



# Memorandum

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**Date:** September 5, 2019

**To:** Economic Development Advisory Committee

**From:** Economic Development Strategy Sub Committee

**Prepared By:** Jeremy Chan and Tim Hendry

**Subject:** Town of The Blue Mountains Economic Development SWOT Analysis

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The following Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) report is the first step within the development of the Economic Development Strategy for the Town of The Blue Mountains. The primary purpose of conducting the SWOT analysis was to identify and establish alignment on the situational factors currently present within the Town of The Blue Mountains as it relates to Economic Development.

The SWOT analysis was developed in collaboration between Town staff and the EDAC Sub Committee with input and guidance from OMAFRA.

Data within the report was gathered through the following sources: Statistics Canada, OMAFRA Analyst, SGBT Labour Supply Task Force Report, and Townfolio.

## **Desired Outcome & Next Steps**

The desired outcome of this report is to facilitate an open discussion with the Economic Development Advisory Committee regarding the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as identified within this analysis.

Determining our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats within our community is integral in understanding where we are currently, how we can grow, and areas of vulnerability.

Based on information gathered within the SWOT analysis, the EDAC Sub Committee has started the process of identifying Key Pillars/Themes that will create the foundation of the Economic Development Strategy. Update reports will be provided to the committee as appropriate.

## SWOT Analysis Highlights

### Strengths

- Successful four-season tourism destination
- Successful and innovative economic industries and fast economic growth
- Geographic location and natural environment
- Engaged entrepreneurial businesses community
- Proximity to well-developed transportation networks and nearby communities
- High quality of life
- Well-developed active leisure infrastructure
- Unique culture and heritage assets
- Engaged residents, community members, organizations and service clubs
- Access to health and emergency services
- Strong residential growth and development
- Positive relationship with neighbouring municipalities, organizations and government

### Weaknesses

- Lack of 'Open for Business' environment
- Community cohesion and communication
- Challenges with youth retention, employee recruitment and aging-in-place services
- Workforce challenges related to the availability of attainable housing and transportation
- Community identity and branding challenges
- Aging infrastructure and lack of infrastructure

### Opportunities

- Create a true "Open for Business" environment
- Celebrate community pride and showcase achievements
- Develop framework and policies to address workforce development challenges
- Strengthen community brand and identity
- Downtown development and activation opportunities
- Enhance, support and strengthen tourism products
- Residential growth opportunities as an economic driver
- Collaborative opportunities

### Threats

- Lack of 'Open for Business' environment
- Need for economic diversification
- Workforce leakage and out-migration of youth
- Ability to address infrastructure demands to support service-driven economy
- Aging population and associated needs
- External factors beyond control
- Rising real estate prices

## **SWOT Analysis Details**

### Strengths

- **Successful four-season tourism destination**
  - Abundance of four-season recreational activities, year-round events, festivals, and natural environment features that separates The Town of The Blue Mountains from other tourism destinations in Ontario.
  
- **Successful and innovative economic industries and fast economic growth**
  - Robust and diversified service driven economy
  - 14% employment growth between 2015 – 2018
  - Tourism, agriculture, and small business continues to drive the local economy
  
- **Geographic location and natural environment**
  - Natural beauty, diversity of landscape and environmental assets
    - Fortunate to be geographically located between the Niagara Escarpment and the shores of Georgian Bay
    - Unique micro-climate and environment which supports recreation and agriculture
  
- **Engaged entrepreneurial business community**
  - The community is comprised of local independent entrepreneurial businesses that are invested into the overall success of the community
  - A unique blend of local businesses that cater to the latest trends and culture
  
- **Proximity to well-developed transportation networks and nearby communities**
  - Two hours away from the Greater Toronto Area and one hour from Provincial 400 series highway
  - Provincial Highway 26 corridor through the Town with easy access to nearby communities
  - Access to local regional airports

- **High quality of life**
  - Rural location with access to urban amenities offers an excellent work/life balance
  - World class outdoor recreational activities with strong diversification between seasons
  - Active and healthy lifestyle trends within the community
  - Family friendly community that provides recreational and leisure activities for people of all-ages
  - Stable municipal government committed to sustainable community development
  - Active and quality of life focused retirement community
  - Below average Crime Severity Index (CSI) compared to Ontario and Canada
  
- **Well-developed active leisure infrastructure**
  - Well-established trail networks with over 260 kilometers of trails ranging from sidewalks to limestone and natural based trails
  - Strong active transportation links between communities (ex- Georgian Trail and Bruce Trail)
  - Wide range of active leisure options including: cycling, sailing, hiking, camping, downhill skiing, cross country skiing, rock climbing, etc.
  
- **Unique culture and heritage assets**
  - Sheffield Park Black History & Cultural Museum
  - Craigleith Heritage Depot Museum
  - Strong arts and culture community within Clarksburg (Artsburg) and Thornbury
  
- **Engaged residents, community members, organizations and service clubs**
  
- **Access to health and emergency services**
  - Community access to both the Collingwood General & Marine Hospital and the Meaford Hospital
  - Reliable and quick emergency response average time in The Blue Mountains
    - Grey County EMS emergency response time is above or equal to the County average in the Town of The Blue Mountains. ([2018 Response Time Target Performance Plan](#))

- **Strong residential growth and development**
- **Strong relationship with neighbouring municipalities, organizations and government**
  - Collaborating on transportation solutions and attainable housing strategies with Collingwood, Meaford, Grey County, Owen Sound, etc.

## Weaknesses

- **Lack of 'Open for Business' environment**
  - Community NIMBYISM
  - Misalignment of communication between residents, businesses and government
  - Concerns regarding Municipal regulations such as the Sign By-Law
  - Sense of mistrust and collaboration between government, businesses, and industries
  - Low participation and engagement from local businesses on associations
- **Community cohesion and communication**
  - Lack of cohesiveness/communication between Municipal government, BIA, Chamber of Commerce, BMVA, and other associations
- **Challenges with youth retention, employee recruitment and aging-in-place services**
  - Only 9.3% of the population is youth aged 0-14 compared to the Ontario average of 16.4%. ([Statistics Canada, 2016](#))
  - Not enough available workforce to fulfill demand
    - 475 advertised employment opportunities within 25km of Thornbury ([Indeed, 2019](#))
    - Lower average participation rate compared to the Ontario average participation rate
      - The Blue Mountains: 56.1% ([Statistics Canada, 2016](#))
      - Ontario, Canada: 64.7% ([Statistics Canada, 2016](#))
  - With a median age of 57.6, there is only one private nursing and retirement home in the area

- **Workforce challenges**
  - Lack of attainable housing supply
  - Limited availability of public transportation
- **Community identity challenges**
  - Lack of understanding that Blue Mountain Village is in the Town of the Blue Mountains, not Collingwood.
- **Aging infrastructure and lack of infrastructure**
  - Attention should be given to infrastructure investment to ensure well-maintained roads, bridges, sidewalks, and water/sewer infrastructure to support economic development
  - Reliability of internet in rural areas
    - Certain businesses/residents in rural areas do not have access to reliable internet

## Opportunities

- **Create a true “Open for Business” environment**
  - Ensure proactive communication to mitigate community NIMBYISM
  - Continue to foster the development of partnerships between local businesses, committees, and associations
  - Strengthen collaboration opportunities between industries
  - Invest into service delivery-oriented infrastructure
    - High speed internet, public washrooms, parking, sidewalks, bike lanes, sewer & water capacity, etc.
  - Conduct research to better understand target markets and economic development opportunities
- **Celebrate community pride and showcase achievements**
  - Showcase and demonstrate sense of community pride
  - Highlight business success stories and community achievements
  - Celebrate businesses and volunteers with annual award ceremony

- **Develop framework and policies to address workforce development challenges**
  - Proactively support the development of attainable housing stock within the municipality
  - Expand public transit service to connect communities and mobilize workforce
  
- **Strengthen community brand and identity**
  - Increased brand recognition and community awareness
  - Strengthened community cohesion
  
- **Downtown development and activation opportunities**
  - Opportunities to improve key downtown areas through façade improvements, streetscaping, activation, festivals, and events
  
- **Enhance, support and strengthen tourism products**
  - Invest, and participate in the strengthening and development of experiential tourism products and experiences
  
- **Residential growth opportunities as an economic driver**
  - Land availability for new residents
  - Attracting new full-time residents ensures a local tourism driven economy
  
- **Collaborative opportunities**
  - A variety of great options to work all industry/business/marketing stakeholders

# Threats

- **Lack of 'Open for Business' environment**

- Community NIMBYISM
- Misalignment of communication between residents, businesses and government
- Concerns regarding Municipal regulations such as the Sign By-Law
- Sense of mistrust and collaboration between government, businesses, and industries
- Low participation and engagement from local businesses on associations

- **Need for economic diversification**

- Accommodation and Food accounts for 27% of total employment, followed by Retail at 9%, and Agriculture at 6.3%.
- There is potential for major consequences if a key industry declines or faces hardships

- **Workforce leakage and out-migration of youth**

- Employees are working in The Blue Mountains area but living, and spending money in other communities
- Lack of full-time career options for young professionals

- **Ability to address infrastructure demands to support service-driven economy**

- Parking issues throughout the community
- Public restroom availability in tourism areas such as downtown Thornbury
- High speed internet connectivity in all areas of the Town
- Roads and signage to help tourists navigate around Town
- Accessibility improvements

- **Aging population and associated needs**

- Median age in the Town of The Blue Mountains is 57.6 compared to Provincial average of 39.8 ([Townfolio, 2017](#))
  - Above average concentration of all age groups over 50
  - 2,310 are people expected to retire within the next 10 years ([Townfolio, 2017](#))



- **External factors beyond control**
  - Health of Canadian and global economies
  - Climate change and global warming
  - Provincial and Federal regulations and legislation
  
- **Rising real estate prices**
  - Real estate prices are continuing to increase at a rapid pace
    - Average sale price of single family detached home: \$884,556 ([Royal LePage, 2019](#))
    - Average sale price of condo: \$437,180 ([Royal LePage, 2019](#))
    - Median total household income: \$78,490 ([Statistics Canada, 2016](#))
  - Young professionals and families looking to relocate may overlook The Town of The Blue Mountains due to the availability and affordability of housing