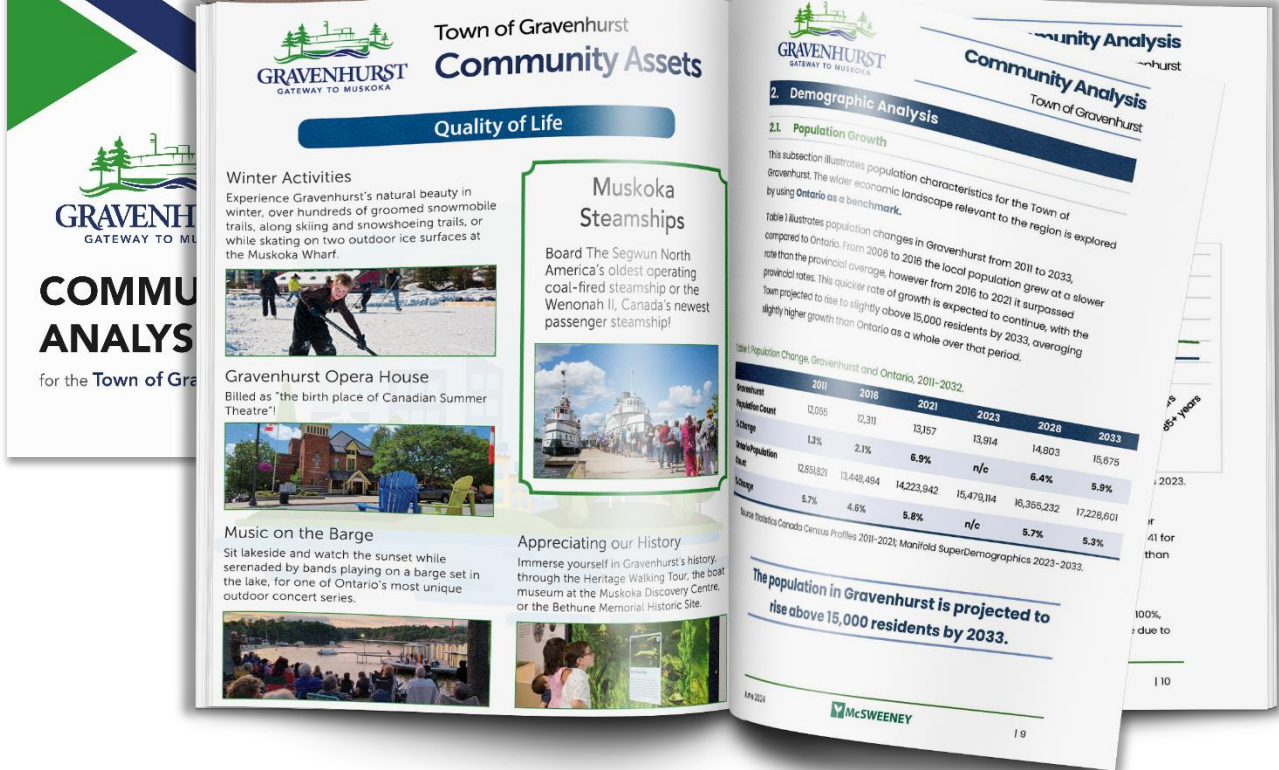
### Results

The Town of Gravenhurst will build off its incredible natural assets to be a Town that offers opportunity to businesses and residents through each of its four seasons. The Town will be home to an eclectic mix of industries and businesses that service the needs of the community. Residents will be able to see a clear approach to economic development that promotes a clear brand and identity for the Town so that it is no longer the best kept secret in Ontario, but instead well-known among potential residents, cottagers, visitors, and investors.



## Appendix Three: Community Analysis Snapshot

The Gravenhurst Community Analysis was completed as part of the Economic Development Strategic Plan. The following are the key findings from the Community Analysis can be found in the Demographic Snapshot. The full document is available upon request.



# Town of Gravenhurst Demographic Snapshot



## Population Profile

	MEDIAN	AVERAGE
Region Age	52	48
Ontario Age	41	42



## Highest Education

Population ages 25-64



**35%**  
*Secondary*

**51%**  
*Post-secondary*

## Household & Earnings



**20%** **ONTARIO 28%**

of Gravenhurst's population spends 30% or more of total household income on shelter costs.



Average Dwelling Value **\$789,411**  
Median Dwelling Value **\$699,851**



Total number of households  
**5,814**

All data sourced from Manifold SuperDemographics 2023, unless otherwise specified.

# Town of Gravenhurst Demographic Snapshot



## Labour Force & Local Economy

Median Employment Income | Average Employment Income

**\$41,466** | **\$55,020**

ONTARIO MEDIAN | ONTARIO AVERAGE  
**\$43,942** | **\$60,007**

### PARTICIPATION RATE

ONTARIO  
66.0%

**58.3%**

### EMPLOYMENT RATE

ONTARIO  
62.4%

**55.0%**

### UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

ONTARIO  
5.4%

**5.6%**

## Top 5 Sectors by Industry\*\*



Retail Trade



Construction



Health Care &  
Social Assistance



Accommodation &  
Food Services



Public  
Administration

## Top 5 Sectors by Occupation\*\*



Sales & Service



Trades, Transport  
& Equipment  
Operators



Business, Finance  
& Administration



Education,  
Law & Social,  
Community &  
Government Services



Health  
Occupations

\*\* by labour force employment for people living in Gravenhurst.

All data sourced from Manifold SuperDemographics 2023, unless otherwise specified.