

Economic Development Action Plan



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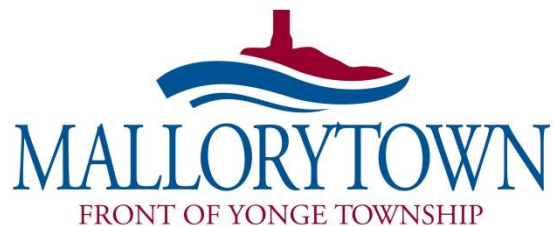


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Contents

- Introduction 3
 - Background 3
- Strategic Planning Process 4
- Economic Background 5
 - Economic Development in the Past 5
 - Previous Projects 5
- Key Partners 6
- SWOT Analysis 6
 - Strengths 6
 - Weaknesses 7
 - Opportunities 7
 - Threats 8
- Economic Vision 9
 - Economic Development Vision Statement 9
 - Economic Development Leadership 9
- Strategic Action Plan 10
 - What does the Strategic Action Plan mean for the community? 10
 - ‘Economic Corridors of Strength’ 10
 - Other Regional Interests 11
- Strategic Areas of Focus 11
 - Community Development 12
 - Business Attraction 12
 - Business Retention and Expansion 12
 - Planning, Infrastructure & Service 13
 - Integrated Community Sustainability Planning (ICSP) 13
 - Image/Communication 13
 - Return on Investments 14
 - Promoting Service Satisfaction 14
 - Methods to Measure Return 15
 - Relationship to Local Municipalities and External Organizations 15
- Future Action Plan 15
 - One Year Strategic Action Plan 15
 - Five Years Strategic Action Plan 16
- Conclusion 16

Introduction

Front of Yonge Township has redefined its economic development practices, as well as its Marketing Plan. The Marketing Plan will direct the way the community will continue to brand, advertise, and present itself to different interest groups, such as visitors, businesses, residents, and other governmental bodies, while increasing the social, environmental, cultural, and economic development in a sustainable manner. The Economic Development Action Plan (EDAP) will convey recommendations on both long and short-term levels on the priorities of enacting development within the township. The plan is considered an important aspect to increasing the quality of the community by:

- ❖ Creating a diverse and sustainable economic base for years to come
- ❖ Providing support to local organizations that are involved in tourism and rely on visitors to the area
- ❖ Encouraging appropriate growth strategies
- ❖ Generating more local opportunities for businesses and residents

The EDAP is the result of a collaborative action by the Community Development Committee. The committee is composed of community members and Council representatives, and used insight from the December 2008 United Counties of Leeds & Grenville Economic Development Action Plan. The purpose of the plan is to bring value to local residents, the municipality, the county administration, and any other organization involved in development.

It is recommended that the Community Development Committee review the EDAP every five (5) years to ensure its accuracy and relevance, as well as to address any misinformation or additions during this assessment period. The report will be made available to the Council members, as well as residents and businesses, for additional consultation and consideration.

Background

The township encompasses over 125km² of waterways, key roadways, and diverse landscape. Located along the St. Lawrence River within the 1000 Islands region, it maintains its small town charm through a strong community bond and dedication to preserving its natural elements. The municipality supports these values by encouraging local festival events and volunteer groups, in addition to enacting by-laws to minimize negative environmental impacts.

Based on the Statistics Canada 2011 census, the Mallorytown Area holds a primarily Anglophone population of 2,752 within 1,210 households. With a median age of forty-six (46), the majority of the population play an active role within the workforce through various occupational fields. Overall, the age brackets, household size and numbers, and population

growth has remained relatively consistent from previous years, allowing future assumptions to be deduced with reasonable foresight. Despite its location along main corridors, economic opportunities in the form of new businesses has not grown in recent years, with the exception of the two (2) 401 Highway service centres which re-opened in 2011 and 2012. Positioned between major cities such as Toronto and Ottawa and its close proximity to United States border crossings, much of the region relies on visitors who enter the area during the tourism season (May to September), to sustain the economic standing.

Strategic Planning Process

The municipality formed an Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (ICSP) in 2012 to determine the five (5) priorities to promote the social, environmental, cultural, and economic development within the area. The purpose of the ICSP was to create a long-term strategy of actions and means of measuring success. The success would result in people and businesses remaining in the township as well as generating more revenue. The ICSP priorities are to promote:

- 1) Business in a Creative Economy
- 2) Local Food Production, Consumption and/or Distribution
- 3) The Needs of Youth and Young Families
- 4) Community Gathering Places
- 5) Trails and Paths

The five (5) focuses influence future opportunities and clearly state the interest of the municipality and how it wishes to develop. The ICSP goals are to be considered in decisions regarding changes within the community, such as by-laws and regulations, marketing, and funding. The Community Development Committee, in agreement with Front of Yonge's Council and with the support of United Counties of Leeds and Grenville, has approved the priorities with the confidence that they will promote development by creating clear objectives on ways to advance.

The ICSP was created through a series of public meetings coordinated with a neighbouring township which was also developing its own ICSP. Assets of each area were promoted and approved by the public before the consulting team created a presentation to be put forward in front of the Council whom later accepted the plan.

Economic Background

Economic Development in the Past

Before the Community Development Committee was created, all economic development issues were overseen by the elected municipal Council. Council determined how much funding would be allocated to an issue, designing advertisements, and finally forging and maintaining partnerships. Most importantly, the Council was in charge of attracting new businesses, residents, and tourists to the area. In December of 2010, the Community Development Committee was created with the approval of the Council. The members consist of volunteers who focus on developmental incentives to promote the area through collective agreements and support from the Council.

Previous Projects

Several reports have been conducted to assist with the economic development of Front of Yonge over the past decade.

- ❖ 2004: A Business Retention and Expansion Project was completed to gain insight about the businesses operating within the township. A Business Visitation Survey was distributed with the help of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Housing to determine the opinions of business owners on a large variety of topics including strengths and weaknesses, energy sources, technological factors, employees, and future prospects.
- ❖ 2006: An Official Plan for the municipality was formed with the intent to support land use planning goals for development while maintaining the integrity of structures and environmental qualities. The plan influences building by-laws by maintaining the values and vision of the community to preserve and enhance the existing quality of life.
- ❖ 2010: A SWOT Analysis was produced with the assistance of United Counties of Leeds and Grenville. The report shows the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of economic development for the township. Its purpose is to draw attention to negative aspects of the region and correct them, while highlighting the attributes.
- ❖ 2011: First Impressions Community Exchange with another community of similar size revealed the thoughts of strangers to the area about different topics.
- ❖ 2012: Integrated Community Sustainability Plan was developed to identify the key priorities for the municipality to maintain long-term economic development.

The Community Development Committee has undertaken numerous objectives since its creation to help promote the area. As economic development was not a key focus prior to the formation of the committee, the committee has the ability to greatly influence the township's

growth in a strategic manner. Several tasks have been accomplished or are in formation with the most notable ones below.

- ❖ Modernize the official municipal website visually while providing accurate information to residents, visitors, and businesses about local affairs. Status: ONGOING
- ❖ Form a partnership with the Ministry of Transportation to allow staffed kiosks at the two Mallorytown ONroute centres. Status: COMPLETED
- ❖ Create an annual Farmer's Market to attract tourists and promote local produce. Status: COMPLETED
- ❖ Produce brochures listing the attributes of the township to be placed in strategic locations. Status: COMPLETED
- ❖ Actively participate in local and regional events when possible. Status: ONGOING

Key Partners

Development within the area is not limited solely to the actions of the local Community Development Committee and Council. Many other organizations are active in the development of the region which benefits the community. Nearby corporations focused on economic development are:

- ❖ United Counties of Leeds and Grenville
- ❖ 1000 Islands Community Development Corporation

Both of these offices have dedicated numerous resources towards the region. UCLG has assisted with grant proposals, spearheading projects, and collaborated with the township to have manned tourism kiosks, while the other has provided grants for various municipal endeavours.

SWOT Analysis

SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. A SWOT Analysis allows a clear view of an organization and presents the positive and negative features that affect development. Seeing the organization through different spheres provides a progressive approach on how to maximize the good qualities and address the negative issues.

Strengths

- ❖ Strong community spirit: The most apparent strength of the area is its strong sense of community as people are eager to be active in community endeavours. Many committees and boards are created by volunteers who strive for the betterment of the township. Their work involves organizing events for the public, raising awareness, and enhancing the quality of life for other residents. There are many examples of how the

community has rallied together, such as the efforts to have the Front of Yonge Elementary School remain open when it was threatened with closure by the Upper Canada District School Board in 2011. The volunteer efforts also create a positive impact on development as the needs of locals are promoted to a wider audience and their underlying goals are respected during decisions made by the township.

- ❖ **Environment:** The municipality is located in an environmentally rich area. Found in the 1000 Islands region of the St. Lawrence River, the municipality is bordered by this natural waterway. With the combination of land holdings by both provincial and federal parks, and municipal by-law regulations, much of the waterfront remains unspoiled by building development. The abundance of environmental elements also relates to the multiple trail systems spanning several kilometres and exposed rock face along major routes. These features not only make the area more attractive to visitors, but influence the types of businesses within the community.

Weaknesses

- ❖ **Missing Services:** The small size of of township causes it to be overshadowed by other municipalities. These larger areas have more resources and economic stability assisting the retention of existing services. Their larger population allows for facilities to exist that would not be economically sustainable in our area, causing locals to travel to other municipalities to benefit in these amenities. The lack of availability and accessibility of products was noted in the responses of participants of the First Impression Community Exchange conducted in 2011.
- ❖ **Lack of Familiarity:** Front of Yonge is located within a prime tourist destination, the 1000 Islands, between Ontario's largest cities. However, the area is often passed with people not realizing where the town is located and what it has to offer. Gaining recognition is difficult due to the absence of signs as only the exit ramps are marked with Mallorytown along the 401 Highway. The township is also overlooked on a provincial level, either by the focus on urban cities or among the abundance of rural communities. As of 2013, Ontario's official tourism and other provincial website do not mention the Mallorytown area, while some offer information about neighbouring municipalities.

Opportunities

- ❖ **Modernized Marketing:** Beginning in 2012, the Community Development Committee has put forth a rebranding effort in order to better represent the area. The key elements of the project include brand development through the creation of a new logo, improvements to the official municipal website, and promotional material. Through the partnership with a marketing team, TD Graham & Associates, stronger marketing

communication will be achieved by offering quality, and more importantly, familiarity of the region. Rebranding allows the municipality to be more competitive with other areas in attracting residents, visitors, and grants to achieve economic development.

- ❖ **Active County Organization:** United Counties of Leeds and Grenville is supportive in the development of the municipalities it oversees. Former initiatives by UCLG include creating a Business Directory which lists the contact information for businesses operating within the Counties, and is searchable by industry and municipality. UCLG hosts an annual Economic Development Summit with key speakers and delegates from the area to present useful information. The Counties also works towards gaining investments and tourism, which may benefit the community.

Threats

- ❖ **Utilities Quality and Cost:** The Business Retention and Expansion Report executed in 2004 revealed many business owners expressed concerns about the lack of municipal water and sewage disposal in the township. More respondents stated that this was a disadvantage to their operations and is believed to be a weakness that exists within the community. Of the 17 business responses, forty-two percent (42%) stated that water and sewer availability were very important, and thirty-six percent (36%) viewed water and sewer costs were as well. The issue of utility quality and costs may become a deterrent for new businesses and expansion as the drawbacks outweigh the benefits. The area could lose out on a prospective market and job creation due to these issues.

Economic Vision

Economic Development Vision Statement

The mandate of the Community Development Committee in 2010 was to strive for a common goal of enriching the community. The vision the committee commenced as:

“Under the direction of Council to work in an advisory capacity to advance economic development in the Township of Front of Yonge, by supporting sustainable community development and lifestyle enhancement.”

The official statement reveals a number of factors of the Committee’s aspirations

- ❖ The Committee will continue to work closely in partnership with Council
- ❖ Actions are to leave a lasting and sustainable impact in the municipality
- ❖ The existing lifestyle and functions of the community will not be threatened in any manner

Respecting the vision for economic development will lead to a greater quality of life for residents who would become more likely to support local endeavours. The continued encouragement strengthens a community, while showcasing the unique natural and cultural elements and businesses the township offers. People of all family dynamics will want to live here and businesses will want to continue to operate here.

Economic Development Leadership

The Community Development Committee is compiled of volunteers whose mission is to advance the development within the Township of Front of Yonge. Meetings are open to the public and anyone can gain membership. Meeting minutes are posted online for transparency for any person or organization who may wish to view them. Meetings occur on a monthly basis for most of the year and the Committee works as a collective body with two Co-Chairs to move motions forward with topics that can be submitted by any member.

While the Committee exercises a degree of autonomy, the Township Council has the ability to alter or halt projects. The Council is composed of officials elected by the public and determines the funding and direction of the Committee. Typically, decisions such as advertisement placement and organized events do not need to be approved by the Council. Decisions by the Community Development Committee leading to long-term results, such as signage and tender proposals, are presented to the Council for their consideration.

Strategic Action Plan

The Strategic Action Plan for the municipality symbolizes the success of the municipality in acknowledging the importance of economic development as well as its efforts to promote development. The Strategic Action Plan will lay out plans for the Community Development Committee to explore to assist the municipality's efforts for economic development. The strategies were derived by the Committee primarily during meetings. The Committee members also completed a Community Economic Development Action Plan created by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to identify various areas of focus to address to help determine future goals.

What does the Strategic Action Plan mean for the community?

The goal of economic development is to create lasting success for the community in a manner that maintains the values and characteristics of the community. Economic development has become more important to the township over recent years, through the creation of a committee dedicated to this endeavour in order to continue the promotion of living, visiting, and operating in the community. The purpose of the plan is to act as a guideline for creating sustainable development for Front of Yonge, in response to current conditions hindering potential development.

The Strategic Action Plan is to provide a starting point for both short-term and long-term initiatives to build on the current success of the area, as well as ensure continued support from, and sustainability for, the community.

'Economic Corridors of Strength'

The Township of Front of Yonge has many transportation options promoting economic growth in the area. With the three options listed below, businesses benefit as goods can be transported in the most economical fashion to best suit the individual. The choices also provide other advantages for the area that increases the enjoyment for the people who utilize them.

- ❖ By Train
 - Centred between two stations located in Brockville and Gananoque
 - Reliable with high safety statistics
 - Less emission when transporting great distances
 - Greater Speed
 - Connects across Canada
- ❖ St. Lawrence River
 - Access to the United States and Quebec
 - 1000 Islands

- Parks & Recreation
- Tourist Attraction
- Trail Networks
- ❖ 401 Highway
 - Connects to larger cities
 - Close proximity to two International Bridges
 - Provides access to the 1000 Islands Parkway
 - Service centres within the municipality directs people to stop
 - Easy admission to attractions in Mallorytown and its surrounding area

Other Regional Interests

Many characteristics located in the township contribute to economic development. With the variety of opportunities to generate growth, the municipality is not reliant on a singular aspect and can thus appeal to a wider audience. Projects that would enhance multiple features would be more efficient and beneficial to the community.

- ❖ Heritage
- ❖ Art & Culture
- ❖ Trail Systems
- ❖ National and Provincial Parks
- ❖ Farmers' Market
- ❖ Volunteer Base
- ❖ Festivals and Events
- ❖ Recreation
- ❖ UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve status
- ❖ Frontenac Arch Biosphere

By focusing on the already established features, short-term goals can be accomplished. Long-term goals can incorporate one or more interests of the region with the intent of increasing the existing quality. Actions of both short and long-term for economic development would be conducted with a mindset of ensuring sustainability, while maintaining the values of the municipality and its residents.

Strategic Areas of Focus

The Economic Development Action Plan concentrates on a number of strategic areas of focus which incorporates previous reports by, or involving, the area. The overall feature is to help

with the coordination of development designed to assist residents and businesses, while promoting tourism.

The following is a summary of recommendations that will direct be the strategic focal points for the Community Development Committee and Council over the next two years.

Community Development

Any plans designed to promote economic development need to be made with the community in mind as the leading priority. A project can only be successful with the ongoing support of the residents who are the ambassadors for the municipality. When residents and business owners are content with their quality of life, they will convey their enjoyment onto others increasing the appeal of the township. The Community Development Committee recognizes the importance of residents as community members support local vendors and events, with many volunteering to one of the many local social organizations. Development focused on the community leads to mutual benefit by raising the satisfaction of residents, while generating additional support for the committee and township. Plans for Front of Yonge regarding Community Development are widespread and include:

- ❖ The Engagement of Youth
- ❖ Volunteer Recruitment
- ❖ Buying/Supporting Local
- ❖ Leisure Living

Business Attraction

Attraction for businesses and investment is an ongoing and very important goal for economic development. The opportunities presented by a new business or investment are great as they can generate additional services for the community, employment, and funds for the area.

Actions taken by the municipality and/or one of its partners may include:

- ❖ Follow-up on leads
- ❖ Maintain partnership with UCLG
- ❖ Promote the development of small and medium sized (SME) businesses
- ❖ Active in development of associations and events
- ❖ Website development and maintenance
- ❖ Create and publicly provide an information package for new businesses

Business Retention and Expansion

The Community Development Committee continues to support the ongoing retention and expansion of businesses within the municipality. The methods of support include:

- ❖ Ongoing support of issues and challenges
- ❖ Free listing of businesses on the municipality's and counties' website
- ❖ Assessing the concerns of businesses through surveys conducted either internally or externally
- ❖ Welcoming business owners to attend public meetings

Planning, Infrastructure & Service

The Township Council continues to review the planning and approval process for infrastructure and services, to ensure they are happening in a timely manner with minimal or no interruptions. An annual "Front of Yonge Township Performance Measures" report is published that evaluates the time it takes on average for a permit to be approved, which has continually exceeded the provincial averages.

Integrated Community Sustainability Planning (ICSP)

The ICSP process is organized by UCLG who works on building a shared vision for a successful plan to reduce costs and generate more wealth for the area. The ICSP for the municipality can be viewed on the UCLG website.

Image/Communication

Communication is important to a program's success as it accurately promotes the municipality to the public and media. Once reports, such as the Economic Development Action Plan, have been reviewed and approved by the Front of Yonge Council, copies will be sent to interested parties and be available to view from the municipality's website. The sharing of information will ensure all interested parties are aware of the intention and progression of the Community Development Committee.

The methods of communicating with the public, businesses, and media include:

- ❖ Press Releases sent to surrounding media sources
- ❖ Regular meetings of Council and local committees open to the public
- ❖ Website development and maintenance
- ❖ Advertisements
- ❖ Newsletters
- ❖ Marketing materials, including and not limited to brochures
- ❖ Township Staff
- ❖ Kiosk by the Township Office

Township of Front of Yonge Website

Websites are one of the most effective communication tools and are therefore vital for economic development. The more information and appeal a website provides, the more likely visitors are to remember information and return to the site, and share the page with others. Websites which are streamlined and visually appealing, with frequent updates or new information give a favourable opinion of an active community that is open to development.

The municipality owns the rights to various addresses to maximize exposure and discoverability. Currently, these sites are www.FrontofYonge.com, www.FrontofYonge.ca, www.Mallorytown.com, and www.Mallorytown.ca. The websites allow people to find local information by searching both the municipality's name, as well as the most populous town within it.

The website offers information in an organized manner with sections dedicated to local government proceedings, visitor information, and residential services. Announcements, an events calendar, and a business directory are further highlighted online.

Return on Investments

Performance measurement is used to determine the effectiveness and quality of a project or service. While many services provided by the municipality have a procedure for documenting their results, in the Front of Yonge Township Performance Measurement, others do not have a concrete quantitative or qualitative protocol. Recording the activity is important as it:

- ❖ Identifies improvements and declines over time
- ❖ Determines effectiveness
- ❖ Equates the return on the investment
- ❖ Provides public accountability

Performance measurement in economic development is uncommon. Organizations which do measure and communicate its results are more effective as it can use its information to continually make improvements. The conclusions can be used in grant requests, allow funding to be distributed more effectively, and create opportunity to address issues which may have gone unnoticed.

Promoting Service Satisfaction

Economic development is a product of excellent service it can make the difference where a person lives, visits, or builds a business. Knowledge about the area, its key industries, by-laws, and more, is important to have as answers can be given instantly to eliminate wait times. Equally important is having one contact person or entity to provide a clear window for

communication, who will manage the case by contacting others if needed. A clear procedure of who will oversee which topics will be beneficial to both the municipality and residents. Organization, approachability, and professional behaviours are essential to providing the best service as the advancements of technology, people and businesses expect responses with minimal waiting times. By having an interested party wait, a message of disinterest could be conveyed, or loss of opportunity to another municipality.

Methods to Measure Return

Determining the return of business attraction and retention can be accomplished by reviewing commercial taxes for growth. Population and household numbers provided by Statistics Canada can contribute to determining the area's appeal towards homebuyers. Partnerships with existing businesses and event organizers would be required to assess the return value of tourists in the region.

It is important to consider the possibility of misinterpretation presented in the measurement results. Tax rates may increase or decrease, Statistics Canada may have changed their boundary lines, and weather may have an effect on event attendees. Additionally, the procedure of recording the data and its presentation should remain consistent to allow for comparisons between results.

Relationship to Local Municipalities and External Organizations

The Community Development Committee takes a leading role towards economic development by organizing projects and collaborating with other social groups and organizations as required. Ideally, the actions taken by the Committee will positively impact other local groups, Council, and residents within the community.

- ❖ Build a mutual relationship where the Committee offers to assist a group and the group returns through offering support or providing a service.

Future Action Plan

One Year Strategic Action Plan

The Community Development Committee is proposing projects to be commenced and/or completed by the end of 2014, depending on the nature, funding, and approval of the initiatives. The strategies for economic development include:

- ❖ Providing a comprehensive guide for small and medium sized enterprises entering the township

- Contact information for organizations specializing in business start ups
- Relevant by-law and policy information
- Building permit procedure
- Introduction on how to use the Business Directory
- ❖ Redesign Front of Yonge brochures targeted towards tourism promotion
 - Directions
 - Attractions
 - No dates or year
 - New website
- ❖ Provide a comprehensive map of the area listing key attractions
- ❖ Reform the municipality's website to reflect new branding and marketing initiatives
- ❖ Continue to assist and/or participate in UCLG's efforts for development
- ❖ Work towards increasing services for residents and businesses
 - Internet and cell coverage
 - Natural gas

Five Year Strategic Action Plan

The Community Development Committee has ideas of items they would like to have accomplished, but are not practical to do within the following year. This rational decision is due to a combination of lack of funds, approval wait times, and time constraints. From having a goal to strive for in the upcoming years, preparations in the form of grant application for example, can be made. The economic development initiatives to be considered for implementation within five (5) years are:

- ❖ Creation of a Chamber of Commerce, or other similar business collaboration
- ❖ Replacement of all municipal and area signs to reflect the new brand
- ❖ Create an annual fall event
- ❖ Expansion of beautification of the township
- ❖ Cycling and walking guides of the area

Conclusion

The Township of Front of Yonge has taken a more assertive approach to establishing economic development. The recommended actions create a guideline on how the community can provide more features to residents, businesses, and travellers. Continued support from Council and partners is needed for the Economic Development Action Plan to proceed.