



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.**

# DOWNTOWN REDEVELOPMENT MASTER PLAN

Re-Imagining Our Beachfront  
To Strengthen Our Economy  
And Ignite Tourism in Ontario

## OUR ASK

That the Province supports the Town of Wasaga Beach's efforts to build homes, attract investment and grow tourism by providing financial assistance to rebuild critical road infrastructure and resolve flooding issues on Beach Drive.

## Why now?

Wasaga Beach is home to the longest freshwater beach in the world, and our iconic Beach Drive has been a magnet that helps draw almost 2 million visitors to our community each year. The approximately 556 metre long Beach Drive runs parallel with the beach at Beach Area 1 and it is the main commercial area which includes the Town's iconic wayfinding WASAGA sign, shops, food trucks, restaurants and live music venues that cater to summer tourists.

It continues to be prone to repeated, severe flooding damage. Recent headlines:

- [Wasaga Beach plans to close Beach Drive after storm damage](#)
- [High water levels swallow up Wasaga Beach's main strip](#)
- [Record high water levels on Georgian Bay cause damage along waterfronts](#)

The Town is now seeking to redevelop this commercial area and Town-owned lands at its beachfront through joint venture partnership with FRAM Building Group and Sunray Hotel Group. The Town must raise Beach Drive approximately five feet to mitigate flooding issues at a cost of \$20M. This will achieve the shared goals of the Town and Province to attract jobs and investment to build stronger, economically resilient communities and grow tourism.

# \$584M

in economic development  
activity unlocked within  
South Georgian Bay  
and Simcoe County

## Our Opportunity

- This critical infrastructure project will support the Town's efforts to attract jobs and investment and grow tourism.
- Raising Beach Drive approximately five feet will resolve recurring flooding issues. It will also support the implementation of the Town's Downtown Development Master Plan and immediately unlock more than 1,000 residential units, an award-winning beachfront hotel and multimillion dollar commercial development to assist in the revitalization of the Town's tourism economy.
- This is not a pipe project, it is a road project. It is shovel ready – construction is ready to begin next spring.

**\$625M**

of mixed-use redevelopment

**500K**

additional tourists

## Our Challenges

- The project budget for this critical road infrastructure will be one of the most significant investments the Town will make in the next 10 years.
- The Town must raise Beach Drive approximately five feet to mitigate flooding issues at a cost of \$20M.
- Further works are required to upgrade water/sewer and adjacent streets to facilitate development. Total costs for all of this work is approximately \$40M.
- Development charges (DCs) will cover some of these costs. The Town is seeking other funding sources to cover the balance.



## OUR ASK

That the Minister of Infrastructure collaborates with MMAH and MECP to provide the Town with an update on the status of the review of provincial land holdings in the Town of Wasaga Beach, including a review of the Wasaga Beach Provincial Park boundary.

The Town requests that the Minister collaborates with the Town, MECP and MMAH to achieve the following:

- **Ensure** that vacant and underutilized lands not critical to the functioning of park areas be deemed surplus, and that opportunities for affordable and workforce housing – or new provincial park amenities – be pursued on surplus lands.
- **Remove** all lands not owned by the Province from the provincial park boundary – or collaborate with the Town to modify the park boundary – so work on the Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan and downtown redevelopment project can proceed.



## Our Opportunity

- The Province owns approximately 25% of the geographic land area of Wasaga Beach.
- A significant portion of vacant, provincial land holdings are simply empty, cleared residential lots and old, overgrown parking lots. This land is not providing any return to the Province or Town.
- Without compromising the integrity of park areas, there is an opportunity to free up vacant, derelict and underutilized provincially-owned lands for higher and better uses.
- Much of this land is fully serviced.
- This supports the government's priorities to build more homes faster.
- As part of the Downtown Development Master Plan, the Town is also seeking to develop 1,000+ residential units and an award-winning hotel – in a joint venture partnership with FRAM Building Group and Sunray Group of Hotels on Town-owned lands at the beachfront.

**\$45M**

in increased provincial revenue

**1,300**

jobs

**1,200**

housing units

## Our Challenges

- In 1995, the Province drew a provincial park boundary over top of Town-owned lands that is preventing the Town from moving forward.
- The Town is seeking assistance from the Minister to have the provincial park boundary adjusted so the project can proceed. This will create jobs, housing and economic opportunities in our community.

## Total Impact

**Provincial funding to make Beach Drive flood-resilient, and collaborating with the Town to declare some provincially-owned lands surplus will unlock the Town's Downtown Development Master Plan.**

**This will immediately:**

- **Help** build affordable, attainable and work force housing that is much needed.
- **Secure** millions in new investment including the Town's first award-winning/ year-round beachfront hotel, hundreds of jobs and 1000+ homes – shovels can get in the ground within the next 12 months.
- **Support** the province's priorities to build more homes faster and help municipalities build more flood- and climate-resilient infrastructure.
- **Generate** revenue for the province for the proceeds of sales of surplus land.
- **Strengthen** the Town and Province's tourism economy.
- **Increase** the Town and Province's property tax assessment base.
- **Ensure** the Town remains open for business.

### ALIGNING WITH PROVINCIAL PRIORITIES

Supports the Province's budget commitment for infrastructure projects, and is in alignment with the government's priorities of growing tourism, building a stronger economy, building more homes faster, and investing in climate-resilient infrastructure that will ensure municipalities can continue to support future growth.





# DOWNTOWN REDEVELOPMENT MASTER PLAN



## Town of Wasaga Beach

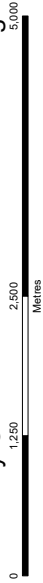


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**Town of Wasaga Beach**  
Provincially Owned Lands Within Town of Wasaga Beach



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