



TOWN OF WASAGA BEACH

2024 ASSOCIATION OF MUNICIPALITIES OF ONTARIO CONFERENCE



The longest freshwater beach in the world.

Mayor's Message

This year, the Town of Wasaga Beach is celebrating its 50th birthday. As we look back upon 50 years of transformation and growth and reflect on our rich history, we are looking forward to what our community can achieve and become over the next 50 years.

We are standing at a fork in the road.

We can do things the way they've been done for 50 years, or challenge ourselves and our partners to do things differently, work together differently, and achieve radically different results – results that will build a more resilient Wasaga Beach and a stronger Ontario.

We are here at AMO to talk about our vision for the future of Wasaga Beach, explain how it supports provincial priorities, and connect with partners who will help us turn this vision into reality.

Since its incorporation in 1974, Wasaga Beach has continued to evolve from a playground for the GTA to one of Ontario's most iconic tourism destinations.

Today, Wasaga Beach is one of the fastest-growing municipalities in Ontario with a growth rate 4 times higher than the provincial average. We are now the largest community in the south Georgian Bay region.

Fortunately, successive Councils have invested wisely over the years so that we are unique, an outlier in our region, in that our water and sewer capacity sits at 50% with sufficient reserves to support future growth. We are well-positioned to help deliver on the Province's bold housing targets.

We are proud to be unique among all other Ontario municipalities in another way, in that we are home to Ontario's first and most highly visited urban Provincial Park, which is located in our downtown and across 25% of our geographic land area.

Every year, almost 2 million people visit Wasaga Beach to enjoy our community, our magnificent 14-kilometre sandy beach, our sports and live music programming, and Wasaga Beach Provincial Park. This includes one of Canada's most significant national historic sites, Nancy Island.

Our population of almost 25,000 is shifting and growing, becoming younger and more diverse, on course to double in the next 30 years.

As a result, in part, of our Council's renewed focus and continued investments in festivals and special events programming, tourism in Wasaga Beach has bounced back and is up 20% over 2019 levels – and at its highest level in almost a decade. More people from the GTA are visiting Wasaga Beach for sport and live-music-related recreation than ever before.

We know Wasaga Beach is unique and we're building on what sets us apart.

The Town of Wasaga Beach's summer live music lineup is unlike any other live music lineup in Ontario, Canada – it takes place under the stars on the sandy shores of the longest freshwater beach in the world. In 2023, the Town's annual Memories of Summer concert attracted almost 15,000 people to our spectacular beachfront for a live music experience you won't find anywhere else in the province.

In February 2024, the launch of the Town's first winter sport and music festival was a huge success, thanks to the Town's \$60 million investment in a new twin-pad, NHL-size arena and library which opened earlier this year. Over 6,000 people attended from outside our community.

We're working smart, thinking creatively, and building partnerships to get things done.

The Town is partnering with FRAM Building Group and Sunray Group of Hotels to reimagine our iconic beachfront and build 1000+ mixed-use residential units and a world-class hotel in our downtown, near Beach Area 1. We expect shovels in the ground in summer 2025.

The Town is partnering with the Ontario Ministry of Education, Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board, County of Simcoe, Canadore College, Lakehead University and Farsight Homes to build a new state-of-the-art high school, community hub and theatre that is right next door to our new arena and library, and in walking distance to the beachfront. This project will leverage over \$60 million of existing municipal infrastructure to save taxpayers money and get shovels in the ground faster. We expect construction to begin in early 2025.



Today, we are focused on forming new partnerships.

We want to reinvent our beachfront; reinvigorate our main street; deliver a bold tourism strategy that includes more sports and live music festival programming than ever before; establish a closer, more innovative and collaborative relationship with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming, Ministry of Sport and Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks; strengthen our economy; build more homes faster; get shovels in the ground on affordable housing; make life better for our full-time residents; and help ignite tourism in Southern Georgian Bay and South Central Ontario.

We know our goals are achievable, but we can't do it alone.

We look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,
Brian Smith, Mayor
Town of Wasaga Beach

The longest freshwater beach in the world.

TOURISM DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

OUR ASK

That the Minister of Sport convene a joint meeting of the Ministry of Sport, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of the Environment and Town of Wasaga Beach.

The Town of Wasaga Beach requests that the Minister:

- Collaborates with the Town and Minister of Tourism and Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks to identify new sport, tourism and recreational experiences that could be offered at Wasaga Beach Provincial Park and Town facilities, including our new \$60-million NHL size, twin pad arena.
- Convenes a joint meeting of the Ministry of Sport, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks and the Town of Wasaga Beach to explore and advance four (4) time-sensitive opportunities. Specifically, the Town would like to collaborate with the province to:
 1. **Organize** and host an annual Summer Beach Games beginning in 2025/2026.
 2. **Explore** enhancements to the existing Nordic Centre, which is part of Wasaga Beach Provincial Park, that would enable it to become a Winter Olympic event training site.
 3. **Develop** the Town's new \$60-million, twin-pad NHL-size arena into a winter Olympic event training facility – beginning with a site visit and assessment for sledge hockey – as part of work that is currently being done to develop a winter sports hub or centre of excellence at Horseshoe Valley in partnership with Freed Developments.
 4. **Identify** new sport and tourism experiences that could be delivered at Town facilities, including new ways the Town can support the important work of the ministry and Canadian Sport Institute Ontario.



Why is this important?

This will leverage existing assets in our community, grow tourism in the province, and create jobs and economic opportunities across our Town and region for years to come.

These actions also support and leverage the Town's beachfront redevelopment and Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan. Our goal is to concurrently drive supply (first-class hotels and other short-term accommodations) and demand (for higher-value, multi-day tourism experiences) to transform Wasaga Beach into a more resilient, all-season Ontario destination.

Our Opportunity

- Wasaga Beach offers considerable assets, good winter conditions and an easy commute compared to other communities. We are ideally suited with our sandy beach, warm water and the Nottawasaga River.
- Every summer, millions of people flock to Wasaga Beach and thousands participate in recreational beach sports, from spike ball and volleyball to soccer, rowing, paddle boarding, waterskiing, and more. We have hosted numerous triathlon events and an annual recreational beach volleyball tournament.
- The Town has recently launched its new Tourism Destination Management Plan, which is a blueprint to guide the Town in growing tourism. We are laser-focused on driving tourism through new, collaborative sports and live music activations, events and experiences.
- In 2024, to demonstrate its commitment to this approach, the Town approved a new armslength corporation to drive the development of demand-generating sports and live music experiences: Wasaga Beach Sports and Entertainment Inc.
- Wasaga Beach Sports and Entertainment will move forward in parallel with the redevelopment of the Town's iconic beachfront and implementation of the Town's Downtown Development Master Plan in 2024/2025, which will see the construction of an awardwinning beachfront hotel – just minutes away from the Town's new \$60-million twin pad arena.
- The Ontario Winter Games held in Orillia in 2020 offer a blueprint for what is possible.



\$60M

Amount the Town has invested in building a new NHL-size, twin-pad arena and library

ALIGNING WITH PROVINCIAL PRIORITIES

Supports the Province's priorities to grow tourism, create jobs and build a stronger Ontario.

Our Challenges

- Cross-ministerial collaboration