



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.**

# INVESTING MORE IN THE WORLD'S LONGEST FRESHWATER BEACH AND NANCY ISLAND HISTORIC SITE

## OUR ASK

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

The Town of Wasaga Beach requests that the Minister actively encourages collaboration and convenes a joint meeting with the Town, Minister of Tourism, Minister of Sport, and Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, to achieve the following:

- **Move** the longest freshwater beach in the world, Nancy Island Historic Site and the Nordic Trails System to the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming (MTCG).
- **Modify** the provincial park boundary to enable the Town to proceed with its Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan in 2024/2025. This requires removing some Town-owned lands from the park boundary. This will unlock the redevelopment of the Town's beachfront commercial area (which burnt down in 2007) and construction of an award-winning beachfront hotel, just minutes away from the Town's new \$60-million twin pad arena.
- **Identify** new tourism events and experiences that the Town and Province could collaborate on planning and delivering at Wasaga Beach Provincial Park on Town-owned land at the beachfront, and at Town facilities, including our new \$60-million twin pad arena.
- **Fund** a new annual live-music festival in Wasaga Beach, beginning in 2025/2026.
- **Identify** new and improved ways that the Town and Province (and Ontario Parks) can work together to share content and creative assets and collaborate on promoting tourism/events/festivals in the Town of Wasaga Beach through MTCG, MOS and MECP (provincial) and Town marketing channels.

## Why is this important?

- This year, the Town of Wasaga Beach is celebrating its 50th anniversary of incorporation and the fact that it continues to be one of Ontario's most iconic tourism destinations. Tourism is up 20% and higher than it has been in almost a decade. Over the past year and a half, the Town has invested significantly in demand-generating visitor/tourism programming to grow tourism by 800,000 unique visitors.
- Working together, the Province and Town can leverage existing assets in our community, including Town festivals and events and Wasaga Beach Provincial Park, to grow tourism in the province. This will create jobs and economic opportunities in 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

- Thirty minutes down the road from Wasaga Beach, the Province (MTCG) operates two of the most successful historical parks in the province – both with links to the war of 1812 – with an accomplished CEO and developed assets with year-round appeal: Saint-Marie among the Hurons and Discovery Harbour. The Town wants to collaborate with the Province to develop Nancy Island to the same level.
- 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 events and experiences.
- In 2024, to demonstrate its commitment to this approach, the Town approved a new arms-length corporation to drive the development of demand-generating sports and live music experiences: Wasaga Beach Sports and Entertainment Inc.
- In 2025, Wasaga Beach Sports and Entertainment will move forward in parallel with the Town's Downtown Development Master Plan and the redevelopment of the Town's iconic beachfront, which will see the construction of an award-winning beachfront hotel, just minutes away from the Town's new \$60-million twin pad arena.
- The Town of Wasaga Beach is ready to collaborate, support provincial priorities, and explore all of the ways the Province and the Town can work together to elevate the longest freshwater beach in the world, Nancy Island, and Town of Wasaga Beach to its full potential.

## Our Challenges

- Recently, the reputation of the Town and the world's longest freshwater beach have been dragged through the mud.
- Adding more garbage cans, a fresh coat of paint and more enforcement on the beach is a good start, but it's not enough. Provincial park infrastructure is crumbling. Nancy Island is crumbling. These provincial assets need to be treated like world-class attractions. They would better serve the Province and Town if they were placed under the care and management of the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming (MTCG), in the same way that MTCG oversees Niagara Falls, Saint-Marie among the Hurons and Discovery Harbour, which are all carefully protected and well-maintained Ontario attractions.
- Currently, the world's longest freshwater beach and Nancy Island are managed by Ontario Parks and it has fallen into a state of disrepair.
- This unique recreational park/natural wonder and historic site are tourism attractions that should fall under the ministry responsible for promoting and protecting tourism, culture and recreation with the funding envelope and expertise to do so.
- The way the Parks Act is written now, rules must be applied across the board. The current legislation does not recognize that Wasaga Beach Provincial Park is unique. There is a better way to manage the truly unique aspects of the park, and unlock greater value from these assets for the Town and Province.

## Total Impact

- The beach is our Town's beating heart – our economic engine. We cannot understate the impact that these actions will have on the Province and Town. They will help strengthen our tourism brand and support the Town's efforts to develop into a resilient 2-season Ontario destination (summer and winter – short term), on the path to a full four-season destination (long term). This will help develop Wasaga Beach into a world-class tourism, sport and resort destination.

### ALIGNING WITH PROVINCIAL PRIORITIES

Supports MTCG's priorities to promote and strengthen tourism across the province.  
Supports the Province's priorities to expand access to parks and outdoor recreational opportunities, grow tourism, create jobs and build a stronger Ontario.









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# 2 Million

Number of people who visited Wasaga Beach in 2023.

# \$19 Million

The amount the Province has committed to spend over the next three years, as part of the 2024 Ontario Budget, to establish Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park in the Township of Uxbridge.

# \$1 Million

The amount the Province has invested in Wasaga Beach Provincial Park (a recreation class park) over seven years, between 2018 - 2024.

# \$50 Million

The amount the Province announced it is planning to spend on Bigwind Lake Provincial Park over the next few years (an environmental class, non-operating park in Muskoka with no visitation numbers).

