A Strategy for the Future

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February 24, 2011
Table of Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 2
A Vision for Innisfil ............................................................................................................................... 4
Executive Summary .............................................................................................................................. 5
How did we get here? ............................................................................................................................ 8
The Strategies ....................................................................................................................................... 10
  Community ........................................................................................................................................ 10
  Economic Development .................................................................................................................... 19
  Tourism and Culture .......................................................................................................................... 28
Appendix A - Key Findings .................................................................................................................. 48
Introduction

Innisfil is at a crossroad.

Since it was founded 20 years ago, Innisfil has been a collection of separate and isolated communities forced together through amalgamation. Long-term planning has been inadequate. Community vision has been lacking. And naturally, cynicism has grown.

*Inspiring Innisfil 2020* has occurred at exactly the right time.

Residents are realizing the future is at stake. During our initial public consultations, nearly 900 people came forward to speak out about their vision for the Town. That’s an impressive outpouring for a community of this size. They talked mostly about prosperity, a high quality of life, and a distinct identity for Innisfil.

What’s most important is that, for the first time, a growing segment of the local population wants to be involved in shaping Innisfil’s future. They are unsettled by the annexations of recent years. They believe strongly that supporting a distinct identity and vision for the town of Innisfil is worthwhile.

This is a good thing for the new Council. Any time people are passionately engaged in their community’s future it provides new drive for change. Clearly, Council has a mandate for taking action.

This Economic, Community, Cultural and Tourism Strategy is a roadmap for those actions.

It shows where Innisfil is today. It reflects a collective vision for Innisfil’s future. This kind of vision is essential if change is to happen on the scale needed by this town.

Council now has a unique opportunity — to leave the past 20 years behind, harness the positive energy generated through the development of this strategy, and focus on making the vision real.

**Innisfil – A place to live, play and...work.**

Eighty-three percent of employed residents leave Innisfil every day to work elsewhere. Future prosperity will depend on reversing that flow by giving residents more reasons to work in Innisfil. New business opportunities must be developed. Entrepreneurs must be provided with infrastructure and reasons to invest in Innisfil.

There is no doubt that Innisfil has opportunities. It exists in a highly-prized rural setting in close proximity to major cities. Lake Simcoe is a core asset that is a potential game-changer for the community with the development of Big Bay Point Resort and other lake-oriented opportunities.
However, a new economy has to be understood and endorsed by Innisfil. It will include tourism and culture, entrepreneurs and small businesses, innovation and the “creative economy.”

Doing nothing is simply not an option. Change is already here. The challenge is to shape opportunities rather than accept whatever comes along. Communities that passively experience random change fail to improve work/life opportunities for their residents.

This strategy outlines a series of steps, both short and long term, which must be taken. It will be vitally important for Town Council to approve and support these recommendations.

Community-building is a bottom-up process. It is essential that the community embrace these strategies, participate in the implementation, and drive the ongoing process of change and growth.

This is not a static document. The recommendations must be pushed, challenged, enhanced, and creatively implemented. It must be flexible. New ideas and concepts must be welcomed. Unique community twists are to be supported and commended.

The firm parts of the strategy are the core principles and vision. Those are the guideposts on this journey. The Town should keep referring back to them when making decisions.

Today’s Innisfil was born out of municipal amalgamation. It must now emerge on its own — to be prosperous, safe, and sustainable with a high quality of life, including more jobs. That goal is attainable.
A Vision for Innisfil

Innisfil will utilize its rich rural and agricultural heritage as the foundation to build a modern, dynamic and appealing municipality that will attract families for the quality of life, entrepreneurs and businesses for the quality of business opportunities, and visitors for the quality of its environment and recreational and cultural assets.

Innisfil will grow and prosper through leading-edge technology, green companies, entrepreneurs and small business leaders and a commitment to the creative economy, tourism, and becoming a culturally vibrant and diverse community.

The clean air, clean water and clean land of Innisfil are treasured assets that must be protected and preserved for future generations; Lake Simcoe will become a key element for our recreation and economic prosperity.

Innisfil will be driven by valuing families and establishing high community standards. Our town will become a sought-after destination in which to live, work, play, raise a family and enjoy one’s retirement in peace and dignity while celebrating a superior quality of life for all residents.
Executive Summary

Innisfil must prepare for growth.
Innisfil is going to change in the next 20 years through population expansion, changing immigration patterns, continued urban encroachment, and growing demands on land use and community development. The Town is not ready for these significant shifts.

The Town must invest wisely in infrastructure.
Both traditional (roads, water, sewers) and contemporary (high-speed broadband, telecommunications services, etc.) infrastructure need to be developed. If the Town is to build a stronger local business base, it must be fully digitally connected. The Town needs to determine priority infrastructure and develop accordingly.

Innisfil needs stronger medium and long-term planning.
Innisfil needs to lead the planning of growth and development, not simply react to one-off development opportunities. The Town must assert itself to shape the kind of community its residents increasingly indicate they want.

Residents want to protect their quality of life.
How to protect and maintain the special quality of life that Innisfil offers will be an on-going challenge for Council and Town staff. Innisfil, with its blend of seasonal recreation and rural and agriculturally-based tradition will inevitably see more of suburban and urban development. This will be a delicate balancing act for the community.

Innisfil should focus on economic development.
This is what it will take:
• Retaining existing businesses
• Developing new opportunities
• Encouraging entrepreneurs to move to Innisfil
• Attracting and retaining bright young minds
• Giving residents more reasons to work in Innisfil
• Resources to make it happen

Investment is needed in arts, culture, and tourism.
There are a number of pockets of artistic and cultural expression but little municipal support. This is a significant growth opportunity. Investment in this sector will make the Town more appealing and attract tourists.

Lake Simcoe is a unique asset and is one that can play a larger role in Innisfil’s future.
Access to the lake for recreation needs to be improved. One idea: develop a transient marina themed around arts, local food, crafts, and marina services that would attract boaters and tourists. Continuing attention needs to be given to protecting Lake Simcoe’s environmental quality.
Innisfil’s heritage should be promoted. Protecting and preserving heritage assets must also become a stronger focus for council and the community. These assets are part of what distinguishes Innisfil from other communities. Losing them diminishes the town’s character and appeal.

**Key Priorities That Should be Undertaken Immediately**

**Complete a review of the Town’s Official Plan.**
If Innisfil is to move forward as one cohesive community, the Town’s key planning document must be updated to reflect these important aspirations:
- An urban core
- Neighbourhood identities
- The development of professional and office space
- Policies to promote home-based businesses
- Better physical connections and transportation networks
- An expanded Innisfil Heights.

**Identify an urban core.**
Innisfil is comprised of multiple residential areas scattered across a large geographical area with no defined core. Building Innisfil as a cohesive community depends on a commitment to an urban core and growth being concentrated there.

**Complete a strategic infrastructure servicing plan.**
As Innisfil grows there will be increased demand for municipal services such as water and sewer. Already there are pressures, but Innisfil lacks a proper plan that identifies priority areas and the most effective methods of providing services. The strategic infrastructure servicing plan should marry the priorities of the Official Plan with the Town’s ability to deliver quality affordable servicing solutions.

**Develop a long-range financial plan.**
A comprehensive review of the Town’s financial policies is needed to ensure that fiscal capacity (both short and long term) is adequate to meet community priorities. This will facilitate the Town’s required annual budgetary process and lead to a sustainable financial plan.

**Form a Community and Economic Development unit.**
Hire an experienced Community and Economic Development Officer to implement the community and economic development strategy recommendations in this document. This individual will need to be knowledgeable in the priority areas defined in this strategy. Also hire a Tourism/Culture/Special Events Coordinator to support the Arts Council and Tourism Network, and build Innisfil’s offering of festivals and events.

**Establish the Innisfil Arts Council.**
The Innisfil Arts Council would support, develop and advocate for every medium of arts and culture, working cooperatively with the South Simcoe Arts Council. Dedicated annual funding from the Town is necessary.
Establish the Innisfil Tourism Network.
The Network will coordinate joint efforts in tourism on behalf of stakeholders within the town. Its primary role will be to facilitate working with regional partners in tourism to ensure that Innisfil’s offerings are taken to market in the most effective manner. These partners will include Tourism Barrie, Celebrate South Simcoe, Simcoe County Tourism, and the new Regional Tourism Organization (RTO#7).

Expand Innisfil’s offering of festivals and events (including amateur sporting events). Existing festivals and events should be strengthened with expanded programming and marketing. New festivals and events should be developed around arts and culture, amateur sports, heritage, antiques and/or local food.

Develop Lake Simcoe-based recreation and other outdoor activities. Develop and promote expanded opportunities for winter and summer activities associated with Lake Simcoe. Establish Innisfil as a destination for other outdoor activities, such as cycling.

Collaborate with Big Bay Point Resort. Big Bay Point Resort will be a major tourism generator for the region. The Tourism Network, business community, and Town should collaborate with the resort on such things as marketing, packaging, and developing complementary on- and off-site experiences.

Grow Simcoe’s Green Economy. Work with and support the efforts of Nottawasaga Futures and their partners as they move forward with the Green Economy Transition initiative. Ensure that Innisfil is well positioned to benefit from the anticipated growth of the Green Economy.

Develop tourism infrastructure. Ensure supportive infrastructure is in place to support tourism and assist visitors to the community. This would include things such as visitor-oriented signage, visitor information services and municipal policies that generally support tourism.
How did we get here?

Beginning in August 2010, the Town of Innisfil began the process of developing a strategy to guide its future community, economic, tourism and cultural growth.

McSweeney & Associates, in association with The Economic Planning Group and Hume Communications Inc., provided a participatory framework to enable over 1100 community stakeholders and Town Administration to shape the development of this strategy.

The extensive first round of public engagement included:

- One-on-one interviews with local stakeholders
- Surveys mailed to every business and household
- Advertisements and articles in local newspapers
- An *Inspiring Innisfil 2020* website with links to all online methods of participation (including the online survey, comment blog, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn)
- Focus groups, open house sessions, and a stakeholder summit

Everyone had an opportunity to have their say.

We obtained a significant sampling of opinion over the course of the public consultation process. Over 880 responses were received in the first phase of the process:

- 445 hard copy responses received by mail
- 52 people interviewed
- 104 responses via the online survey
- 132 participants in 12 focus groups
- 47 participants in three open houses
- 93 participants at the Stakeholder Summit
- 7 emailed comments

A sample size of 588 people for Innisfil’s population of 28,080 (aged 15+) would give us a confidence level of 95% with a 4% margin of error. Therefore, the response rate received is statistically significant.

During the second round of consultations, we received 234 responses:

- 146 responses to the online survey
- 5 emailed comments
- 34 participants at two open houses
- 47 participants in four focus groups
- 2 people interviewed

The second round of public consultations indicated a high degree of support for the strategy and its action plans.
This final strategy will provide a commonly accepted direction, focus, and framework for decision-making by Council and other key stakeholders.

Innisfil Council, Town Administration, and other key business and community stakeholders will work collaboratively to implement these strategies.

Other documentation was prepared in conjunction with this strategy. The Situational Analysis document presents a comprehensive statistical portrait of Innisfil’s current situation, in addition to the SWOT Analysis prepared during the first round of consultations, relevant best practices, and an inventory of Innisfil’s tourism and culture assets.
The Strategies

Community

Where We Are Today

Since its amalgamation, Innisfil’s uniquely different neighbourhoods (i.e. Alcona, Cookstown, Lefroy, etc.) have not had an opportunity to embrace life as one community. Geographically separated by vast open spaces, these neighbourhoods have relied on their own historic identities rather than that of Innisfil as a whole. This lack of a cohesive identity has led to the perception that there is a fragmented sense of community in Innisfil. This is further perpetuated by the lack of recognition of Innisfil from outsiders, as well as scattered developments throughout the municipality.

One of Innisfil’s biggest obstacles with regards to community development is the lack of transportation and communication networks within the Town. Due to Innisfil’s size, many residents do not have the opportunity to directly interact with residents from other areas. Public transportation is unavailable. Thus, ease of movement around Innisfil is difficult unless one has a vehicle. As such, community interaction is currently not easily facilitated. In addition, residents often need to leave Innisfil to obtain certain services (i.e. medical), and the use of public transportation to access these services is not available. Enhanced communication between residents, as well as with Town Administration and Council, will be key to developing a solid community.

The people of Innisfil are fiercely protective of their respective neighbourhoods; however this sense of pride and concern needs to be extended to include Innisfil as a whole in order for it to be successful in the future. Innisfil is often overlooked by outside parties, and the threat of annexation by Barrie is of constant concern. There, Innisfil must come together as a cohesive town in order to become a strong and unified community with a voice of its own - albeit not at the expense of the characters of the individual neighbourhoods.

Recently, growth in Innisfil has been concentrated in certain areas. Although this concentrated growth is a step in the right direction towards becoming a cohesive community, an unfocused approach to community planning and over-all decision-making in the past has created sprawling developments with a lack of overall community vision. In order to be successful in the future, Innisfil must decide on an overall vision for their community, plan properly for growth, and stick to these visions when making future development decisions.

Innisfil has the building blocks to build a strong, vibrant and unified community, as it is home to many bright, talented and ambitious individuals who truly care about their town. However, until Innisfil comes together to work towards a common vision for their town, Innisfil will just continue to exist as it is – a fragmented community that has yet to find its way.
1. Develop and promote a new identity for Innisfil.

**Strategy:** Innisfil to develop and promote an identity to reflect a unified community. The Innisfil identity and brand will support sub-identities/sub-brands for each of its neighbourhoods.

**Why this is important:** Innisfil does not have a common community identity; as such, it is continually being overlooked (or disregarded) by external parties such as the Province and investors. Innisfil has referred to itself as a ‘community of communities’ which has foiled development of a single Innisfil identity, and inhibits the development of a true sense of community for Innisfil. There is a need to establish a sense of place - an identity that is easily expressed by residents and businesses, and easily recognized by outsiders.

**What we are trying to achieve:**

- An overall identity for Innisfil based upon the stated vision.
- Promotion of the new identity inside and outside the community.

**Key actions:**

1. Create a visual identity, branding and signage program for Innisfil based upon “A Vision for Innisfil” stated in this document.

2. Encourage use of visual identity and branding throughout Innisfil, including a road signage program (at Innisfil boundaries, within Innisfil, and especially on Highway 400 (“Innisfil, next two exits”)), and signage on municipal buildings and vehicles.

3. Create a tourism signage program.

4. Ensure a consistent use of Innisfil branding in all external communications as well as on municipal buildings, sponsorship programs, Town vehicles, etc.

5. Support neighbourhood sub-branding to articulate the uniqueness of each neighbourhood, including the Innisfil urban core/downtown.

6. Solicit and make application to the CRTC to give Innisfil a single telecom area code.

7. Solicit and make application to the CRTC to require local telecommunication providers to create one common phonebook for Innisfil.

8. Solicit and make application to Canada Post in order to consolidate mailing addresses and P.O. boxes physically located within Innisfil to reflect an Innisfil address.

2. Make planning a top priority. Start by making Alcona the core.

**Strategy:** Innisfil needs to be planned (and serviced) as a community. Support the development of Alcona as the urban core (and downtown) of Innisfil, and the centre of the majority of Innisfil’s future growth.

**Why this is important:** Innisfil is going to grow and is not prepared. A core is the first step toward planning a unified and identifiable community.

What we are trying to achieve:

- A focal point for Innisfil’s growth, while protecting the existing character of other neighbourhoods.
- A single urban node with higher density residential and commercial growth (which will create jobs).

**Key actions:**

1. Immediately commence the review of Innisfil’s Official Plan (OP) with the purpose of planning Innisfil as a complete and cohesive community, and with a specific vision of how and where Innisfil will develop.
2. Designate Alcona as the urban core for Innisfil in the 2011 review of the Town’s Official Plan (OP).
3. Through the OP review process, ensure the provision for future major community assets (institutional lands, GO Station) to be located within the urban core.
4. Focus new higher-density development in close proximity to a potential Go-station.
5. Plan for office and business accommodation space in this urban core.
6. Undertake a study of major infrastructure at the same time as the OP review to ensure a strategic infrastructure and servicing plan supports major community developments such as an urban core.
7. Undertake a review of the Innisfil Beach Park Master Plan to incorporate a public pier/port into the longer term development of the Park.
3. Make sure each neighbourhood remains distinctive.

**Strategy:** Preserve and enhance the unique character of the each neighbourhood within Innisfil.

**Why this is important:** Individual neighbourhood characteristics are important to the residents of Innisfil, and are also important in creating a “sense of place”. People clearly indicated that they valued the distinctive character of each neighbourhood, and that they did not wish to see significant change that could negatively impact that character. Clearly articulating and enhancing the distinct character of each neighbourhood will also contribute to the overall sense of place that is Innisfil.

**What we are trying to achieve:**

- A definition and articulation of the unique characteristics of each neighbourhood.
- Future development within neighbourhoods that is consistent with, and enhances the character of each neighbourhood.

**Key actions:**

1. Undertake a neighbourhood character study aimed at defining and visually illustrating the specific aspects of each neighbourhood’s unique characteristics.

2. Complete a detailed Community Design Plan for each of Innisfil’s distinct neighbourhoods.

3. Implement Community Improvement Plans for “main streets” (i.e. Innisfil Beach Road, Cookstown, Stroud) to promote the redevelopment of neighbourhood cores.

4. Develop and implement Building Architectural Design Guidelines for each neighbourhood or those areas within Innisfil that are deemed to have unique building characteristics.

5. Ensure the Town of Innisfil has a voice in the environmental protection and management of Lake Simcoe. (Focus on opportunities to access the Lake Simcoe Cleanup Fund to support waterfront projects.)

6. Evaluate the potential for lifestyle communities to be integrated with recreational opportunities (a mix of permanent and seasonal residents, possibly linked to commercial accommodation and associated services).
4. Connect residents and neighbourhoods.

**Strategy:** Enhance the networks that enable people to move within and between Innisfil’s neighbourhoods.

**Why this is important:** Innisfil’s neighbourhoods are physically isolated from one another. Community cohesion depends on the easy movement and interaction of people within and between neighbourhoods.

What we are trying to achieve:

- A range of ways people can move between existing and planned neighbourhoods.

**Key actions:**

1. Create a Community Linkages Plan (CLP) through the Official Plan process, mapping out existing and planned transportation networks throughout Innisfil (including all public roads, sidewalks, recreational pathways, trails\(^1\), etc.).

2. Examine transportation needs within the CLP, including known issues such as the need to re-route truck traffic around Cookstown.

3. If CLP identifies a need for public transit, complete a study examining the financial feasibility of various public transit solutions.

4. Examine, within the CLP, improvements to allow pedestrians and bicyclists better movement within and between neighbourhoods, as well as better access to the Lake and community assets.

5. Ensure that land-use planning policies as identified in the OP require physical linkages connecting neighbourhoods and all new developments (i.e. roads, recreational pathways, and sidewalks connecting residential subdivisions and commercial developments).

\(^1\) A Trails Master Plan is recommended in the Tourism portion of this strategy.
5. Make Innisfil a full-service community.

**Strategy:** Innisfil evolves into a complete full service community, including amenities, diversity of housing, communications infrastructure, and healthcare, education, recreation facilities, and activities for all age segments.

**Why this is important:** Innisfil currently has a base of community amenities (i.e. the recreation centre, the libraries). However, there are some gaps (i.e. healthcare, retirement homes, activities for youth). Amenities draw people to a community and retain existing residents.

What we are trying to achieve:

- For Innisfil residents to live, work, and play in their community without having to go elsewhere.

**Key actions:**

1. Ensure, through the OP review process, that areas targeted for growth also identify requirements for future community amenities.

2. Define through the OP review process required thresholds for various forms of housing in each neighbourhood, as well as requirements and population targets for community amenities such as healthcare clinics, nursing homes, youth centres, recreation facilities, office and professional space.

3. Prioritize the development of publicly supported amenities and services, and ensure they are addressed in Innisfil’s long-range financial plan.
6. Make community-building a priority.

**Strategy:** Build the capacity of Innisfil to reach its potential by making sure that Council, the Town administration, and other members of the community work collaboratively towards the same vision. Use the existing talents of the people in Innisfil for the betterment of the community.

**Why this is important:** Community involvement in Innisfil and the Town’s capacity for community development are low. Innisfil is home to many people who care and want to channel their energies to create a better quality of life. Building on this capacity is essential.

What we are trying to achieve:

- A unified, connected, and cohesive community that works effectively and collaboratively with Council and the Town Administration toward a common vision.

- Effective and ongoing communication between Council, Administration and the community. This means openness, transparency, and ongoing support for citizen participation in every aspect of civic life.

**Key actions:**

1. Hire three key Town staff members to support community capacity building and to implement and monitor the success of the Inspiring Innisfil 2020 plan:
   - An experienced Community and Economic Development Officer
   - A Tourism/Culture/Special Events Coordinator
   - A Communications Officer

2. Develop a community participation/engagement policy. This spells out in clear language exactly how the community will be consulted as part of the decision-making process. The policy should insist on multiple-channels for two-way communication, including online, social media, and in-person interactions.
   - Make a special effort through the policy to open lines of communication and cooperation between neighbourhoods, as well as youth, seniors, seasonal residents, and other groups that may not have traditionally participated in community life.
   - Ensure the policy promotes and protects the rights of all people to participate in community life regardless of race, colour, religion, physical ability, or sexual orientation.

3. Develop a comprehensive Innisfil Volunteer recognition program (to include all volunteers throughout Innisfil, not just those who volunteer for the Town).

**Strategy:** Develop a financial sustainability plan to ensure Innisfil can make — and continue to make — smart investments in community, economic development, tourism, and culture.

**Why this is important:** Because of the town’s geographical size, community infrastructure is relatively expensive to deliver. Long-range financial planning helps Council, the Administration, and the community understand Innisfil’s capacities, limitations, and investment priorities.

What we are trying to achieve:

- A forum for discussion, understanding, and informed decision-making with respect to large community related investments.
- Realistic ratepayer expectations based on the financial capacities of the town.

**Key actions:**

1. Begin with a comprehensive review of the Town’s financial policies to ensure fiscal capacity (both short and long term) are adequate to meet community priorities, based on the annual budgetary process. (The review and refinement of financial policies will feed into the creation of a long-range financial plan.)

2. Develop a long-range financial plan. It should ensure the town’s long-term financial sustainability, new Official Plan and the Strategic Infrastructure and Servicing Plan are in alignment.

3. Town to prepare and publicly present an annual Inspiring Innisfil 2020 progress report.

4. Conduct an annual public forum (as part of the budget process) to consult with the community on upcoming investment priorities. This should be organized and attended by Council and the Administration.
8. Increase local employment opportunities.

**Strategy:** Actively encourage employment growth in Innisfil to help balance residential growth.

**Why this is important:** Job growth has not kept up to residential growth in Innisfil. The majority of residents commute to work outside the town. It is important that a balance be achieved between residents and local jobs.

What we are trying to achieve:

- More employment so the town grows more sustainably.
- Innisfil as more of a “Live/Work” community.

**Key actions:**

1. Support the Inspiring Innisfil 2020 Economic Development strategy (which follows).
Economic Development

Where We Are Today

Over 80% of Innisfil residents commute to work on a daily basis. Many of these residents have chosen to live in Innisfil due to the slower pace and better quality of life, only to find themselves spending a good portion of their days commuting to work. One of the primary reasons for this is the lack of high-paying and professional employment opportunities in Innisfil. Innisfil is home to a large number of well-educated, professional workers who cannot find fulfilling employment opportunities close to home.

With such a talented workforce at their fingertips, Innisfil should be thriving – however, economic development has not been a municipal priority. Currently, insufficient time and resources are being put into economic development activities. The Municipality does not have the required tools to successfully retain and attract business, local business owners feel unsupported and undervalued by both the community and Town Administration, and potential entrepreneurs do not have the support, information, or resources to help them easily consider starting their own business. In addition, the tourism and culture sector, also an important part of municipal economic development, is not receiving the resources and support required for it to flourish.

Innisfil has the workforce and talent pool to have prospering business and industrial sectors; however, before these can be fully developed, Innisfil must build a business-friendly environment from the ground-up. Focus needs to be placed on the development of the required tools, setting the strategic economic development direction, and promoting and supporting local businesses to ensure Innisfil is positioned for economic development success.
1. Make economic development a top priority.

**Strategy:** Create a business-friendly economic development environment by providing the necessary funding and support.

**Why this is important:** Innisfil currently does not have the resources or the skills/tools to successfully pursue economic development.

What we are trying to achieve:

- Retention of existing businesses and attraction of new ones.
- Strategic direction to follow through all economic development decisions.
- Smart economic growth with rationale, realistic land-use planning and infrastructure decisions.
- Prioritize major community investments.
- Less red tape from Town Administration.
- More support for local businesses from the municipality and the community.
- More opportunity for the resident workforce.

**Key actions:**

1. Form an economic development unit with two key hires:
   a. A Community and Economic Development Officer experienced and knowledgeable in the priority areas of this strategy document to implement the community and economic development strategy recommendations.
   b. A Tourism/Culture/Special Events Coordinator to support the efforts of the Arts Council and the Tourism Network.

2. Secure public and private-sector partnerships to help support the funding of community and economic development activities and projects. Partners include: the county, provincial and federal governments, related agencies, and the local business community.

3. Reinforce within the community the importance of supporting economic development, tourism and cultural activities by organizing informal lunch-and-leans, speaker forums, training seminars, and other education programs.
4. Focus on investment readiness and business attraction activities:

a. Prepare and maintain:
   - a Community Profile, and quick facts brochure;
   - a comprehensive Economic Development website; and
   - an Available Commercial and Industrial Land and Space Inventory;

b. Be open to partnering with local chambers, Nottawasaga Futures, Simcoe County and other local business organizations to provide support to economic development and local entrepreneurship development programs and activities; and

c. Undertake an Investment Readiness Assessment (every 2 years) to measure progress.

5. Develop infrastructure strategically:

a. Through the Official Plan review:
   - Provide the rationale required to enlarge the amount of industrial land in Innisfil as designated by the Province in the ‘Places to Grow’ Amendment;
   - Identify a major professional office space node in Innisfil’s new urban core; and
   - Promote the development of small and flexible office space in Innisfil’s new urban core.

b. Complete a Strategic Infrastructure and Servicing Plan (also see Make planning a top priority in Community Strategy);

c. Work to ensure Innisfil Heights can continue to grow as an employment area;

d. Undertake a cost/benefit and feasibility analysis of the various Innisfil Heights servicing models as part of, or at the same time as, the Strategic Infrastructure and Servicing Plan;

e. Work with Simcoe County and local service providers to ensure 100% Broadband coverage in Innisfil (development of fibre backbone and last mile connections); and

f. Develop tourism and culture infrastructure through the implementation of the Tourism and Culture strategy.

6. Seek out and develop strategic partnerships:

a. Internal partners – Chambers of Commerce, local businesses, business associations, investors – to develop local marketing campaigns, and events to support small businesses (i.e. Small Business Summit); and

b. External partners – South Simcoe Economic Alliance, Simcoe County, other regional municipalities, Nottawasaga Futures – to develop investment and marketing partnerships.
2. Attract entrepreneurs and small businesses.

**Strategy:** Provide tools and training to support entrepreneurship and small business start-ups.

**Why this is important:** Innisfil has a small but thriving local business community. Efforts need to be made to foster and grow the entrepreneurial and small business capacity of Innisfil.

**What we are trying to achieve:**

- A business-friendly environment where entrepreneurship and small business start-ups can flourish.
- More professionals who currently commute have the opportunity to work in the community.
- More young people staying in the community to work after graduation.
- A live/work community in Innisfil.

**Key actions:**

1. Develop partnerships with the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade (MEDT), local chambers, business associations, Nottawasaga Futures, and local investors to:
   
   a. Establish and promote an entrepreneurship centre;
   
   b. Deliver “how-to” training seminars for small business and start-ups (including business started by local youth);
   
   c. Review OP policies, zoning by-laws and other Town regulations and procedures to create a supportive positive atmosphere to assist CRINK (Creative, Innovative, Knowledge-based) economy entrepreneurs;
   
   d. Develop a program aimed at local primary and secondary schools to engage youth in events and training focusing on the benefits of entrepreneurship and how to start their own business; and
   
   e. Work with community partners and investors to create a small business centre offering affordable flex space and business support to small start-up companies (please also refer to locating flex space in Innisfil’s urban core).

2. Focus on local growth and maximizing internal resources rather than focusing on the attraction of major employers.
3. Appeal to businesses and professionals to relocate to Innisfil.

**Strategy:** Provide higher paying jobs for local residents, attract professionals, creative, innovative knowledge-based occupations, and other businesses to Innisfil.

**Why this is important:** Innisfil has a well-educated and skilled commuter workforce. Many of these commuters may be interested in telecommuting or capable of starting their own business in Innisfil. This would allow them to work and live in Innisfil.

**What we are trying to achieve:**

- A creative and knowledge-based economy in Innisfil.
- Accommodating professionals who commute out of Innisfil (i.e. provide high-paying/skilled jobs, contain vs. export local talent).
- Telecommuting workers.
- Reasons for youth to remain in or to return to Innisfil following their education.
- A balance between retail and other types of employment.

**Key actions:**

1. Through the OP review, direct planning efforts to support the development of small professional-type office space in the new “core” of Innisfil.

2. Develop Innisfil as a telecommuting community by:

   a. Conducting a telecommuting needs/gap survey to determine if commuters are able to telecommute and, if so, what services and amenities they would need to work from their homes;
   b. Developing and delivering marketing material promoting the benefits of telecommuting or working in Innisfil (i.e. time savings, financial and quality of life benefits, etc.);
   c. Developing a business case or rationale to provide the services and amenities identified in the telecommuter survey;
   d. If there is a valid business case, soliciting and partnering with local investors to fulfill the needs of local telecommuters.
4. Retain local businesses and help them expand.

**Strategy:** Support and promote small businesses currently in Innisfil.

**Why this is important:** Currently, many small businesses in Innisfil are feeling unsupported and undervalued.

What we are trying to achieve:

- Provide the necessary tools and community support for small businesses to prosper in Innisfil.
- Recognize, promote, and celebrate small businesses and their contributions to Innisfil.
- Focus on support for the local business community and maximizing internal resources rather than focusing on the attraction of major employers.

**Key actions:**

1. The new Community and Economic Development Officer to undertake a business visitation program (similar to the provincial Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) program) to become better acquainted with individual business needs. The first priority should be businesses within the Innisfil Heights area.

2. Collaborate with the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade (MEDT), Nottawasaga Futures, local chambers of commerce, business associations and the local business community to create and deliver awareness programs to Community leaders and municipal staff informing them of the need to support local businesses and to address issues identified through the BR+E exercise.

3. Initiate a Municipal Red Tape Task Force to identify current impediments and ensure a streamlined development approvals process and business-friendly environment at the Town Hall.

4. Use the review of the Official Plan to:
   a. Develop policies to support home-based businesses; and
   b. Provide necessary commercial/industrial space by examining small expandable work environments (multi-tenant industrial space, flex space, professional space, etc.).

5. The Town of Innisfil to partner with local chambers of commerce and other local business associations to support an annual business awards program.
6. Establish an online entrepreneurship centre giving entrepreneurs the business information and tools needed to grow their business. This online resource should be linked directly to the Town’s economic development website.
5. Put more effort into the development of the agricultural economy.

**Strategy:** Ensure that agriculture remains an integral part of the local economy.

**Why this is important:** Innisfil’s heritage is largely agricultural and valued by citizens. The sector is foundational and should be expanded.

What we are trying to achieve:

- New ways to promote and grow the agricultural economy.

**Key actions:**

1. Look for tourism opportunities that involve the promotion of niche agriculture products and/or farms.

2. Research the feasibility of processing agricultural products locally (both niche and mainstream products).

3. Research the feasibility of establishing a local farmers market in the new Innisfil core.

4. Investigate community and agricultural support for the establishment of a Community Supported Agriculture Program (also known as Community Shared Agriculture).

5. Work with the local Ontario Federation of Agriculture chapter and other agricultural producers to promote the value of the agriculture sector to Innisfil.

6. That an annual forum of agricultural producers and businesses be held to identify actions that can assist in growth of Innisfil’s agricultural economy.
6. Develop and promote tourism and culture.

**Strategy:** See the Tourism and Culture Strategies.

**Why this is important:** Innisfil is home to many creative, educated, and skilled residents. Currently, tourism and cultural assets are minimal and could be further developed and better promoted and supported. Innisfil’s future community success will depend on how it supports economic development of which tourism and culture are important components.

What we are trying to achieve:

- Develop supporting infrastructure and programs to encourage the development of a creative economy over the longer term.

**Key actions:**

1. The Innisfil community and Council need to consider tourism, culture and economic development into their overall decision making process.

2. Support the implementation of the Tourism and Cultural Strategies.
Tourism and Culture

Tourism - Where We Are Today

Innisfil today is not a significant player in the region’s tourism marketplace. Its participation is generally limited to Lake Simcoe cottaging, fishing, and boating. There are some Highway-400 related traveller services and specialty retail, and the Georgian Downs racetrack and casino.

Innisfil has a number of tourism assets but many gaps and weaknesses that limit its ability to grow its tourism.

The Strengths and Assets
- Small town, rural character
- Natural environment, particularly Lake Simcoe and its recreational opportunities
- Proximity to the GTA and Highway 400
- Proximity to Barrie’s accommodations and other services
- Location on the route from Southern Ontario to cottage country
- A few attractions, notably Georgian Downs racing and casino, marinas and golf courses, some galleries and a theatre
- A few festivals and events
- The development of Big Bay Point Resort which will have major impact on tourism

The Gaps and Weaknesses
- Absence of accommodations and limited number of restaurants
- Limited number of things to do
- Limited access to the waterfront
- Absence of a tourism organization to build stakeholder partnerships and promote the area.
- Inadequate signage and visitor information services for visitors
- Innisfil’s presence in the tourism marketplace is modest. Its near-term potential in tourism is constrained by the shortage of assets on which to build visitation.

Tourism - Where We Want to Be

Focus on what will work. Given the obvious limitations, it will be important that the tourism effort be pursued in stages, building first on existing assets. The following are near-to-medium-term strategies:

Build on Innisfil’s potential as a regional getaway.
Innisfil is on the doorstep of the GTA (population: 6+ million and growing) and readily accessible from Highway 400, Highway 27, and Yonge Street. This offers an excellent opportunity to attract GTA residents for same-day and overnight getaway visits. Additionally, the GTA population is increasingly multi-cultural, which means that offers, promotional activities, and media are warranted for different target audiences within the region.

While Innisfil cannot currently compete in the longer-haul destination tourism marketplace, that will begin to change with the development of Big Bay Point Resort.
To become a regional getaway, Innisfil must develop its cultural and natural assets, making unique experiences easily accessible to visitors.

The town and its various neighbourhoods have some real cultural and natural assets on which to build tourism over time. Cultural assets include artists, craft artisans, performing arts and galleries. A stronger, vibrant cultural community in Innisfil, more events, and promotional support of these features would fit well with the goal of establishing Innisfil as a GTA getaway.

Lake Simcoe is a resource for both summer and winter outdoor activities but there are some major challenges associated with public access to lake experiences. Innisfil’s rural and agricultural character provides opportunities for outdoor activities and agri-tourism, responding to growing market interests in active recreation and local foods.

**Work on product development within Innisfil.**

Tourism development involves two general activities: one is developing quality products of compelling appeal; the other is taking them to market effectively.

The first task involves attracting investment in new tourism products and services, upgrading and enhancing the offerings where necessary, along with making tourism experiences and services readily accessible to the target audience. This effort is local in focus and scope.

**Take the experiences to market in collaboration with regional partners.**

The second task is taking them to market through promotional activities. This should be undertaken by an alliance or network of tourism stakeholders in Innisfil that are willing to work together in this effort. The primary method would focus on working with external partners in reaching the GTA and other markets. (These partners would include Tourism Barrie, Celebrate South Simcoe, Simcoe County Tourism and RTO #7 (This new organization is likely to be renamed within the near future)). This should also be part of the longer term strategy. Success in tourism is all about partnerships in selling the destination; that must be a first order of priority.

**Develop Innisfil’s capacity to pursue both the preceding and other future initiatives in culture and tourism.**

It takes people and money to get things done. First, alliances of stakeholders having common objectives willing to work together are required, then someone needs to be employed to coordinate and facilitate efforts, and funding possibilities need to be explored. The following need to be put in place:

- A network or alliance of tourism stakeholders to establish suggested experiences, itineraries and packages and work with partners to take them to market.
- A tourism/culture/special events coordinator to do the real work on behalf of these groups. (This facilitator would also work with the arts/cultural community and festivals/events.)

**A longer term priority is to strengthen Innisfil’s appeal as a place to live and to visit.**

This is a longer-term endeavour. For the town to become a vibrant community and a tourism destination of significance in future, this is a vital direction to pursue. It will be important to protect and nurture the character of place of the town’s neighbourhoods. Retirees and visitors want more than subdivisions; they want to live in or visit communities offering a mix of
compelling features – protected heritage, vibrant cultural assets, recreational amenities, unique attractions, good shopping, and so on.

**Culture - Where We Are Today**

Innisfil has few cultural assets and there is little support, financial or otherwise, for the arts, culture and heritage. There is no cohesive culture/arts/heritage community, no community gathering places or public art, and little sense of place.

Innisfil has a strong library system, with facilities that play an important role in community life. The South Simcoe Theatre, a few galleries and a number of artists and artisans are the main cultural assets in Innisfil. Only two buildings are designated under the provincial Heritage Act, although there are numerous examples of significant built heritage throughout the community.

Innisfil has a few well-attended cultural festivals and events which bring day trippers into the town. It is also home to several significant antique and flea market outlets which attract large numbers of visitors off of Highway 400.

Innisfil is lacking in many of the characteristics necessary for it to be a player in the creative economy where jobs and prosperity evolve from creative, innovative and knowledge-based initiatives.

**Culture - Where We Want To Be**

Much of the world, including our part, is evolving into a CRINK (Creative, Innovative, Knowledge-based) economy that will drive future jobs and prosperity. Creative cities and communities will thrive in a CRINK economy. Innisfil can be one of them.

An essential component will be entrepreneurs willing to live and work in Innisfil. To draw these people, Innisfil must offer an attractive lifestyle, a modern infrastructure and a supportive economic development environment.

Equally important will be a vibrant cultural landscape and arts scene that includes artists and artisans, performing arts and heritage, as well as a strong local food culture.

Achieving this requires an Innisfil Arts Council that can bring together a culture/arts and heritage community. The Arts Council’s efforts must be strongly supported by the policies and actions of Innisfil Town Council. People and money will be needed to facilitate arts and cultural programs, festivals and events and broader strategies such as a public art policy.

Culture also attracts visitors, and cultural tourism is a significant growth market. A strong arts, culture and heritage sector in Innisfil will become an important tourism asset, contributing to Innisfil’s position as a regional getaway.
1. Develop a tourism network and partnerships.

**Strategy:** Establish a tourism network within Innisfil to coordinate tourism initiatives within the town and to work with regional partners in marketing.

**Why this is important:** In today’s competitive marketplace, an organized and coordinated effort is vital to sell the destination. Tourism can play a major role in Innisfil’s future economic prosperity.

What we are trying to achieve:

- Marketing reach of local tourism businesses through collaborative marketing, packaging, and itinerary development.
- Visitors who stay in Barrie attracted to events in Innisfil.
- Develop GTA markets for festivals and events, outdoor activities and other Innisfil offerings.

**Key actions:**

1. Hire a tourism/culture/ special events coordinator.
2. Establish an Innisfil Tourism Network of stakeholders to work together in destination development and marketing.
3. Partner with regional destination marketing organizations including Tourism Barrie, Celebrate South Simcoe, Tourism Simcoe County, and RTO#7.
4. The Innisfil Tourism Network should use the proposals presented in this report to build their strategy. (The strategy needs to identify roles and responsibilities of the Innisfil tourism network and regional partners - who does what, what is done collaboratively and what is done independently; also an internet strategy.)
5. Establish marketing and packaging partnerships with Barrie and South Simcoe hotels, pending the development of accommodations in Innisfil.
6. Develop a tourism website and a basic collateral piece on Innisfil’s experiences. (These could be independent for Innisfil and/or in partnership with other groups such as Celebrate South Simcoe and Barrie Tourism.)
2. Collaborate with Big Bay Point Resort.

**Strategy:** Through the Innisfil Tourism Network, collaborate with Big Bay Point Resort on such things as festival and event development, marketing, packaging, and developing complementary on and off-site experiences.

**Why this is important:** Big Bay Point Resort will be the most significant tourism development in Innisfil to date and likely a major tourism generator for the region. It will provide many opportunities for complementary projects and programs.

What we are trying to achieve:

- Success for Big Bay Point Resort, which will then be a major contribution to the local economy.
- Collaboration between Big Bay Point Resort and other local tourism businesses.

**Key actions:**

1. Meet with the developer and resort operator to ensure the resort’s business planning includes mutual opportunities.

2. Solicit the developer/resort operator’s participation in the Innisfil Tourism Network.

3. Coordinate festival/event development and efforts to strengthen arts/cultural/performing arts in Innisfil with the activities of Big Bay Point Resort.

4. Connect Big Bay Point Resort to the rest of Innisfil through the trails network.
3. Take greater advantage of Lake Simcoe.

**Strategy:** Make greater use of Lake Simcoe for recreational activities, ensuring all such development is done sustainably.

**Why this is important:** Expanding the use of Lake Simcoe is vital to Innisfil’s future as a tourist destination. However, the lake is already threatened so its quality must be maintained. Today’s biggest problems: poor public access and conflicts between resident and visitor uses.

**What we are trying to achieve:**

- Improvements in the infrastructure and public access to support recreational uses of Lake Simcoe.
- Preservation and protection of the Lake Simcoe environment.
- More Lake Simcoe-based tourism experiences.

**Key actions:**

1. Establish a Port of Innisfil with a transient marina providing dockage for temporary and overnight use. It should be close to the Alcona commercial area. (In the short term, this would be modest short-term docking facilities with signage to the Alcona urban core. The facility could grow in the future).

2. Update the Innisfil Parks Master Plan to identify “end-of-the-road” Lake Simcoe access locations having capacity for limited parking. Improve them for public day use activities e.g. picnics, etc. See Community Strategy 4.4.

3. Take advantage of any future opportunities that arise for the Town of Innisfil to acquire lakefront property for greater public access.

4. Explore opportunities for expanded transient capacity for visiting boaters at existing and new marinas.

5. Support efforts to increase summer and winter recreational activities, e.g. fishing, ice fishing, snowmobiling and boating. Designate additional parking and boat launch areas, facilitate cooperative marketing by outfitters, and create packages with area hotels.

6. Explore with marina operators and Big Bay Point Resort their willingness to host water sports outfitters such as kayak tours/rentals, boat tours, etc., as well as to provide basic infrastructure such as parking and boat launch services on a commercial basis to both residents and visitors.

7. Enhance and support the Celebrate Lake Simcoe event.
8. Review all current municipal by-laws and policies to ensure visitors are not discouraged from enjoying Innisfil and Lake Simcoe.
4. Build a strong program of festivals and events.

**Strategy:** Strengthen existing festivals and events, and create new ones that appeal to residents and generate tourism. Focus on events that celebrate Innisfil’s culture, heritage, and people.

**Why this is important:** High profile, well-marketed festivals and events will raise Innisfil’s profile. Awareness will grow in regional markets. Innisfil’s identity and sense of place will grow. Plus, artists, galleries, restaurants, and other local businesses will earn more income.

What we are trying to achieve:

- New visitors and enhanced economic benefits.
- A reputation for appealing annual events.
- Festivals and events that celebrate Innisfil, its history, people, community, agriculture, and artists.
- Regular celebrations for Innisfil residents.

**Key actions:**

1. Expand existing Studio Tours, possibly linking them together to create a more significant event.
2. Enhance the on-line Innisfil events calendar, making sure it is comprehensive and up-to-date.
3. Work with existing festivals and events to strengthen and broaden their programming so that it appeals to visitors and residents.
4. Explore ideas for a major, iconic Innisfil event and other festivals. Possibilities include antique car/motorcycle show, music festival, sailing regatta, arts & crafts festival, Art (and Music) in the Park.
5. Establish a local/regional food event/festival (or series of local food events).
6. Hire a tourism/culture/special events coordinator to work with existing and new events.
7. Establish a new program to:
   a. Fund and support new creative projects ongoing initiatives; and
   b. Ensure municipal policies and procedures support Innisfil’s festivals and events.
5. Pursue the development of a major new tourist attraction, and improve marketing strategies for existing attractions.

**Strategy:** Work toward making Georgian Downs a more broadly based destination. Assist the market development of other existing attractions.

**Why this is important:** Innisfil has only a few attractions and they are not widely known. Packaging and marketing more effectively will attract GTA visitors. Big Bay Point will increase tourism appeal. Adding a major new attraction at Georgian Downs will bring visitors and increase their spending. It will also create local jobs, help put Innisfil on the tourism map, and likely lead to new hotel accommodation.

**What we are trying to achieve:**

- New reasons for people to visit Innisfil or stop and spend money.
- Increased economic activity and local employment.
- Establish Innisfil as a getaway destination.

**Key actions:**

1. Approach Great Canadian Gaming Corporation (owners of Georgian Downs) to consider development of a major attraction and hotel complex. It might include meeting space and resort-style recreation facilities such as an indoor water park. Sewer and water services would be essential.

2. Involve existing attractions, including Big Bay Point Resort, in the Tourism Network. Coordinate programming and marketing.

3. Establish the Port of Innisfil, over the long term, as a major integrated waterfront development with a marina, retail stores, galleries, and dining. Make it a base for water activities with public waterfront spaces.

4. Explore opportunities for the enhancement of other attractions.

5. Pursue enhancements to Cookstown as a heritage walking community (see Tourism & Culture Strategy 13).
6. Make Innisfil a regional destination for outdoor recreation.

**Strategy:** Expand and create activities and experiences such as walking, cycling, ice fishing, sports fishing and snowmobiling. Establish a network of recreational trails, including road cycling routes.

**Why this is important:** People in nearby urban markets, along with visitors staying in Barrie and in South Simcoe, want outdoor recreational fun. Innisfil has the potential to deliver. A trails network will accomplish several things: provide transportation options, recreation opportunities, and provide off-road and on-road linkages within the community.

What we are trying to achieve:

- Reasons for people to visit/stop in Innisfil and spend money.
- Increased economic activity and local employment.
- A getaway destination for regional markets.
- More recreation and physical recreation opportunities for Innisfil residents.

**Key actions:**

1. Ensure existing activities (golf, snowmobiling, Lake Simcoe-based recreation outfitters, sky diving, etc.) are part of the Tourism Network, including them in itinerary development, packaging, and promotional efforts.

2. Prepare a recreational trails master plan that includes an inventory of existing trails, gaps and opportunities for new trails, and designated routes for summer and winter recreation. The master plan should have an implementation action plan involving local and regional stakeholder groups. The trails should include hiking/walking, off-road cycling, equestrian, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing and ATVs. The plan should also incorporate linkages as part of the community linkage strategy and opportunities on lands yet to be developed.

3. Promote trails and routes on Simcoe County trail maps and web sites.

4. Identify the best routes for road cycling in Innisfil, with links to routes in other parts of Simcoe County.

5. Upon completion of the Recreation Trails Master Plan, establish a major invitational biking event (e.g. The Innisfil Road Race) to gain profile.

6. Explore opportunities to strengthen other outdoor recreation experiences, such as sports fishing, snowmobiling, and lake-based activities through events, the necessary infrastructure and promotion.
7. Work with regional partners to identify and promote a golf trail.
7. Develop visitor infrastructure and services.

**Strategy:** Establish designated “points of arrival” for visitors with visitor information services and clear signage. Pursue private investment in commercial accommodation. Strengthen retail and dining experiences. Improve informational and directional signage.

**Why this is important:** Without commercial (roofed) accommodation, tourism potential is very limited. Visitors expect a quality mix of accommodation, retail and dining experiences, as well as things to see and do — well identified with signage, and well promoted.

What we are trying to achieve:

- Make it compelling and easy to access Innisfil’s visitor experiences and services.
- Visitor infrastructure and services.
- New commercial roofed accommodations.
- Influence future residential development to provide visitor accommodation and services.
- A broader mix of retail and dining experiences.

**Key actions:**

1. Identify designated points of arrival where visitor orientation and information services could be. Locate with partners such as chambers of commerce, Town Hall, libraries, the recreation centre, Innisfil Beach Park, marinas, and golf courses.

2. Establish a tourism signage system (as recommended in Community Strategy #1) with consideration to modern technology opportunities now available to supplement/enhance the signage system. (This should be coordinated with regional partners). Improve directional signage to the libraries for both visitors and residents.

3. Provide downloadable visitor information (e.g. map, guide) on the Town’s and other appropriate websites and form connections to social media.

4. Establish a cottage rental network/service.

5. Solicit the interest of hotel companies/developers in establishing commercial accommodations.
6. Promote “by-way” touring on Innisfil’s secondary roads as an alternative to major highways. (Includes itineraries, signage for routes and points of interest, associated marketing effort)

   a. Identify potential by-way touring routes;
   b. Develop appropriate signage in concert with tourism signage program and business partners;
   c. Identify routes and itineraries in tourism promotional material.

7. Identify and promote antique locations and fairs.
8. Make Innisfil a destination for amateur sports competitions.

**Strategy:** Attract amateur sports tournaments. Innisfil has the potential to host events such as hockey, soccer, baseball, track and field and cycling.

**Why this is important:** Sporting events attract not only athletes but their families and other visitors. This is a very cost effective way of building destination awareness and generating tourism dollars.

What we are trying to achieve:

- Sporting events that will lead to spending in the community.

**Key actions:**

1. Work with local sports communities and organizations to identify opportunities for sporting events, bid on events, host championships, and solicit sponsorships. (The tourism/culture/special events coordinator would play this role).

2. Identify sports/recreation events that Innisfil could develop. Example: an Innisfil invitational cycling event or marathon.

3. Organize support services, including arrangements for accommodations, volunteers, catering, etc.

Strategy: Increase the awareness and promotion of existing agri-tourism offerings and expand the range of experiences available for both visitors and local residents. Nurture the development of an expanded range of culinary experiences within Innisfil, with a focus on local foods.

Why this is important: The ‘local food revolution’ is happening. Innisfil is close to a huge urban market where there is growing consumer recognition of the importance of the agricultural sector, and increasing demand for interesting local foods and cuisine. This is driving growth in culinary tourism across Ontario. Innisfil residents are also looking for better access to local foods.

What we are trying to achieve:

- A broad range of culinary and agri-tourism experiences, such as:
  - A selection of dining experiences featuring local foods and quality regional cuisine
  - A mix of agri-tourism experiences, such as farm gate sales, u-picks, activities and events, and farm stays
  - Culinary and agri-tourism festivals and events.
- Opportunities for the public to experience fresh produce from local farms.
- More collaboration among Innisfil culinary, agricultural and tourism stakeholders.

Key actions:

1. Work with Simcoe County Farm Fresh and provide support to their organization (e.g. a map of farm markets, restaurants featuring local cuisine, events, a Savour Simcoe County program, and by promoting local fresh food outlets).

2. Encourage Innisfil agricultural businesses and restaurants to become involved in Simcoe County Farm Fresh as well as in local partnerships and cross promotions.

3. Promote farm-gate sales to residents and visitors.

4. Establish at least one annual local food event such as a community supper or harvest event to gain profile for local producers and chefs.
10. Support the arts and culture community.

**Strategy:** Increase municipal support for the cultural sector. Build a higher profile for artists, artisans, and other creators who live in Innisfil. Establish the Innisfil Arts Council (IAC).

**Why this is important:** Vibrant arts and culture sectors are an important foundation for a dynamic community. They support and encourage a prosperous local economy and help create an appealing and exciting tourism destination. Arts and culture also appeal to the CRINK economy (creative, innovative, knowledge-based) and to entrepreneurs and families. Arts and culture are required to create the kind of community where a broad spectrum of people want to live, build businesses, raise families and visit.

What we are trying to achieve:

- A higher profile for arts and culture.
- Increased economic activity and local employment.
- More capacity to support the efforts of artisans and other creators.
- Cultural experiences that will attract visitors.
- Festivals and events that are appealing to tourists, bring money into the economy and provide job opportunities

**Key actions:**

1. Establish the Innisfil Arts Council (IAC) with teams dedicated to arts, culture, heritage and the performing arts. The IAC would support/develop and advocate for all types of arts and culture. It should work cooperatively with the South Simcoe Arts Council. It could become a granting and peer review agency for Council. (See Strategy 10.3, 10.10 and 12.1 for examples of funding programs).

2. Hire a tourism/culture/special events coordinator who would strengthen the capacity of the municipality to assist the arts, culture and heritage community.

3. Obtain dedicated annual funding from the Town to support culture.

4. Develop, through the Innisfil Arts Council, a Public Art Policy for Town Council approval.

5. Continue the Town’s strong support for libraries. Use the existing and future libraries as neighbourhood and community activity centres. Use the libraries as resource centres for arts and cultural activities and events.

6. Develop a ‘cultural hub’ that coordinates information, performances and events for arts, culture, and heritage through a web presence linked to the Town’s website. This will provide
a platform to share information with residents and visitors and help link arts, culture and heritage groups.

7. Establish public spaces and community gathering places for the display of arts and crafts, performances, readings, etc. These might include Innisfil Town Hall, Innisfil libraries, schools, churches, and other places with under-utilized facilities.

8. Establish a new public art reserve fund to allow for public and private contributions to be put in a capital project fund to be used specifically for public art projects and installations. A common formula used to support this fund is 1% of the cost of major above-ground public works. Encourage Council to work with developers to make public art part of their subdivision planning.

9. Establish at least one new major cultural festival/event.

10. Establish a local innovation/creative fund to help incubate distinctive arts and culture enterprises, festivals, and events.

11. Build broadly-based support for arts and culture through communication with the community generally and dialogue between Council, the Innisfil Arts Council and the arts and culture community.

12. Develop a plan to ensure that all municipally-owned arts and cultural facilities become fully accessible as defined by the Ontario Disability Act.

**Strategy:** Encourage the local arts, cultural and heritage communities to work together and to showcase and present their offerings to visitors and residents.

**Why this is important:** Innisfil has under-utilized and under-promoted cultural assets such as artists’ studios and galleries, South Simcoe Theatre, and antique outlets. Promotion of these experiences — and development of this sector — will help make Innisfil a regional tourist destination. The various components of the cultural community must work together supportively.

What we are trying to achieve:

- Cultural experiences that have sufficient appeal to attract visitors.
- Increased economic activity and local employment.
- Active partnerships between the cultural and tourism stakeholders.

**Key actions:**

1. Include galleries, South Simcoe Theatre, cultural festivals, and events in itineraries and packages developed through the Tourism Network.

2. Include information on galleries, theatre, and art/craft events on the town’s website, tourism and other appropriate websites, in promotional material (local and regional), and through social media.

3. Help create new and expanded festivals/events for artists and galleries, such as studio tours, art shows, and events that include arts and crafts. Promote these through the Innisfil Tourism Network and regional marketing efforts.

4. Encourage juried and peer-reviewed artistic enterprises, shows and events.

**Strategy:** Recognize and support the efforts and energy of the local creative sector, including artists, performing artists, and artisans. Expand the program of gallery and studio tours. Develop strong marketing support programs and partnerships.

**Why this is important:** Innisfil has a number of skilled artists and artisans who contribute to the town’s cultural vibrancy. However, they work in relative obscurity. There is an opportunity to improve the reputation and energy of the local creative sector by introducing programs and policies to support them.

What we are trying to achieve:

- A more vibrant cultural sector.
- A greater sense of community and place in Innisfil.
- Enhanced quality of life.
- A more appealing destination for visitors.
- Increased economic return.

**Key actions:**

1. Establish programs to recognize the efforts and initiatives of the arts, crafts and creative community such as annual Mayor’s Arts awards.
2. Host an annual Artists Day at Town Hall to celebrate local artistic accomplishments.
3. Establish an Arts Trail with associated signage and promotion.
4. Encourage neighbourhoods in Innisfil to have an annual artistic celebration (broadly defined) that would vary from location to location.
5. Hold an annual event to get the arts and cultural community together.
6. Work with the schools to establish an “artists in the school” program.
7. Encourage cultural entrepreneurs to live and work in Innisfil.
13. Preserve and protect Innisfil’s heritage.

**Strategy:** Develop a heritage preservation and designation strategy. Increase the number of designated heritage properties. Support and promote heritage destination tourism strategies.

**Why this is important:** As a new town, Innisfil has a limited cultural history but the area has a 200 year old history that needs to be recognized. Significant heritage properties make a community distinctive and appeal to tourists. There are many in Innisfil, yet few are designated.

What we are trying to achieve:

- A network of listed and designated heritage properties.
- Recognition of the importance of built heritage and its contribution to the community.
- Education of local residents about the history of the area and the importance of heritage preservation.

**Key actions:**

1. Develop a heritage preservation and designation strategy for Innisfil, in conjunction with the Innisfil Heritage Committee.

2. Subject to the adoption of the heritage preservation strategy, consider the designation of additional properties based on recommended priorities from the Heritage Committee.

3. Develop an information piece on heritage properties with a map/suggested touring route.

4. Explore municipal loans/grants to help preserve heritage properties.

5. Investigate the establishment of one or more Heritage Conservation District(s). Cookstown is a strong candidate as a potential location; this would also have the possible desired effect of redirecting the truck traffic on Highway 89 to allow the community to recover its small town ambience and character.

6. Investigate options to redirect Highway 89 truck traffic to allow Cookstown to recover its small town ambience and character as a destination.

7. Initiate annual Mayor’s Awards for heritage/historical property preservation and restoration.

8. Participate in the annual “Doors Open” event.
Appendix A - Key Findings

In general, managing growth will be one of the biggest challenges for the Town Council — how, where, when, what kind, and who pays for what?

Innisfil needs much stronger medium and long-term planning. Innisfil needs to lead growth and development with strong, clear policies, and not follow random development proposals. The Town must assert itself to shape the community that residents want.

The Town must invest in its economic development, tourism, and cultural opportunities. There are new growth opportunities. Local businesses should be given incentive to grow. Green technologies are a possibility.

Innisfil must invest wisely in infrastructure. Roads, water, and sewers are essential. Complete coverage of high-speed broadband is critical to attract businesses and residents who rely on them.

Lake Simcoe is a unique asset and is one that can play a larger role in Innisfil’s future. Access to the lake for recreation needs to be improved. One idea: develop a transient marina themed around arts, local food, crafts, and marina services that would attract boaters and tourists. Continuing attention needs to be given to protecting Lake Simcoe’s environmental quality.

Protecting and maintaining the special quality of life in Innisfil will be an on-going challenge for Council and the Town Administration. When unique rural and agriculturally-based traditions meet suburban and urban lifestyles, a delicate balance must be maintained. That balance should always be considered when making planning decisions.

Innisfil is not ready for what’s ahead. Pressure will be exerted by population expansion, changing immigration patterns, continued urban encroachment, and growing demands on land use and community development. The Town is not ready for all of these significant shifts.

Innisfil should have a better relationship with its neighbours. New relationships and partnerships must be forged with surrounding municipalities, most obviously Barrie and the Province of Ontario. Future economic growth will depend on it. It begins with the obvious: better cooperation on economic development initiatives, tourism, infrastructure, and transportation.

There are pockets of artistic and cultural expression, yet very little support. Arts and culture will attract tourists and make Innisfil a more appealing community. Supported properly, cultural volunteers leverage a great deal of value in any community.
Protecting and preserving heritage assets must become a stronger focus for Council and the community.
These assets are part of what separate Innisfil from everywhere else. With each loss of a heritage asset, you diminish the town’s character.