



MUNICIPALITY OF HASTINGS HIGHLANDS FIRST IMPRESSION COMMUNITY EXCHANGE (FICE) REPORT 2015

In partnership with Muskoka Lakes with assistance from OMAFRA



FORMAT OF REPORT REVISED, IDENTIFIERS REMOVED

FIRST IMPRESSION COMMUNITY EXCHANGE (FICE) 2015

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VISITING TEAM PROFILE:

(60+) Female from Bala,

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(50+) Male + Female from Bala, physically challenged

(35+) Male & Female from Bala,

Note: Visits occurred summer and early fall of 2015

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BEFORE YOU VISITED THE COMMUNITY

What was your impression of the community before your visit? What were you expecting to see? Please comment on what you knew about this community.

- Knew nothing about them, had heard they were near Bancroft but smaller, and I didn't like Bancroft
- Thought people would be moderately friendly but not overly so
- Expecting to find small villages that rely heavily on tourism/seasonal visitors
- Very little knowledge
- Inspiring hamlet/cottage community
- Thought logging would be a primary industry
- One participant booked accommodation and had to cancel, and lost \$55 for cancelling in 'off-season' so left with a really poor first impression without even visiting

How easy was it to get information by internet, mail and telephone about the community you visited?

- Business Association has excellent site, extremely detailed. The place to go to find out anything and everything
- Didn't see a lot of information available on realtor sites
- Google Earth didn't reveal a lot
- If you miss business association there's almost nothing. No helpful information on TripAdvisor or Wikipedia - dry and unhelpful (culture paragraph was good)
- Information is not easy to find about the community.
- Information on accommodations and restaurants was hard to locate.

Are you satisfied with the quality of information you received?

- Business association website was great
- No helpful information on TripAdvisor or Wikipedia, which was dry and unhelpful (culture paragraph was good)
- Action adventure tour company website was very detailed in what attractions were in the area on their website

If you received information by mail, did the information arrive in a timely fashion?

Comment on the community's online materials and information.

- Hastings Highlands website is more business focused. Must continue Google-ing for more information if you are interested in visiting for tourism purposes.
- Township website was nice, but specifically lacked information for visitors
- North Hastings website also had good information on attractions (more general, not specific to Hastings Highlands)
- Hastings County had a slick business focused website targeting business attraction
- Town website was very uninformative as there was not a lot of information on services and facilities

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VISIT ATMOSPHERE

August and September, Weather From hot and sunny to pouring rain

Time spent in the community: from 5 hours to 28 hours

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

After taking a five-minute drive through the community without stopping, what was your first impression?

- The scenery is extremely beautiful - lakes, trees, and big sky
- Struck us as an art/antique community at first, but really trails around Lake St. Peter really got our attention
- Very nice drive there. Drove through 2 entranceways, the 648 S, and through Bancroft. There is potential for visitors to get sucked into Haliburton and Bancroft
- Great community centre
- Clean and well-kept housing
- Good snowmobile and ATV trail, much of it on an abandoned railroad line so very smooth and flat
- Seeing trails from the road made me want to find something to rent and go in to explore. This would be exciting for the ideal target market (outdoor lovers). Trails were marketed but there is a lot of competition in the trail tourism marketplace. Part of the user experience is to travel around to different experience, so position experience as elite and second to none
- Trails and adventure tourism should be their identity for tourism.
- Adventure/Activity rich area
- Maynooth, didn't have great curb appeal, didn't find a real reason to stop there, municipal building looked nice and inviting
- I immediately started making plans to leave - I'm afraid this place is a dive because it looks run down
- Turned into where I was staying, I was afraid to turn in because accommodator's driveway was washed out - took courage
- So much untouched or reforested areas – this place has the Algonquin Park vibe
- Houses were in phenomenal condition, very well maintained
- I was counting the abandoned buildings in Maynooth
- Bird's Creek was very active and alive
- Trailer parks were seasonal, and empty during the week
- The first thing that stood out over the entire area was the great deal of pride that residents take in the maintenance of their homes and properties. Houses are in good repair and properties are well-kept and attractive to the eye.
- In terms of some infrastructure that your average resident would use occasionally (hospitals, clinics), or more frequently (grocery stores, banks, recreational facilities), most were to be found in Bancroft. That's the nature of life in smaller towns and we didn't see that as any detriment to people wanting to settle in the area.
- Except for Maynooth and Bird's Creek, mostly just highway with little else to see/stop

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ENTERING THE COMMUNITY

How favourable an impression of the community did the entrances provide?

On highway from Algonquin, lots of overhead wire signs, lots of construction so wasn't as enjoyable as it could be

- Coming from 127, Hastings Highlands signs were small, we drove right by one
- Signs across the whole township didn't match
- The community park sign was good
- The highway is fast going through these communities - hard to even turn around on these streets
- Community on way to Lake St. Peter (Maple Leaf) was very small - maybe 7 houses with gas station and chip stand, need more businesses that would get people to stop
- Landscaping could be done
- Bird's Creek was very active and alive
- Nice family feel to it

Specific signage:

- To Maynooth, sign was very nice - needs repainting
- Baptiste road sign was nice but overgrown
- Baptiste village sign was peeling away as we were leaving

Other types of entrances such as airport, bus terminals, passenger rail and/or harbour:

- None noted

Comments:

Rating of community entrances as a whole: 5 OUT OF 10 (10 is excellent)

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HOUSING AND RESIDENTIAL AREAS

Comment on the overall quality, affordability, and availability of housing in the community?

- Housing is reflection of small town area - seems adequate, not extensive
- Homes are simple, yet nice, mostly. Reflect the country lifestyle which is part of the areas strengths
- Outside of downtown Maynooth houses were very well kept
- Some Maynooth housing was not appealing, and at times looked disheveled or abandoned
- There were some junky homes, however, all communities seem to have these
- Out of downtown there were some very kept houses
- They don't seem like a community - ones that live in town needed to be there to walk to work and some of their houses seemed to be less well maintained while seasonal/outside's houses were well kept, disconnection between community (who's got the money to spend it)
- Not big enough for an apartment building, perhaps some duplexes for smaller families/singles
- Prices for housing are reasonable, even cheap right now
- Several mobile home parks that were very affordable and nice
- Trailer parks were seasonal, and empty during the week
- Bird's Creek housing is clean and crisp - nice

Mix of housing to suit a variety of income levels:

- Limited range of housing - not a lot of places for sale, typically \$130-200 thousand, highest was \$600,000s, couple of 300,000s

What were the most appealing features of the housing in this community and why:

- Where people cared, they captured the rural charm of the area
- Not big enough for an apartment building, perhaps some duplexes for smaller families/singles
- Prices for housing are reasonable, even cheap right now
- Several mobile home parks that were very affordable and nice
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Mix of housing to suit a variety of income levels:

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What were the most appealing features of the housing in this community and why:

- Where people cared, they captured the rural charm of the area

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What were the least appealing features of housing in the community and why:

- Some houses in Maynooth were not well kept

Comment on the quality and availability of residential infrastructure (e.g. roads, sidewalks, lighting, public transportation, green space and indicators of environmentally conscious practices).

- Bird's Creek has a well-used park and playground – saw grandparents and young ones using

Overall rating of housing and residential areas, by type of housing and overall appeal:

Quality Type of Housing (rate 1 – 10)	
Existing/Older Homes	7
Senior Citizen Housing	N/A
New Construction	N/A
Apartments/Rental Housing	N/A

Overall appeal of housing for (rate 1 – 10)	
Single young adults	5
Young families	6
Middle income	5
Senior citizen	5
Upscale/professional	3

EDUCATION

Pre-school/Daycare:

- Didn't see any daycares

Primary/Elementary:

- Elementary school looked great (Bird's Creek and Maynooth)

High School or College/University:

Comments about education services in the community:

- One resident felt very safe that children could walk to school in Bird's Creek

Availability and appearance of schools:

Ease of locating the school(s):

- School was easy to locate

Programs or services that stand out:

- Great library programs for kids and seniors

Comments:

HEALTH, SOCIAL AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

Healthcare Facilities

- Everything is in Bancroft - doctors, health, long term care

Hospitals in the community:

Physician and dentist offices and clinics:

Long-term care and nursing home facilities:

Other health services (e.g., chiropractor, physiotherapy, naturopath, massage):

- There was a surprising amount of alternative remedies available, farmers market had many natural remedies and small health food store (Health food store) was delicious 'best lemonade I've ever had'

Ease of locating these facilities:

- Everything is in Bancroft - doctors, health, long term care

Residents (young and old) thoughts about the quality and availability of healthcare facility and services:

- Didn't seem to mind travelling to Bancroft
- If needed 'they take care of their own'

Social and Support Services

- Everything is in Bancroft

Social services (e.g., day care, senior's centre, counselling):

- Veteran's Hall apparently still operational

Types of not-for-profit organizations and clubs:

- Business association seems motivated and aspirational

Ease of locating these services/organizations:

Comments:

Emergency Services

Adequacy of fire, ambulance and policing services:

- Maynooth has a fire hall
- Proud of volunteer firefighters - they do a great job was sentiment

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Comments:

DOWNTOWN

- Appearance is cute and welcoming, yet very small but that's part of the charm
- Some storefronts were appalling and crumbling on the outside – yet several times I was quite surprised (in a good way) when I walked inside.
- Much more appealing/interesting when you went inside – real opportunity for façade improvement.
- General store was great.
- 90% downtown business owned by women

Variety of shopping:

- Shops were eclectic and funky
- There were a lot of antique stores, and they were all similar and this does not differentiate this community from any other in Ontario
- Very little shopping beyond art and antiques
- There were several abandoned stores
- No mix of anything, no hairdressers, nothing for the residents, no realtor

Customer service:

- Everyone was very friendly
- Store owners were tired at the end of season
- Potter was fantastic
- Everyone was very friendly
- There were a lot of businesses closed on the Monday. Most people seem to take Monday/Tuesday as their weekend and close because they are not big enough and need the day off. Hiring staff, if feasible, might address this.
- On Maynooth Madness weekend, every business closed at 4pm (general store 4 or 5), gas station (at 6)
- Only chip wagon is open until 7pm

Window displays:

- Mostly just their stuff in their windows, no theme

Signage:

- Lots of signs on the doors of stores advertising all sorts of stuff going on in the area, all advertising Maynooth Madness (even LCBO), this was great and we appreciated the community spirit
- Community centre had clearly marked sign with phone number to book it
- Lots of advertising of cultural events in the downtown
- Arlington with its purple colour spiced up the downtown, otherwise grey and drab
- Signage was generally easy to see – many signs that say antiques
- Everyone in town had local events and maps posted everywhere - impressed by graphic design for those
- There were also many signs that were hand written, or made using electrical tape, which was much less appealing

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Variety and quality of merchandise:

- There were a lot of antique stores, and they were all similar and this does not differentiate this community from any other in Ontario.

Quality and availability of parking:

- Lots of parking in downtown

Quality (e.g., appearance, adequacy, etc.) of lighting:

- Lighting was adequate but not appealing due to all the overhead wires
- Appeared to be standard roadway lighting

Ease of locating the downtown area:

- Easy to locate - that is the only 'downtown', hard to miss on highways 127 and 62
- Money and booze were central and easy to find

Potential for the downtown to play a greater role in tourism:

- Can play a larger role in tourism, the corner at 62 and 127 needs to be developed, need to focus on the target market (particularly outdoor enthusiasts and/or art/free spirits types) to develop further if they fixed up frontage it would definitely draw people in.
- Communities outside of Maynooth best options for development would be a gas station/general store combination
- Needed to be conscious of gas/washrooms due to sparseness
- Trails are part of the existing tourism infrastructure and that theme should be evident in downtown space
- Trails are fantastic - marked for use - Trail map defines use, linked with greater trail system (Eastern Ontario) - someone is making money on these opportunities but it's not Hastings Highlands. Need to capture tourists to spend money in Town and not in Bancroft - today snowmobilers can't even get a meal in town - except for health food store
- Opportunity to embrace the eclectic, artistic, freedom lifestyles to drive tourism. The whole downtown should be eclectic tie-dyed, rural hippie town, big swirls - reminds of Nimbin, Australia as a potential model – 'embrace your hippie weirdness' - if it's restored and vintage that's right up the hippie alley
- Infrastructure is not set up to capture market of tourists
- Need a restaurant to draw people in to become the heart of the community
- #nowheremoment - liked the hashtag from tourism- 875 posts - very catchy - but had to dig for it - all posts are adventure based (not necessarily for Hastings Highlands but could be customized)
- Concerns around availability of food - there are few restaurants - where can I eat - all referred out to Bancroft
- Need a place to get a decent cup of coffee
- Gallery 62, was a beautiful building that was empty and could become a tourism hub

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- Can experience downtown Maynooth in 1-2 hours, would benefit from additional anchoring activities (such as link to outdoors)

Desirability to live downtown:

- Most people seem to live in downtown area
- I would rather live in the more rural, rather than downtown area of municipality

Rating of the overall impression of the downtown: 6 out of 10 (10 is excellent)

BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

- Perception was there was very little employment (from residents) in HH

Retail

Mix of retail shopping:

- No mix of stores, only art and antiques
- Some groceries in the local general store
- Unusual to see so many galleries
- Only shopping was Maynooth
- No real shopping areas
- All downtown stores are owned and operated locally
- Small antique stores and second hand stores, galleries, general store, bakery and restaurant
- Antique stores and galleries
- Limited Food
- Well-priced

Overall appearance:

- Appearance is charming, but a little tired at times

Variety of shopping and merchandizing:

- Unusual to see so many galleries
- Unusual – fun antique and second hand stores
- Pottery, butter tart, and art store were all pleasant
- Arlington provides cultural ‘experience’ more than expected
- Potter producing fine wares and nice art gallery were all unexpected
- Most shops are on highway which is busy, the best opportunity would be to cater to highway traffic, so should focus on gas, food
- The combination of stores makes it eclectic
- Arlington anchors local cultural scene
- Feels like nascent cultural scene but 1st impression does not convey this
- I loved walking into Wildwood because of its cleanliness and lack of clutter, the Shed too
- Very few places to eat
- Missing were clothing stores and real estate

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Customer service:

- Customer service was fantastic!
- Very nice and helpful people
- Customer service is honest and very polite
- Customer service was good

Goods do local residents appear to need to travel to surrounding communities to buy?

- Need to travel to buy food, clothes, and health care
- Residents need - Groceries, drugs, barber hair dresser
- Most residents rely on Bancroft and don't seem to mind
- People need to travel for almost everything
- Hair dresser and Leon's only in Bancroft
- Variety is limited
- Bancroft was a common song

Stores or services were missing that you would expect to find?

- Missing services – grocery and gas
- No professional services
- Food – no grocery stores or diner restaurants, how can people live here?

Stores you would travel 40 k for?

- No stores for 40 k
- Wildwood might be worth the 40 k drive
- Antiques and 2nd hand
- Arlington
- Would travel for trails or antiques

Commercial and Professional Businesses

Convenience of bank and ATM locations:

- One bank – did not see any ATMs
- Scotiabank and LCBO in Maynooth were easy to find
- Very convenient bank location, centrally located

Convenience of bank hours of service:

- Teller hours could be more convenient, seemed limited but likely reflects demand

Types of commercial businesses serve the local community (e.g., high-speed internet provider):

Availability of other professional services (e.g., accounting, legal, etc.):

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- Bank appeared to be the only professional service

Professional services that are missing:

- Several services are missing but a reflection of the size of the area and nearby Bancroft
- Missing – grocery, hospital, professional services (Bancroft)
- Most residents use Bancroft for doctors and legal
- Missing all services

Industry

- Cottaging and trails seem to bring the majority of people, antiques/art secondary appeal
- Proximity to Algonquin is a draw
- Great snowmobile trails for the winter but access part of heritage trail
- Logging trucks
- Women working in Bancroft

Major industrial sectors in the community (e.g., manufacturing, construction, transportation):

- Main economic driver seems to be logging/forestry and art galleries
- Lumber and tourism
- Logging is a declining sector, arts play a role,
- Gravel pit/quarry
- Tourism not as important as I thought

Major employers in the community:

- Maynooth quarry is the major employer outside of small shops
- Seems very few businesses employ others, rather survive on running their own business outside of bank of LCBO

Major types of manufacturing in the community:

Major types of primary industry in the community (e.g. agriculture, fishing, mining, etc):

Noticeable dependence on any one type of industry:

Industrial park or serviced land where industries could locate or expand:

Appearance/maintenance of industrial facilities:

Community's desirability as a location for industrial development:

- Not desirable for industrial development

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

Convenience of municipal office locations:

- Lovely building, nice people sent us to community board down the street, which was blank (when people went the next week was filled)
- Great bike rack
- Beautiful gymnasium with new sound system being put in (link to arts opportunity)
- Very nice municipal office, library, gymnasium
- Municipal office and library well located. Found out about summer programs and business, best restaurant, best fudge, housing costs at the municipal office
- Spoke to 4 different people, general impression, growth is slow, folks are trying, festivals in the fall help bring people to the area
- Electronic sign was not noticeable, I was in front of it before I realized it was a library

Information such as Community Brochure/Guide, Business Directory, Community Profile:

- Maynooth business brochures were available, but no information available on tourism
- Noticed the main board at gas station parking lot
- Municipal brochures could be better organized

Availability of information on the website:

- More business and resident focused, virtually no tourism information, could be more detailed
- Business directory appears to contain listings from outside of Hastings Highlands

Availability of contact information and location of the Business Improvement Association on the website:

Ability to find adequate information to make informed retail, commercial and/or industrial:

- Like rack for planning applications and brochures
- Municipal brochures could be better organized

Public Infrastructure and Municipal Services

Public Transportation:

- No apparent public transportation

Sidewalks, Streets, Drinking Fountains, Benches, etc.:

- Sidewalks, streetscape in rough shapes
- Bench at municipal building

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- No crosswalks, Sidewalks in disrepair
- Unkempt and disheveled, grey, lots of power wires
- Very few garbage bins in Maynooth had to carry to gas station
- Sidewalks in downtown Maynooth were not good, no crosswalks - the sidewalks were actually dangerous
- Garbage was an issue – they stopped picking up garbage locally in Maynooth
- Only bench in town located outside of Town Hall

Landscaping, Trees:

- Not very much landscaping, other than at municipal building

Public Restrooms, Pay Phones, Public Internet Access:

- High speed available locally and through Honey Doo in Lake St. Peter
- Public washrooms limited for tourist town
- Well signed, public washroom
- Public parks and restrooms seem to be enough at Lake St. Peter
- Public washroom at municipal building
- Free Wi-Fi at municipal office
- High-speed for free available throughout the downtown - with password

Street Signage, Lighting:

- Signage/banner was excellent
- Street signage and lighting were ok
- Not great signage

Conflicting land uses in the community (e.g., a residential subdivision next to a pulp mill):

Appropriate or inappropriate land-use (e.g., commercial, residential, green space, etc.):

Traffic or pedestrian congestion:

- Construction made the community a bit inaccessible

General accessibility of community facilities and infrastructure for individuals with disabilities:

- One negative thing we became quite familiar with was the lack of accommodation for the disabled. There were a number of buildings/stores which we were completely unable to enter because of the use of a walker and some we could go in only with difficulty. The problems could be solved in most cases with wheel chair ramps beside existing stairs or possibly the use of alternate entrances/exits.
- Accessibility is near impossible - residents say they take care of themselves, but not accessible to tourists with disability

TOURISM, ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Strength of tourism sector:

- Strongest potential for outdoor tourism is at Lake St Peter
- There are a few gems – Wildwood, theatre in Maynooth, 1st store was quaint, sidewalks and streetscaping would help
- Hippie or free spirit vibe offers potential for future development – unique value proposition, hidden by drab exteriors, love banners on light post and BIA brochure, ‘double down on the funk’
- Seems that Bancroft would catch most of the tourism money
- Capitalize on the eccentric-ness, diversity, and uniqueness of the town
- Tourism relies on the local lakes, well known festival on labour day weekend
- Loved the banners
- Trails provide yearlong tourism opportunities, but there are no outfitters and tourists are staying Bancroft

Community slogan/brand:

- Community slogan sets yourself up for competition in Ontario ‘Beautiful by nature’ maybe focus on antiques and art galleries with nature

Well known attraction, event or festival:

- Maynooth Madness seems “disconnected from this area or development”, Mud Dawgs event seemed to attract a different crowd, from outside of the community that were not patronizing stores and attractions in the community, rather just following the Mud Dawg circuit from community to community.

Community events that could be expanded and/or developed to become tourist attractions:

Attractions (natural or man-made) that could be developed to draw tourists:

- Lodging, food, basic shopping, outfitting would be a major opportunity as there appear to be none in the area
- Key tourism elements are trails, cross country ski, snowshoeing,
- Community is all about the park and the trails

Underdeveloped attractions:

- Promote more local beaches, trails, and natural attractions
- The empty home across from Town Hall – Gallery 62
- Hostel is purple
- The stores, many have real appeal on the inside, just need more draw on outside
- Some sprucing up of a few businesses in Maynooth
- Need more emphasis on trails for ATV, snowmobiles and hikers

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- As someone who has always been interested in the history of any area I visit, I was disappointed that very little effort seems to have been made showcase or even recognize the history of the area. Despite the number of older structures with, I am sure, interesting histories; I didn't even see a single historical plaque about those. I would suggest that the formation of a historical committee would be easily able to find ways to highlight some area history.
- Should have more history/information in/on the trails
- Maynooth is all about trails and adventure, need to start political agenda that invite and educate business owners and create great reward for a touring-type outfitters, there's money and revenue in that - create spin off in local economy + employment
- Lakes and rolling hills were beautiful, didn't see any well-marked public access to beaches
- Vintage stores were good and should build on antiques
- They need to fix the façades and go all the way to embrace alternatives – Arlington is setting the trend as is the Business Association brochure

Services for Tourists

- Most appealing were the trails and waterways
- Least appealing was the lack of services to access trails and waterways
- Town hall had blank outdoor sign
- Well signed and staff
- People are big community boosters

Visitor's Centre, Chamber of Commerce office, or other facility:

- Maynooth had a great information centre at municipal office and the library staff were very helpful
- No Chamber or visitor centre
- Chamber is in Bancroft – dreadful exterior, helpful staff, staff at Chamber could be more well-versed on Hastings Highlands

Tourism staff, facilities, location, signage, marketing material, maps, etc.:

- Visitor board empty on August 20
- Maps and business guides available in most stores, was impressive
- No promotion from local tourism attractions
- Visitor information board was empty
- One week later, tourism board was full and website + booklet summarized area information well
- Everyone loved and brought back the Maynooth map/guide – thought the cover represented the hippie vibe
- Community board - empty in season, full in the off season
- Community information is all mixed up together
- Tourism info booth at Maynooth Madness was prominent and well-signed and staffed with friendly help

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Quality and availability of public restrooms:

- Couldn't find washrooms, in restaurants only
- Good washrooms in town hall
- Restrooms available and signed

Quality and appearance of existing tourist attractions:

- No maps of trails or beaches

Tourism businesses (group tour operators, bus/rail tours, boat rentals etc.):

- Tourism business is limited to handful of individuals
- Seems most tourists would arrive prepared and ready to use available resources with their own recreational equipment

Restaurants and Accommodations

Eateries, restaurants, etc. that could cater to tourists:

- Few eateries and they close very early
- Healthy café offers different fare
- Chip wagon only place to eat from 4-7 on a Saturday night
- Not many restaurants found in Bird's Creek, a couple in Maynooth
- Honey Doo was eclectic
- Butter tarts excellent
- Limited places to eat, limited variety
- Not a lot of choice to eat

Facilities that can accommodate a conference and/or a large number of visitors:

- Limited lodging, cottage rentals, hostel, BnBs, not many choices

Recommended places to stay or eat:

- Local residents recommended leaving the community to eat elsewhere
- Resident n Baptise said go to Bancroft for lunch
- Go to Bancroft
- Residents recommend Chip Truck

PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Public Recreation Facilities:

- Library and community gym very appealing
- Community centres were well kept and clean on the outside and booking numbers were well-posted – Muskoka should do the same
- New gym being built in Maynooth municipal office
- Lake St. Peter community centre is open just the long weekend
- Community centre was crisp/well kept
- Everyone we spoke to was saying Bancroft
- I liked the layout - Walk in, library on left, and public offices ('rose between two thorns) on right, gymnasiums for kids summer programs, got a grant to do some technology related activities (will have movie nights and theatre)

Private Recreation Facilities:

Parks:

- Bird's Creek park looked awesome
- Hard to know where parks were located
- Maynooth park seems older
- Lake St. Peter camping and park trails – atv, snowmobile, hiking
- All parks have alcohol ban on 'long weekends' - other weekends ok

Residents' thoughts regarding the availability of community events:

- Maynooth Madness (Loggers Games) used to be a great festival, but now appears to suffer from volunteer burnout.

Popular community events:

- Attended Farmer's Market – great!
- Attended Maynooth Madness, which was interesting but not well-attended. Mud Dawgs seemed disconnected from the community.

Entertainment options:

- Entertainment at the inn in Maynooth

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- Not many choices therefore those interested in trails, outdoors, antiques would love this place
- Regular and interesting entertainment at the Arlington

Residents thought regarding availability of entertainment options:

Nightlife:

- No nightlife
- Theatre needed
- Music at the hostel, vibrant nightlife at the hostel

Recreation activities and facilities:

Comments:

- All needed better signage
- Library has children and senior's programs which was good
- Build on the eclectic mix of music and artists
- Bird's Creek facilities were great and very attractive
- Seniors have limited options, just a couple of programs at the library/municipal building

Rating of the overall suitability of facilities for each of the following groups:

overall suitability (rate 1 – 10)	
Children (13 and under)	4, 5, 7
Families	6, 4, 5, 7
Teens	4, 1, 5, 6.5
Singles, young adults	6, 3, 5, 6
Senior citizens	6, 5, 6
Newcomers	6, 5, 5, 6

CULTURE AND HERITAGE

- Didn't seem to be a cultural centre

Availability and maintenance of heritage buildings:

- Gallery 62 building has potential
- Downtown is grey, crumbling and looks like an abandoned Northern Town
- Several plaques to tell the area's history, the one in front of library on the building of the highway was particularly interesting
- Arlington has arresting purple paint job – eye opening
- The inn had unique architecture and colour

Number, appearance, and selection of religious buildings in the community:

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- Several tidy churches
- Multiple churches all in good condition, well maintained and clean but not outstanding
- Did not notice any religious buildings
- Churches also very involved doing different programming

Outstanding architectural or design features of religious buildings:

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Businesses and retail specializing in reused or organic merchandise:

- 2nd hand, vintage, and antique stores

Advertisements, billboards and/or fliers advocating recycling, green energy or other “green” practices: Evidence of recycling (curb side recycling, recycling bins throughout the community, availability of reusable bags):

- Recycling bins at community events

Use of public transportation: did not appear to be any

Evidence of using sources of alternative energy: did not see any

Local attitudes about environmental sustainability and “green” practices:

- Disconnection between those who live here and have moved here (more hippie vibe)

WELCOMING COMMUNITY (Newcomers are defined as individuals, families and immigrants who come to live and/or work in the community.)

- It would be a tough go for newcomers due to lack of services and ethnic diversity
- Open and friendly to tourists
- Impressively open to alternative lifestyles
- Welcoming to diverse populations, including GLBT
- There is a gay population and the town is very accepting, speaks to live and let live culture

Employment or job placement services:

- Little employment opportunity

Translation services:

Services or businesses operated by newcomers:

Legal services:

Ethnic diverse population downtown:

- No visible evidence of ethnic diversity

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Immigration services:

Housing information:

Community or youth centres: Community centres were well kept and clean on the outside

WRAP-UP Perception versus Impression

Was your perception prior to the visit accurate?

- First impression was of a struggling, resource-based town which was somewhat true, with time it becomes apparent there is a friendly, slightly off-kilter, alternative community, highly proud and motivated to improve
- Perception was there was more to do than what there really was, except for the trails

In what ways was the community different from what you expected?

- I was gradually drawn in by the warmth and uniqueness of the town
- Expected to visit 5 communities, sense of community was in Maynooth and somewhat Bird's Creek, others were mostly highway communities
- Much more quirky and interesting than expected
- It was a good day but as much as I expected
- I was expecting a small town and villages. The Maynooth downtown was worse than what I was expecting.
- Trails were more interesting and exciting than first believed

Did the information you collected prior to the visit accurately reflect what you observed/experienced? Why or why not?

- Prior information presented a more thriving community

Community Residents

Were community residents knowledgeable about their community?

- Community residents were knowledgeable and protective of the community and mostly positive
- Overall the people are extremely friendly and sometimes shy
- Most often heard you have to go to Bancroft
- Lots of businesses are for sale if you'd like to buy

Did they refer you to someone else who would help? If yes, who?

- Residents and business owners seem to be more individual than community based
- Seems everyone is doing their own thing to survive or are retired and not connected to the community

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In general, did residents you spoke with have a positive or negative attitude toward their community? Why? Did you sense community pride?

- Residents had a sense of pride
- Things are picking up slowly
- We really are hoping to grow tourism
- Most often heard you have to go to Bancroft
- In talking to individuals during our stay, this pride was certainly reflected in their attitudes. They were happy to tell us about the area, spoke of it in glowing terms, and seemed genuinely happy that we were thinking of moving to the area. This atmosphere of prosperity and friendliness would be a draw to anyone looking to move to the area, be they seniors or otherwise.
- From residents there was the impression that they want to be the next Muskoka and I believe they currently have a simplified version of what we have here
- People recommend you don't stay at the Arlington

Did residents identify any particular issues to be of major concern (e.g., safety)?

- Garbage and construction were identified as issues as concern
- An issue encountered was how some residents would campaign against each other's businesses, to each other and to tourists based on personal conflict

Senses:

Taste

Was there any specialty food item, bakery, restaurant or candy store that you will remember?

- Butter tarts X 4 (but they were closed x 1)
- A bag of chips I panic-bought to have for dinner because everything was closed

Smell

Is there a scent that characterizes the community?

- Fresh air!

Sight

Was there a colourful or striking feature that made an impression on you?

- Old and run down
- Funky signs
- Wild flowers
- Wildwood
- Arlington – colourful and striking – made an impression
- Grey facades
- Big sky and beautiful country lakes
- Beautiful rolling hills, very scenic

Sound

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What sounds did you hear? Please comment on the level of noise in the community.

- Quiet X 3
- Peaceful and mellow
- Fine
- Busy highway, problem pulling over

Other

How would you describe the overall environmental health of the community (e.g., air quality, litter, noise pollution, etc.)?

- Excellent
- Very little garbage and litter
- Had the impression of clean air because of the scenery

What if anything, did you experience that had a strongly negative or positive impact on the way the community felt to you? Be specific.

- Very old and run down in the feeling of downtown
- Local people seemed to struggle
- A fun place with huge potential –must get better at showing the vision of how to experience the area
- Evening at the campfire @ the Arlington
- Conversation with the potter at the pottery shop
- Mostly highway except for Maynooth and Bird's Creek

About this Community

What is the most outstanding feature of this community?

Ultimately, the beautiful outdoors, but the following were also mentioned:

- Year round trails, water, touring land
- The Arlington
- Because of the rolling hills this would be a spectacular fall drive and could be combined with festivals
- Snowmobile trail system looks very good (but it appears the only accommodation might be in Bancroft at that time of year)
- Municipal building and office were very attractive and easy to locate.
- Library was great and offered many resources
- Lake St. Peter's Beauty

What will you remember most about this community six months from now (positive or negative)?

- Me and the guys need to come back and explore the trails on dirt bikes
- The Arlington

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- Great funky junk stores
- The unattractive downtown – there was nothing that would attract me to come back to the area
- Fireplace in the library

What local restaurant, specialty shop or attraction would bring you back to this community in the near future?

- No shops or restaurants on their own would be enough to bring us back, the trails would be the attraction
- The Arlington
- Algonquin Gourmet Butter Tarts

Would you consider this a suitable location for:

A young family?

- Yes in BC and Maynooth, local school has a community feeling
- Yes, in all seasons for camping and affordable cottage rentals (to visit)
- Challenge is there are no apparent jobs available

A retired person?

- Yes – if you were self-supporting
- Yes, available to live on a lake, seems like a good place to relax
- Yes in Maynooth or Bird's Creek, close to Bancroft but slower paced, businesses are reasonable
- Yes, only passing through, not enough to do if they are renting but very affordable

Young, single adult?

- No
- Few jobs, no nightlife
- No, not enough activity
- Yes, only passing through, not enough to do if they are renting but very affordable

A tourist?

- Yes
- Possible for the purposes of a cottage on the water
- Yes, very beautiful area, but would recommend staying at the lodge
- Yes, only passing through, not enough to do if they are renting but very affordable

A new retail or service business?

- With a grant
- Maybe, high risk, but definitely some areas are lacking businesses
- No most businesses struggle and most are not open in the winter
- Yes, potential for outfitting services, lodging, food, and beverage

A new manufacturing business?

- Both a long haul

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- No need more infrastructure to support it
- Not sure

A new immigrant?

- No, not enough services or diversity

Five positive things you observed about this community

- 1. Positive friendly attitude** - The kind people/friendly people/friendly service from local business owners/friendliness/outgoing, friendly operators
- 2. The beautiful landscape** - Beautiful landscape/awesome trails/Lake St. Peter and the provincial park there/great lakes
- 3. Public buildings and spaces** - Municipal office and library are great/Maynooth Community Park sign/Great municipal building and library, acts as central hub/Bird's Creek park
- 4. Pride** – sense of community/pride
- 5. Small town charm** – quaintness, affordable, cash and LCBO find you before you find them

Three potential opportunities available to the community:

- 1. Better marketing and servicing of outdoor tourism assets** - Market and support better trail adventure experiences over other places, tourism for Lake St. Peter, Maynooth fall tours of rolling hills, with photography classes, maps of trails, outfitting for all things trail and adventure
- 2. Downtown Maynooth revival** – capitalize on existing cultural assets (such as artists, music at the Arlington, Gallery 62 building) and expand on free spirit vibe to bring revival together with colourful façade and signage improvement. Potential to establish a theatre.
- 3. Attraction of services and retail for residents and tourists** – additional accommodation, grocery and convenience stores, year round lodging and restaurant choices, more variety of business

Five biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community:

- 1. Proximity to Bancroft** – Bancroft seems to pull the majority of visitor dollars, area relates mostly to Bancroft, refers traffic to Bancroft
- 2. Lack of curb appeal of Maynooth** – investment needed in streetscaping and downtown appearance, lacking variety of retail and service, at times housing appears unkempt

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3. Limited and seasonal nature of employment – limited opportunities for young adults, jobs, limited development, seasonal businesses, businesses that hire sustainable, year-round positions needed, slow growth

4. Location on highways – The highways are busy, must create a value proposition for tourists (and potential residents and businesses) to stop and explore your fantastic community.

5. Lack of passion in celebrating your assets – You have a great trail system and outdoor infrastructure, wonderful artists and unique stores, but there is little information available to the public about all these great things. Need to create some tourism focused marketing materials to really showcase the region and attract people from the outside in. Build on great Business Association guide.

Looking at tomorrow...

Which action would you recommend that this community take on right away (quick win)?

- Increase volume of people coming to trails by developing an exciting social media and online presence around that - spend money on SEO/social media (hashtags - gain more traffic, make them well aware) - can even be a joke at first 'not a lot of places to eat but ...'. This will create a measurable online experience. The municipal website is boring, primes you for a boring town
- Volunteer cleanup day - Downtown needs to clean up, there's garbage and broken sidewalks/crumbling infrastructure, which could be improved through some community cleanup efforts

Look forward three years...

What would you like to see changed in this community? or remain the same?

- Develop marketing to become the Whistler of trails - world class spot for hiking/biking/riding/snowmobiling
- Must create by-laws to improve the appearance of downtown to capture the target market (artsy/free-sprit)
- Create the experience of the 'hippieville' - similar to Key West (alternative lifestyle and jock lifestyle mashed together) - bring the funky vibe
- Downtown Buildings needs to be renovated - has potential for a great restaurant

Turn inward and reflect on your own community

What have you learned here that has changed your impression of your own community?

- Re-highlighted the dislike of washrooms for customers only

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- Unfriendly attitude of non-locally owned stores here in Muskoka
- Everyone has to eat and everyone has to get outside

Has this experience given you any new ideas about what is needed in your own community?

- Very friendly - everyone was waving and friendly and talkative and in Muskoka less friendly/rude, sizing everyone up
- Re-evaluate where money is being spent and how we're creating experiences to sustain or the opposite in our approach to tourism dollars - this is about a community and a lifestyle
- Locally owned restaurant that is accessible to community, visitors, and all, and contributing to local economy is so important

ONE idea that you would like to borrow for use in your own business/community and describe how you would start to implement it within the next 72 hours!

- Signage is much more clear, fire burning signs are far more clear, truck braking signs are very direct, all community centres should have booking number posted outside
- Lake St Peter Park had great signage in park with emergency numbers, as well as permitted uses. Good signage with information about the community and drinking water, parking barbeques

Additional Comments:

Rating of overall experience as a volunteer visitor: 8 OUT OF 10 (10 Great fun)

Appendix A - The Communities:

Bird's Creek

Our first impression of Bird's Creek was that of a busy, working class, village. The various stores all seemed to be related to various blue collar occupations and the buzz of activity seemed to confirm that. Signage upon entering the community was simple, but apparent and effective. More could certainly be done if desired.

A drive through some of the residential areas to either side of the main highway showed wonderfully maintained properties and attractive houses. We did not see any "For Sale" signs so were not able to judge availability or price of properties for people wishing to retire, but the large, well-treed lots and quality properties would indicate that they would be attractive to buyers.

The downtown of Bird's Creek lies almost exclusively along the highway. Along with the aforementioned places of business, the main restaurant appears to be the Cafe B.C. We stopped there for lunch and the food was delicious and the staff as friendly and attentive as they could be given the large crowd they were dealing with. When the rush was over, we were able to speak with our waitress and, after we told her our cover story of looking for a retirement community, she was helpful with advice and opinions on the area. She took pride in her community and was happy to give us advice on what we should look for.

Overall, Bird's Creek was a decent place, but it would not be a place I would pick as a senior looking to retire to the area. The vibe is youthful and active and I would choose a quieter place with a more relaxed atmosphere. That said, there seems to be a good cross section of age groups which would imply that people who grow up here are happy to remain. It's a friendly, close knit community.

Baptiste

Our trip through Baptiste was a short one, as the town appeared to be lake front residential and little else. It's an attractive area, with the usual well-manicured lawns and immaculate houses. Laura was quite taken with the friendly vibe she got from the area, although we didn't actually see anyone out and about (with the exception of one man who appeared to be in his 40s out doing some landscaping with his dog in happy attendance). There was a trailer park visible, but we didn't go in as it appeared to be a private facility where we would attract too much attention. There wasn't much in the way of facilities, municipal, business or otherwise (unless they were out of sight in the

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trailer park), so we didn't have a chance to see much or write much down. Our overall impression was of a community that might very well be attractive to seniors looking to retire to a quiet community, but we didn't see any For Sale signs. This matched our expectation as I was unable to find any current listings on local online realty sites. Laura and I came away unclear as to what, if any, benefit could be derived from any sort of commercial or even residential development in the area.

Kamaniskeg Lake

Kamaniskeg Lake was similar to Baptiste in that it was more of a lakefront residential community, albeit on a larger and seemingly higher economic scale.

Our first impression driving through the area was positive. There was excellent natural beauty and, although there were a large number of dwellings, they were not so close together that they gave the feeling of being crowded or closed in. As usual, the properties were well maintained and we both immediately felt as if this would be a great place to live. The signage was a bit pedestrian and could be upgraded to match the beauty of the area. I had been able previously to find a few listings online for properties on the lake, the prices of which were reasonable for what you would get. We didn't happen to see any For Sale signs during our visit, so we couldn't actually check any out.

Kamaniskeg Lake would seem to be an excellent area for someone wanting to retire to a lakefront property, but I think the availability of property both for sale or potential development might be limited. Of all the places we visited, this is the area Laura and I would pick to live had we actually been looking.

Lake St Peter

Lake St Peter was where we had breakfast on the second day. The service was quick, friendly and the food was good. The waitress was happy to answer our questions and was quick to recommend the area to outsiders. She was a transplant herself, but was knowledgeable about the area. She was of the opinion that the area was primed for high growth and lots of newcomers. She advised us to buy soon if we wanted to retire there as prices, while currently very reasonable, would be escalating soon.

The town itself was a pretty typical roadside town with a few businesses along the highway. It was mostly functional and utilitarian, with not a lot to recommend it at first glance. Entrance signage was minimal and we had to look a couple of times to make sure that we were actually in town. The local campground seems to drive a lot of the economy in season. I could see some seniors retiring here, as it would seem that the prices would be lower than in the lake front areas, at least for the present, but that would be the main appeal.

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Maple Leaf

Maple Leaf was very similar to Lake St Peter in that it was a working roadside town. There wasn't much to comment on as regards signage or visual appeal. Many of the houses had a number of cars or pieces of heavy equipment sitting outside. This is obviously the sign of a working town but, understandably cuts down on the manicured look prevalent in other villages in the area.

We stopped at a camping store and spoke to the proprietress and she said that, like other communities in the area, we would have to drive elsewhere for shopping, recreation and most other activities. I don't know that there would be a lot of incentive to retirees to settle in Maple Leaf, unless it were for price/availability or a desire to be away from any urban centres.

Maynooth

Aside from Bancroft, Maynooth is the largest town in the study area. Our first impressions were of an attractive, busy town. We both thought immediately that a senior would have much of what was needed for shopping right here. The entrance ways were good and there was a lot of signage for upcoming events, NOT just the upcoming Maynooth Madness, but other things happening around town.

Housing was well maintained and locals told us that prices were still reasonable, but likely to rise shortly. We spoke to people at a couple of the stores about what it would be like for retirees to live in the area and they were very positive. The ANAF club has a lot of activities and groups aimed at seniors and were highly spoken of (a lot of the towns activities, for all ages, seem to be centred round that club).

The downtown has some lovely stores where one could drop large sums of money very easily and be happy to have done so. We enjoyed the antique stores and Laura would consider moving to Maynooth simply for the butter tarts and fudge...

There were a few stores missing that surprised us. We didn't find so much as a small food market, much less a full service grocery store. There was a gas station which, presumably, housed a convenience store. Town could certainly use another one, with basic groceries.

We had thought that Maynooth would be your typical superficial tourist town, but were pleasantly surprised at how warm and generally welcoming the merchants and

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townsfolk were towards us, especially after we told them we were thinking of retiring to the area. We feel that the area has a good chance at increasing and maintaining steady growth in population as long as the will to expand infrastructure keeps up with demand.