

Summary of 2021 Municipal Interviews & SMART Goals

August 12, 2021

Hastings County
Economic and Tourism Development Unit



EST. 1792

*Hastings*TM
COUNTY

Background

In early 2019, a series of 14 in-person interviews (with the 14 individual municipal partners) was carried out by the Hastings County Manager of Economic Development and the Small Business Coordinator. It involved each Head of Council, their CAO or Clerk, a staff member who had economic or community development as part of their job description, and other elected officials and staff in some of the municipalities. The purpose of the interviews was to meet 1on1 with each following the municipal election, especially considering 9 of the 14 Heads of Council were new to their role. Also, the intent was to collect input towards a refreshed Economic Development Action Plan to support future development and growth of all communities in the County.

Hastings County staff produced 14 separate reports with the results of each interview and a report with all 14 combined. The information was used to prepare a refreshed Economic Development Action Plan and an update to the Tourism Development Plan, both of which were presented to and approved by County Council in early 2020. Then the COVID-19 virus shut everything down in March 2020. The resulting restrictions and lockdown measures created challenges for following through on existing plans, but also identified some new opportunities to act upon and a need to be adaptable.

Warden Rick Phillips, during his inaugural remarks in December, 2020, stated, *“I believe the actions we take in 2021 and 2022 will be critically important to our collective economic health. We need to focus and ramp up our economic development activities starting now.”* Further, the Warden stated, *“We are ready, but we simply cannot just wait for new opportunities to come to us. We have to aggressively search them out and we need to do that with our 14 member municipalities”.*

“We need to focus and ramp up our economic development activities starting now.”, Warden Phillips

While Hastings County is a cohesive entity, each of the 14 partner municipalities has unique resources, economic drivers, populations and challenges. Having a unified approach to economic development strategies is advantageous in budgeting, staffing and branding. In addition, narrowing down specific investment opportunities and objectives in each community helps better guide investment attraction efforts and marketing initiatives carried out by the County of Hastings. Therefore, in early 2021 staff at the County coordinated 1 on 1 virtual meetings during the pandemic with each of the member municipalities including the 14 Heads of Council.

Common themes collected

There are some common themes and direction that emerged from the meetings. They are as follows:

1. Previously when we met with municipalities in 2019, many expressed a goal to increase their population and wanted resident attraction. That wish has come true since now Hastings County is experiencing a rapid increase in the number of people wanting to find homes here or land to build on. The ability to work remotely is another factor driving an exodus from the cities. This has created a greater demand for housing and has increased the workload of planning and building departments. The challenge today is not so much attracting people to want to live in Hastings County, it is ***finding ways to accommodate the increased demand for places to live;***
2. Largely due in part to restrictions surrounding COVID-19, municipalities in general ***do not request help with visitor marketing for their communities currently***, especially during the warmer months of the year. In many cases, and even before COVID, the communities and businesses already experience a high level of traffic from a combination of seasonal residents, campers, cottage renters and other visitors. ***Growing visitation during the colder months of the year needs to be the focus;***
3. Discussions with municipalities have also touched on the issue of whether there is enough beds currently to accommodate increased visitation. Findings from the Accommodation Audit show that many accommodators and seasonal accommodations are almost fully booked during the warmer months and 50% are closed during the colder months. There are opportunities to grow tourism and experiences in the Spring and Fall, while ***it needs to be better understood what purchasable regional experiences and attractions are being marketed to benefit not just certain businesses, but the County economy overall;***

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4. Another topic which has emerged from the meetings, like number 3 above, is that there are many individual attractions, retailers and restaurants which receive visitors from at least 40KMs away but operate in a bit of a silo, in the sense that the customer may not be encouraged or choose to visit other businesses while here. ***More partnerships needed amongst businesses and attractions to encourage longer stays and more spending in the communities;***
 5. Looking at the goal of attracting visitors, when asked, some municipalities mentioned it should be: ***To find creative ways to encourage visitors and seasonal residents to live here permanently bringing their talents with them and buying, starting or relocating a business here;***
 6. Municipalities in general have expressed a goal of economic development as to increase the tax base and expand the commercial services for residents. This requires a database of available commercial/industrial properties to market as available. In other words, what is the current inventory which can be marketed for investment? ***Municipalities are committing to keeping Hastings County economic development staff apprised of any lands for sale which could be pitched to investors and developers, commercial buildings and businesses for sale, and overall commit to being the “eyes and ears” on the ground so to speak when business/investment opportunities arise.*** Larger properties and buildings will be added to the new Ontario East Economic Development Commission’s online listing site. Other opportunities such as a smaller retail or restaurants for sale will be handled as outlined in section 8 below;
 7. Municipalities also provided suggested targets for investment attraction which will help inform marketing. For example, Tweed requested a Giant Tiger. Stirling-Rawdon mentioned a Tim Hortons while Marmora and Lake mentioned dry industrial businesses be attracted to their industrial park. Bancroft would also like a hotel which offers event space. ***Hastings County will approach developers and site selectors to “pitch” identified sites with input from member municipalities;***
 8. Especially for those which have a downtown commercial area, municipalities requested help in retaining businesses, assistance in marketing businesses who are looking to sell/retire and also help market vacant buildings and properties. ***Explore a paid and promoted marketing campaign centred around “See your business here!” and work with local municipalities, BIAs, Chambers of Commerce and others to promote individual opportunities.***

How to move forward

Establish a Mission Statement:

We are a municipal economic and tourism development office with a mandate and mission to help sustain and increase the municipal tax base by supporting the attraction, expansion and retention of businesses across the 14 member municipalities.

Confirm a Vision:

Our vision is to make Hastings County home to state-of-the-art high-speed Internet and County-wide cell phone coverage. This excellent connectivity combined with affordable real estate and located exactly halfway between Toronto and Ottawa makes Hastings County the destination of choice to raise a family, work from home or start and operate a business.

Our member municipalities are fully funded by the development and expansion of commercial sectors and our downtown cores are filled with Wildly Authentic artisan boutique shops, restaurants and sidewalk cafes.

We are Canada's worst kept secret. We have many purchasable experiences and "weekend getaways" centred on the minerals and rock collecting experiences, outdoor recreation, motorsports and others that attract four season revenue and supports jobs. As a result, many visitors decide that they love the County so much that they choose to move here permanently.

Suggested SMART Goals to Respond

SMART Goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound.

The following pages outline six strategic Actions and SMART Goals to complement, not replace, the existing Economic Development Action Plan: 2020-2024 and the Tourism Development Plan 2020-2022. These Actions and SMART Goals offer an updated understanding and identification of opportunities to address economic and tourism development matters with more recent direct input and consultation from all members of County Council.

The following also recognizes the opportunities and challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic which were not a factor when the Economic Development Action Plan and Tourism Development Plans were prepared and approved by County Council in early 2020.

Action #1: Attract hotel/resort developers to see the potential in Hastings County

Smart Goal:

Attract commitment from hotel chains to build a new hotel(s) in Hastings County. The two proposed areas will be Bancroft and the area around Highway 7.

Rationale:

Attracting new hotels / motels / resorts will financially benefit Hastings County by increasing the tax base. Additional benefits include a growth in tourism overnight stays, resulting in increased tourist spending and the creation of jobs in both the hotel and surrounding tourism related businesses.

Recent municipal interview data suggest Hastings County currently lacks in overnight accommodations inventory. This creates a challenge when attempting to attract more tourists. Tourists who are not able to stay overnight tend to spend much less than those who stay and purchase food, accommodations, souvenirs and entertainment in the area.

Findings from the Accommodation Audit indicate that 50% of commercial accommodations are closed in the Winter season which aggravates the lack of inventory. The Audit also indicated that during the Summer months, existing accommodators are close to full occupancy and, quite often, need to turn many potential visitors away.

Steps:

1. Completion of the Accommodation Audit, ensuring accuracy in all data. Creation of a one or two-page summary of the audit, outlining the current capacity of accommodations in Hastings County, seasonal occupancy rates, and rationale for increasing the roofed accommodation inventory. This data will be presented to hotel site selectors to help reinforce their business case for building in Hastings County;
2. In partnership with member municipal offices, identify suitable land available for potential new accommodation sites. Detailed listings for each of these sites will be created to be used in promotion to developers and hotel site selectors;
3. Develop a marketing campaign to attract hotel developers and national hotel chains. Promotion of "Hastings County Opportunities for Hotel Development" will be done via direct contact with hotel site selectors, referrals, networking, online targeted advertisements and industry leads.

Assigned to: County Economic and Tourism Development Office and Member Municipalities

Timeline: To commence immediately with targeted commitments by the end of December 2021.

Action #2: Tourism marketing for the foreseeable future will be redirected towards marketing to existing seasonal residents, cottagers, campers etc. who are already coming here and make sure they know what's available to purchase.

Smart Goal:

In conjunction with local business organizations and member municipalities, promote a menu of activities, purchasable attractions and local businesses to our existing seasonal residents, cottagers and campers.

Rationale:

We have an abundance of people converging on Hastings County who are different than transient tourists we attract with our tourism marketing efforts. These people include cottage renters, cottage owners and seasonal campers. We do not need to spend our budget attracting these people to our area, as they are already coming here. We can generate some economic benefit for the County through the promotion of local businesses, attractions and events to these seasonal residents.

The purpose of this marketing initiative will be to assist in retention of existing commercial services, to help retain the municipal commercial tax base, to increase revenue (and hopefully grow) our local businesses who, in turn, will create more local employment.

Steps:

1. Meet with local Chambers of Commerce, BIA's, Business Associations and Municipal Partners Group to identify what similar marketing initiatives, they are currently doing and to determine how we can support each other in advancing this initiative;
2. Create a "menu" of activities highlighting "purchasable attractions", things to see and do, and list local businesses of relevance to this target group. This "menu" will be created and reviewed by each local Chamber, BIA and/or member municipality (e.g. Municipal Economic and Tourism Development Partners Group) with the *aim to highlight purchasable (and multi) experiences first*;
3. Market directly to these seasonal residents through our website and compliment with printed material, which will be distributed through cottage/lake property owners' associations, campgrounds / resorts, municipal offices, and businesses who cater to seasonal residents. Note: We can use a lot of the content currently existing on the Hastings.ca website supplemented by the info received in Step #2 (above);
4. Regularly review and update printed material and distribute with the assistance of business organizations in each of the municipalities.

Assigned to: Hastings County new Marketing Coordinator and members of the Economic and Tourism Development Advisory Committee (specifically those who benefit from our seasonal residents).

Timeline: To commence immediately and have “menu” of activities created and reviewed by October 1, 2021

Action #3: Work closely now with local accommodators and attractions to establish purchasable ‘Wildly Authentic’ multi-day experiences and market them.

Smart Goal:

Working closely with accommodators, we will facilitate the development of at least 6 new purchasable experiences/packages which we will promote in 2021. We will increase this offering to a total of 12 purchasable experiences for the 2022 season.

Rationale:

Promoting purchasable experiences/packages benefits Hastings County financially by attracting new revenue across all four seasons, supporting longer stays by transient visitors, supports jobs at participating local businesses and helps retain the municipal commercial tax base. It also helps build “quality of place” and as a result many visitors who partake in an experience may decide to move here permanently.

The Tourism Development Plan 2020-2022 outlines a strategy to “Facilitate the development of offerings...”. This needs to be priority number one and urgently needed now to create more purchasable experiences, especially in the Spring and Fall seasons, and also on weekdays, to encourage longer stays, vacuum a visitor’s wallet, and provide something measurable to market to transient visitors and generate visitor spending to benefit the entire Hastings County economy.

As stated by the Warden, the County overall should not wait for opportunities to happen naturally, but rather aggressively seek them out. Starting with existing accommodators, County staff can make the process easier by directly and individually highlighting a list of assets, attractions and experiences and encourage accommodators to create purchasable experience packages which can be marketed and measured.

The Action Plan that was produced to accompany the Premier-ranked Tourist Destinations Framework does state (p. 5) that there should be “more quantifiable goals and objectives” identified for tourism beyond increasing the number of visitors to Hastings County and average visitor expenditure which are both broad in nature. Confirming the quantifiable goals and

objectives will help guide actions and show a return on investment for tourism and tourism related marketing.

Steps:

1. Create an inventory of assets which could be blended into purchasable experiences. As an example, Hastings County is “world-famous” for its varied mineralogy and mineral collecting potential. When consultant Richard Innes helped complete the Premier-ranked Tourist Destinations Framework for Hastings County, and then produced a follow-up action plan, he regularly proclaimed that “Minerals & Rocks” is our top underdeveloped and underperforming asset that could be better utilized to impact tourism visitation and revenue. There are more mineral specimens per capita in the Bancroft region than anywhere else. How has this asset been capitalized since then? Could it be turned into a purchasable getaway experience?;
2. Through the Experiential Tourism E-Training Program (taking place in 2021) we have started bringing together tourism operators with an aim to have them create new purchasable travel experiences;
3. Development of 6 unique experiences will be the task for 2021 followed by an additional 6 for the 2022 season;
4. Develop a marketing and promotional program to sell these experiences through social media, advertising, referrals and word of mouth.

Assigned to: Hastings County new Tourism Development Coordinator to lead

Timeline: To start immediately and be ready by the end of 2021.

Action #4: Commence a paid and promoted campaign that helps showcase business opportunities (vacancies and businesses for sale) in downtown areas and elsewhere

Smart Goal:

The Hastings County Economic and Tourism Development Office will coordinate a campaign on social media to target both Ottawa and GTA residents in an attempt to attract them to open a business in one of our vacant storefronts, purchase an existing business or move their existing business to one of our available locations in Hastings County. A similar campaign will use printed material to target seasonal residents, encouraging them to relocate their business (or purchase a business) in Hastings County.

Rationale:

County Councillors and municipalities have requested help with retaining and expanding commercial services in their communities.

Marketing specific investment opportunities and focusing as well on those who are already cottaging or “playing here” will allow the County to benefit financially by filling vacant businesses in our municipalities, by increasing the number of new business operations and by helping to sustain and grow the municipal commercial tax base.

An additional benefit is the opportunity to have local businesses become brand ambassadors and create awareness of the Wildly Authentic brand messaging.

Steps:

1. Create and maintain a current inventory of business opportunities and locations available in Hastings County;
2. Create a campaign on social media to target both Ottawa and GTA residents and includes photos of vacant or for sale businesses. This can be supplemented with paid online advertisements including photos of a business/storefront façade and a message of “See yourself here”, or “See your business here” (Refer to the Downtown Belleville Facebook Page for an example of how this can look);
3. Prepare a marketing piece (i.e. a rack card) which will be given to seasonal residents and transient visitors (who are already coming here) with “Wildly Inspiring” messaging to encourage them to give Hastings County economic development staff a phone call to learn more about the financial opportunities and advantages of working remotely here, running a business here, and/or buy a business which is for sale.

Additional Notes: The campaign on social media can be started right away. Information on what opportunities are available can be sourced from member municipalities, BIAs, Chambers of Commerce and local realtors. Content and stories which are produced, and published at Hastings.ca and promoted, should centre on a particular message which is to inspire the reader to pick-up their phone and call the

Hastings County economic development office to learn more about the County, to get information on opening a business here, relocating their business or remote work here, or purchasing an existing business for sale. As an example, communicate to the seasonal resident population the opportunity to invest in the various aspects of the new Fountain Hill development in Bancroft – banquet centre, hotel etc. A specific marketing campaign that could help is one that targets the eastern side of Toronto for example, using Wildly Authentic brand language, along the lines of, “We want you to grow your inner passion and be your own boss by leaving the city for Hastings County! Join a passionate community of trailblazers where genuine and one-of-a-kind businesses are surrounded by record setting real estate sales! Our wildly supportive staff are awaiting your phone call”.

Assigned to: Hastings County’s new Marketing Coordinator

Timeline: Commencing immediately with milestones of printed material completed and distributed before end of September, 2021 and social media campaign up and running by September 1, 2021.

Action #5: Attract investors and site selectors to build in Hastings County

Smart Goal:

The Hastings County Economic and Tourism Development Office, in partnership with all 14 member municipalities, will promote specific investment opportunities across the County.

Rationale:

Marketing and having investment opportunities purchased and developed helps maintain and grow the commercial tax base. This will commence immediately and will be an ongoing priority to maintain, post and track with the support and input of member municipalities and realtors.

Steps:

1. Immediately maintain a database of active “for sale” properties, land, buildings and so forth and aim to have 6 opportunities purchased by the end of 2021;
2. Using the Ontario East Economic Development Commission’s (OEEDC) property listing tool, and maintaining quick access to Realtor.ca by member municipality borders on our website, we will market available investment opportunities through networking,

the OEEDC Investment Marketing Team campaigns and advertising, and through social media promoted posts and other online targeted ads.

3. Municipalities commit to helping Hastings County Economic Development become aware of available (and potential) development lands, buildings and opportunities in addition to what is marketed at Realtor.ca. This should include municipal assets, input from commercial real estate agents, private landholders, MNR (Crown Land), etc. ;

Assigned to: Hastings County Economic and Tourism Development Office and Member Municipalities

Timeline: To commence immediately and will be ongoing.

Action #6: Oversee the creation of a directory of contractors

Smart Goal:

We will create a robust directory of licensed and professional renovators and trades businesses and identify shortages and gaps in available trades people.

Rationale:

Hastings County is experiencing a major spike in new building activity and renovations. This helps retain and grow jobs, especially in the construction and building trades sectors and helps sustain and expand the municipal tax base.

Feedback received, however, has highlighted a significant barrier and frustration that businesses and property owners are experiencing trying to hire contractors who can take on the work and not have to wait 6 to 12 months for a contractor to commence a job;

Assisting local business/property owners searching for licensed and professional trades people will help prevent a slowdown of development activities. It also can help identify any gaps and shortages of trades people in order to inform a potential lure campaign.

Steps:

1. Staff have connected already with the Quinte Home Builders Association (QHBA), and have reviewed their directory of licensed and professional contractors/renovators;
2. We will work to find out who the licensed and professional renovators are that do not have a membership and are not listed on the QHBA website.

Assigned to: Hastings County Economic and Tourism Development Office, Economic and Tourism Development Advisory Committee and Quinte Home Builders Association

Timeline: Aim to have a review done and a list of observations and next steps by Fall, 2021