



The Municipality of East Ferris
Five-Year Economic Development Strategy
2022-2027

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Municipality of East Ferris Five-Year Economic Development Strategy was a collaborative effort involving businesses, residents, staff and Council. Karen Jones Consulting Inc. was retained to develop the Five-Year Economic Development Strategy utilizing data collected from the community. The plan reflects the thoughtful input and insightful recommendations of those who dedicated their time and effort to this initiative.



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MESSAGE FROM COUNCIL

East Ferris is home to a thriving business base and local economy. It is an amazing municipality with incredible potential. It has competitive advantages and compelling assets that can be further leveraged. With input from local entrepreneurs and guidance from the East Ferris Economic Development Advisory Committee, the five-year economic development strategy (2022-2027) is our roadmap to the next generation of economic growth and prosperity. It identifies key priority areas, goals and indicators of what success will look like. This strategy is timely, as we emerge from the pandemic with new ideas on how to adapt, pivot and reflect. Covid's pandemic has made us more resilient to turbulence and change. It has equipped us with the attitude to continue to grow our local economy.

MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

Mayor Pauline Rochefort
Deputy Mayor Steve Trahan
Councillor Terry Kelly
Councillor Erika Loughheed
Councillor Rick Champagne

STAFF

Jason Trottier, CAO/Treasurer
Greg Kirton, Director of Community Services

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Jake Lacourse, Chair
Deputy Mayor Steve Trahan
Angela Knight-Vanschaayk
Claude Champagne
Rod Cloutier
Steve Austin
Dominique Marleau, Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources
and Forestry Representative
Guy Paquette, FedNor Representative



BACKGROUND

The Municipality of East Ferris is a rural, residential community located 20 kilometers east of the City of North Bay. Situated between two large bodies of water (Trout Lake and Lake Nosbonsing), East Ferris offers amenities needed for work and play. Composed of the communities of Astorville and Corbeil, the area is rich in heritage, culture and entrepreneurial spirit. The Municipality has experienced steady growth and currently has a population of over 4,900. This growth has contributed to the evolution of the municipality from a township with a rural setting to a semi-urban community. Furthermore, the variety of lifestyle opportunities for residents and business owners offers an additional draw. Access to year-round recreation, wide open spaces, and room to move and expand are factors that position East Ferris favourably.

This continued growth is a true testament of the community mindedness and the many benefits associated with living in East Ferris. The Municipality's bilingual history and traditions are deeply rooted in the annual activities, events and initiatives that unites the community. Council and staff continue to work together to develop initiatives and strategies that foster a vibrant, safe and healthy community.

The Municipality of East Ferris is committed to creating an entrepreneurial community through the advancement of new projects and ideas that promote continued growth and development. Programming that assists with the establishment of new investment and supports the retention and growth of existing businesses within the community remains a priority.

East Ferris is home to a variety of businesses including industrial, commercial and home-based ventures. As the rise of entrepreneurship and business growth climbs, the Municipality of East Ferris continues to identify ways to work with partnering organizations to support and encourage investment. The community has witnessed growth in the home-based business sector as remote working and the ability for global connectivity becomes easier. Strategic efforts will be placed on growing industrial and commercial space to allow for business expansion and investment attraction. East Ferris businesses benefit from lower tax rates and reduced land costs while maintaining proximity to North Bay for larger urban needs.





MISSION, VISION & GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Municipality of East Ferris remains committed to the following Vision and Mission Statement and Guiding Principles.

Vision Statement

Our home/notre chez-nous: residents and government working together to build a vibrant and healthy rural community.

Mission Statement

We provide high quality public services, through collaboration and partnerships, to promote community health and well-being for all.

Guiding Principles

Transparency: Openness of government decision making & operations

Sustainability: Good stewardship of community assets & natural resources

Responsiveness: Resources & ability to adapt to changing community priorities

The Municipality of East Ferris is committed to creating an entrepreneurial community by:

- Strengthening existing local businesses and non-profit organizations;
- Increasing opportunities for business retention and attraction;
- Establishing regional partnerships;
- Increasing community collaboration and involvement;
- Fostering arts, culture and heritage;
- Building a stronger more sustainable community; and
- Identifying investment needs.

Through collaboration and teamwork, Council, staff, businesses and residents continue to come together to develop new strategic priorities that align with the community's vision.





METHODOLOGY

In order to develop the strategic priorities for the next five years, research and stakeholder engagement was conducted in order to establish a deeper understanding the current landscape. This included a Focus Group held on March 8, 2022, with Council and Senior Staff, as well as a community-wide survey to garner feedback and perceptions about East Ferris as a place to live and conduct business.

Survey

The survey was developed in Survey Monkey and distributed through email and on the Municipal website. It was promoted on the Municipality's social media pages with a direct link to the survey. A total of 96 survey responses were received with 66% of respondents identifying as business owners.

Community Feedback

During the survey process, respondents were asked to for ways in which the Municipality could assist with business development and growth. The following anecdotal ideas were put forth.

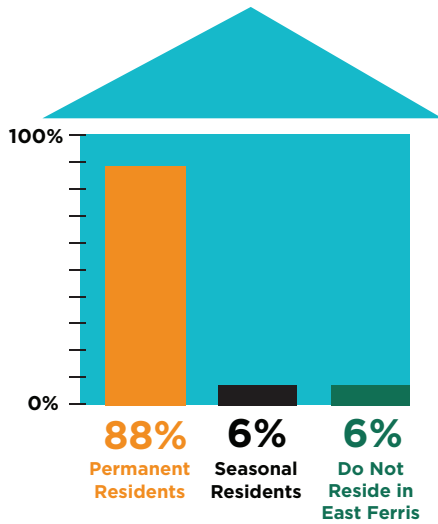
- Reliable, high-speed internet
- Limited hydro capacity
- Need for an Industrial Park
- Need to further develop businesses, family, home, lifestyle and community
- Increase community support for business development and growth
- Offer seminars at the library
- Increase availability of meeting space
- Provide digital supports for business
- Assist with increased exposure of businesses

In addition to the qualitative data, quantitative data was collected during the survey. Both data sets were integral to forming the actions identified in the Strategic Plan. The following provides a high-level overview of the results garnered. For a copy of the survey questions and corresponding results, please refer to Appendix A.



SURVEY RESULTS

SURVEY RESPONDENTS



BUSINESS PROFILE



TYPES OF INDUSTRIES

Accommodations, hospitality or food services

Agriculture

Arts, culture, photography, entertainment or recreation

Automotive repair or services

Consulting, marketing or creative services

Educational services

Equipment rentals

Health care and/or social assistance

Information and technology

Legal, finance or insurance

Manufacturing

Mining, mining supplies and/or mining services

Personal care services (beauty, animal care, fitness)

Retail or wholesale trade

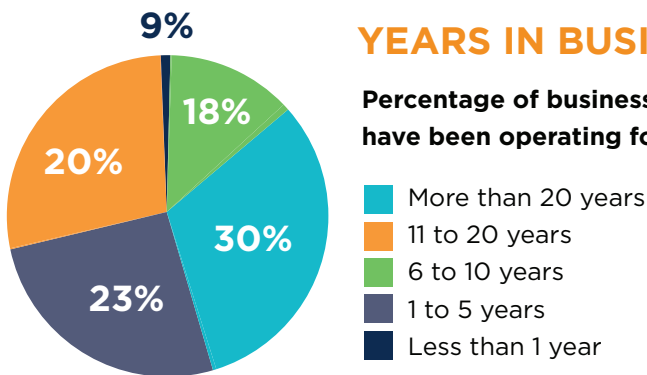
Transportation and/or warehousing

Travel services

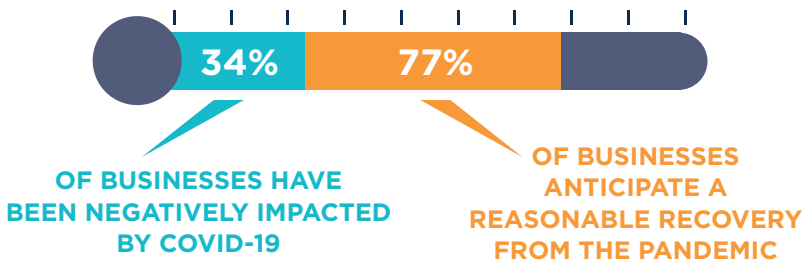
Waste management

YEARS IN BUSINESS

Percentage of businesses that have been operating for:



COVID-19 IMPACT





ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS RANKED IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE



SWOT ANALYSIS

Based on the research conducted, the following provides an overview about the internal and external factors related to East Ferris.

Strengths



- Community support
- Strong volunteer base
- Proximity to North Bay and Toronto
- Low property taxes (commercial and residential rate are the same)
- Competitive industrial tax base
- Safe and vibrant community where everyone looks after everyone
- Cooperative and accessible municipal government
- Relaxed community in a natural environment
- Great environment to work from home/on site
- Beautiful landscapes and crown land trails
- Connectivity with access to major highways, rail and airport
- Small town feel with stable growth
- Affordability of community
- Land available for development
- Strong history of entrepreneurship

Weaknesses



- Limited Internet connectivity
- Distance to client base
- Staff recruitment
- Lack of natural gas and three-phase power limiting ability to attract larger operations such as businesses within the manufacturing sector
- Transportation/shipping costs
- Roadways for transports
- Lack of rental/lease space
- Lack of amenities, downtown hub, industrial space, coffee shops, restaurants
- Lack of advertising about business-friendly and open to new business opportunities
- Availability of commercial and industrial land (serviced)
- No entrance to access potential Industrial Park

Opportunities



- Convert municipal lands to an Industrial Park
- Establish multi-use, attractive hub area
- Implement three-phase power and natural gas and attract new investment opportunities
- Attract new services such as food & beverage, banking and mortgage corporations to cater to needs of local community
- Use Community Improvement Plan as a tool to promote development
- Conduct feasibility on old school and identify potential opportunities to complement growing senior population and family demographics
- Focus on core areas to centralize and develop mixed-use development (walkable core activity area)
- Work with property developers and assess need for higher density housing and senior housing
- Build on growth of new medical centre
- Work with existing businesses and investment leads on funding and grant incentives, marketing programs and support increased exposure
- Continue to build community through social responsibility including road upgrades, walkability, infrastructure
- Increase communication about the opportunities and tools available through testimonials showcasing existing companies who have been supported
- Advertise available lands for development
- Develop investment attraction tools
- Attend tradeshow in Southern Ontario to promote the community
- Serve as a connector for local businesses and organizations
- Support existing businesses with succession planning assistance
- Develop mentor program with retired business residents in East Ferris

Threats



- Global pandemic
- Business closures
- Youth out-migration
- Inability to access required services and telecommunication supports



STRATEGIC PRIORITY AREAS



**Infrastructure,
Telecommunications
and Services**



Business Support Services



Communications



Transportation



Development



ACTION PLAN



Strategic Priority: Infrastructure, Telecommunications and Services

Goal: Improve telecommunication infrastructure to reduce barriers to business growth and assist with future investment attraction efforts to the community.

1. Continue to advocate on behalf of the business community about telecommunication barriers impeding business growth opportunities and potential investment attraction efforts.
2. Continue to foster strong relationships with telecommunication partners and providers to ensure business needs are communicated and strategies can be implemented to reduce connectivity barriers.
3. Monitor progress in relation to the fibre internet installation occurring in rural communities through the Bell expansion. Work with partners such as Blue Sky Net to measure progress and communicate updates to the community.

Goal: Collaborate with service providers to review opportunities for increasing the availability of services such as natural gas and three-phase hydro within East Ferris.

1. Explore options with Hydro One for reviewing areas where three-phase power could be made available to facilitate new investment within the community.
2. Seek input from Enbridge about the rationale for declining natural gas expansion in East Ferris.
3. Collaborate with provincial and federal delegates as well as partners such as the North Bay and District Chamber of Commerce to advocate and lobby on behalf of the business community for the expansion of natural gas.
4. Review options for implementing alternative energy solutions within the community.
5. Continue to seek and apply to relevant funding programs to assist with future infrastructure enhancements for improved services.



Goal: Continue to enhance community infrastructure and assets to ensure a positive quality of life is felt by community residents and business owners.

1. Update the Facilities Master Plan to seek feedback from residents and user groups of recreational facilities to identify gaps, challenges and opportunities relative to municipal assets, recreational facilities, programs and services.
2. Ensure a balanced approach is taken in relation to commercial development and community economic development to continue to foster a positive environment for residents and business owners.
3. Review opportunities to access funding from provincial and federal partners to assist with capital infrastructure enhancements to parks and recreational facilities as identified within the Facilities Master Plan.
4. Continue beautification efforts throughout the community including upgrades to assets and wayfinding signage. (Example: canopies over outdoor amenities).

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

- ✓ Expansion of natural gas line
- ✓ Increased telecommunications infrastructure
- ✓ Updated Facilities Master Plan
- ✓ Infrastructure enhancements to municipal assets
- ✓ Funding dollars secured to assist with infrastructure enhancements



Strategic Priority: Business Support Services



Goal: Develop partnerships and strategies to assist with youth attraction and retention efforts while cultivating a strong entrepreneurial spirit among youth.

1. Educate students about entrepreneurship and collaborate with partners such as The Business Centre to develop and offer entrepreneurial focused workshops, programs and events within both elementary schools located in East Ferris. (Example: Expand Lemonade Day to include East Ferris).
2. Collaborate with secondary and post-secondary institutions to educate students about entrepreneurial opportunities, especially those that reside within a rural community setting.
3. Explore opportunities to partner with post-secondary institutions and highlight alumni within the community, share success stories and promote reasons for relocating back to East Ferris for employment or entrepreneurial opportunities.
4. Facilitate conversations between businesses and post-secondary institutions in relation to hiring challenges, skills development gaps and opportunities for co-ops and hiring incentive programs. (Example: Hiring incentive through Canadore College's Career Launcher).

Goal: Enhance outreach and supports to the business and non-profit community to foster a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem.

1. Develop an annual business outreach initiative, modelled after the Business Retention + Expansion program as a mechanism to connect with businesses and organizations to identify challenges and opportunities and assist with eliminating any barriers to growth.
2. Provide support to local non-profit organizations in relation to funding application assistance, volunteer recruitment initiatives and programming and service offerings.
3. Facilitate information sharing between residents and organizations to fill gaps and capitalize on opportunities within the community. (Example: volunteer succession planning, youth programming, senior supports).
4. Provide regular updates to the Economic Development Committee on challenges and opportunities being faced by businesses and non-profit organizations and seek advice on how to best mitigate issues and foster growth within the community.



Goal: Continue to strengthen partnerships with regional organizations and agencies that provide business development services to support business start-up and expansion, non-profit growth and workforce development.

1. Engage with business development partners such as The Business Centre, IION and NECO Community Futures to ensure they are aware of the unique business needs and opportunities within East Ferris. Connect local businesses with business development organizations to access programming, funding initiative, business planning and succession planning assistance.
2. Continue to consult with The Labour Market Group to provide information on workforce opportunities and challenges as they arise as well as actively participate in their regular programming and events. (Example: workforce week, job fairs).
3. Connect businesses and organizations with employment service providers to access funding, programs and resources to assist with hiring and training challenges. Emphasis may be placed on educating businesses about the Rural & Northern Immigration Pilot Project being administered by Yes Employment which can facilitate employment opportunities with new Canadians for in-demand occupations.

Goal: Develop programs, supports and resources to foster economic growth through business start-up and expansion activities.

1. Continue to support activities such as the East Ferris Farm Stand Tour to foster growth and development within the agriculture sector. Develop a business plan/feasibility study to explore the option of hosting a farmers' market on a regular basis to assist with connecting residents with local producers.
2. Develop programs to meet business community needs such as digital transformation supports, succession planning and business mentorship.
3. Partner with business development agencies and industry-specific organizations to host educational seminars geared to supporting business growth activities on a quarterly basis. Utilize these seminars as a place to create connections with businesses, foster networking amongst attendees, encourage the development of strategic partnerships and enhance the overall awareness of businesses operating within the community.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

- ✓ Implementation of Lemonade Day within East Ferris
- ✓ Strong relationships with partners including educational institutions, business development agencies and industry-specific organizations
- ✓ Formalized business outreach program with a target number of site visits/surveys completed
- ✓ New programs developed and implemented to meet business community needs
- ✓ Number of workshops, events and seminars hosted
- ✓ Development of a business plan to guide the creation of a farmers' market
- ✓ Ongoing engagement with the Economic Development Committee



Strategic Priority: Communications



Goal: Continue to increase the exposure of businesses and organizations operating within East Ferris to educate and inform residents of available products, services and amenities.

1. Continue to spotlight local businesses and organizations through the development of business spotlights which are shared through digital media channels. The spotlight series should alternate between highlighting businesses, non-profit organizations and community assets/amenities.
2. Monitor and update the online business directory on the municipal website to ensure residents and businesses can easily find and locate business information to encourage purchasing locally.
3. Continue to host events such as the East Ferris Tradeshow to facilitate networking between the local business community while bringing together local and regional residents.
4. Collaborate with the North Bay & District Chamber of Commerce to host networking events at local businesses, municipal buildings and non-profit venues to showcase available amenities while forging connections within the community.

Goal: Review and communicate municipal-led programs and services available within the Municipality to support business development, infrastructure enhancements and capital development projects.

1. Conduct a review of the Community Improvement Plan to ensure the funding programs and program model aligns with the needs of the business community as well as the future vision of development for the Municipality.
2. Promote programs such as the Community Improvement Plan and Wayfinding Signage Program to educate businesses and organizations on available funding opportunities to foster development within the local economy.
3. Promote economic development services to the local business community to ensure businesses are aware of the available services and programs provided by the Municipality.



Goal: Build a suite of tools and resources to assist with future investment attraction initiatives as well as enhance communication efforts.

1. Create a marketing strategy to guide promotional activities in relation to economic development and investment attraction efforts. The document should identify key audience groups, targeted messaging and best-bet distribution channels. Emphasis should be placed on developing brand messaging that celebrates East Ferris and positions the community as an attractive and safe place to work, play and live.
2. Implement the marketing strategy through the development of marketing materials to further support ongoing communications to potential and existing investors, business owners and property developers.
3. Identify and attend conferences and events to showcase and communicate the competitive advantages of investing, living and working within the community of East Ferris.
4. Utilize the Economic Development Committee to develop tools and resources to showcase business-friendly environment for investment attraction efforts.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

- ✓ Increased promotion of businesses, non-profit organizations and municipal assets
- ✓ Increased number of businesses accessing municipal-led programs and incentives
- ✓ Increased number of businesses assisted through the Economic Development Department
- ✓ Strong relationships with partners including educational institutions, business development agencies and industry-specific organizations
- ✓ Development of a formalized business outreach program with a target number of site visits completed annually
- ✓ Creation of an economic development and investment attraction-focused marketing strategy
- ✓ Increased attendance at conferences and events to promote East Ferris



Strategic Priority: Transportation



Goal: Enhance connectivity for residents of East Ferris to other urban centres such as North Bay.

1. Investigate opportunities with local transportation companies to provide bus shuttle options to and from the City of North Bay on a regular basis to facilitate residents accessing required amenities, facilities and stores within an urban centre.
2. Monitor transportation needs within the local community and adapt services as required. A focus should be placed on senior population needs, especially as senior housing development increases.

Goal: Ensure current transportation infrastructure is suitable and safe to facilitate both residential and commercial traffic.

1. Host an open house to seek feedback from residents in relation to increased transportation traffic and their safety concerns.
2. Consult with transportation companies who frequent the area to ensure their needs are met in relation to capital infrastructure.
3. Establish a transportation plan to identify areas of concern and actions to mitigate safety issues brought forward by community and business residents.
4. Review current and future transportation trends and ensure the community has the available infrastructure to accommodate growth. (Example: cycle route development and green technologies such as charging stations.)

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

- ✓ Reduction in safety concerns in relation to increased commercial traffic within the East Ferris Community
- ✓ Increased police patrol in relation to speeding and traffic-related safety concerns
- ✓ Development of a transportation plan inclusive of feedback from residents, businesses and transportation providers
- ✓ Creation of a regular bus service for residents to access urban amenities



Strategic Priority: Development



Goal: Collaborate with private and public stakeholder groups to identify and cultivate central areas for industrial, commercial and residential development.

1. Continue to engage key stakeholders in the exploration of an Industrial Park to be developed within the municipal boundaries of East Ferris. Consult with businesses to promote and engage them in relation to new commercial and industrial land opportunities and develop a roster of potential leads.
2. Explore opportunities to develop mixed-use space including core areas to serve as community hubs. (Example: Health and Wellness Hub).
3. Work with residential developers and public-sector stakeholders such as the District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board to identify and develop new residential housing opportunities. Focus may be placed on expanding the successful senior villa complex to ensure that current and future housing demands are being met.

Goal: Establish a central database to be used as a tool to promote available lands for development, sale and lease by either the Municipality or private sector partners.

1. Establish and maintain an inventory of land opportunities for sale and lease to assist with internal land planning and external investment attraction efforts.
2. Engage with property developers and construction firms on an ongoing basis to identify areas for commercial, industrial and residential development and/or re-development.
3. Conduct an internal audit of land and property owned by the Municipality and identify lands available for development. Throughout this process, lands may be acquired by the Municipality to stimulate future development initiatives.



Goal: Collaborate with regional partners to identify and participate in growing economic activities.

1. Connect with the City of North Bay and other partners actively engaged within the film sector to identify opportunities for regional collaboration. Ensure commercial property owners, entrepreneurs and residents are aware of opportunities to service the film industry.
2. Collaborate with Regional Tourism Organizations and Destination Marketing Organizations to identify partnership opportunities to support product development within the tourism sector.
3. On an annual basis, host roundtable discussions with surrounding communities to identify and discuss regional trends, challenges and opportunities in relation to economic development and tourism activities.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

- ✓ Creation of the Industrial Park
- ✓ Increased activity for commercial, industrial and residential developments
- ✓ The transition of vacant parcels of land selected for industrial and commercial use
- ✓ Updated inventory of land and buildings available for development, sale and/or lease
- ✓ Strong partnerships with public and private stakeholders
- ✓ Increased activity within the film sector
- ✓ New tourism products and experiences developed within the community
- ✓ Annual roundtable discussion with partnering communities



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