

MARCH 2018



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN

MUNICIPALITY OF PICKLE LAKE

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Background

Once a town bolstered by the economic wealth of the mining industry, Pickle Lake has had to redefine itself and look for economic opportunities and security elsewhere. Redefining Pickle Lake's economic focus is a process that leans heavily on the tangible strengths of the community and its surroundings. The town is settled amongst a spectacular backdrop of natural environment, and comprised of hardworking, friendly and industrious people. Much of the infrastructure, such as roads and buildings, were funded by the mining industry to initially set up the town to house and serve the interests of its workforce. Currently, Pickle Lake is operating on a limited budget based on a small community size and tax revenue, attempting to tackle large infrastructure and economic development projects. Much of the municipal focused funding available from the Provincial and Federal governments is geared to larger community sizes, leaving Pickle Lake to rely on creatively and strategically leveraging the strengths and resources available.

Competing for Growth Opportunities

Unique Assets

The primary feature that sets Pickle Lake apart from similar remote communities in Ontario, is geography. Situated at the far end of Highway 599, Pickle Lake is surrounded by an abundance of pristine wilderness, providing ample opportunities for sportsmen, adventurers and naturalists alike. In today's fast-paced, technology-driven world, many people yearn to head to the bush to escape the complexities of modern life. Pickle Lake has a unique opportunity to attract a significant eco-tourism market to the area. Tourists have road access to hundreds of lakes and camping areas, and water access to even more potential for back-country adventures. There are a number of skilled local outfitters in the area, many able to provide air access to some of the more remote locations in the region.

Pickle Lake's location also provides a unique set of opportunities given the proximity of Ontario's Far North – an area comprising 42% of the province. Pickle Lake is primed to access two major secondary markets not readily available to most other communities: remote First Nations, and Far North infrastructure/resource development projects. Highway 599 ends not far from Pickle Lake where a bottleneck of access to remote first nations exists via a winter road network. Pickle

Lake is the closest hub to provide a supply-chain economy servicing upwards of as many as twenty First Nation communities in the area.

Recently, there has been an increased level of interest in resource development and infrastructure enhancement in the Far North. The exploration of gold and minerals will maintain an industry presence that Pickle Lake will be uniquely situated to support. As resource development increases, an expansion of infrastructure will be required, such as road construction, power transmission line expansion, and broadband development. There will be increased demand for lodging, goods and services that Pickle Lake will be well-situated to provide.

Challenges

Currently, Pickle Lake faces various challenges in competing for growth opportunities. These challenges stem from the reality of a relatively small population size and the remoteness of the community. There is a need for substantial infrastructure improvement, and a heavy reliance on secondary markets. Given the small size of the primary market population, 388 in 2016 according to Statistics Canada, financial institutions such as banks seem reluctant to provide financing to new local businesses (many bank's initial location assessment is based on postal code). Entrepreneurs are in a tough spot, with the limited financing options effecting not only new businesses, but existing businesses as well. As business owners retire, they often have difficulty finding adequate successors to take over in their absence, due to the difficulty in securing small business loans. This pattern eventually leaves a void of lost economic potential, where businesses whom once provided the sole supply of certain goods/services cease, and these amenities are lost to the community and secondary market consumers alike.

Pickle Lake is due for a significant amount of infrastructure improvement, including road construction and improvement, and sidewalks. Access to Pickle Lake is limited, with a single way in and out of the community. Development of a secondary access route to the community and improving active transportation with sidewalks and greater curb appeal, would increase the likelihood of attracting visitors and repeat visitors, but at a substantial cost.

At the present time, there are limited building structures available to accommodate new retail/commercial activity within the community. Some of the vacant buildings exist in a state of disrepair, if not condemned. Lessees may occupy these spaces only after absorbing the cost of renovation; in some cases, with a literal leaking roof overhead.

Financial and Human Capital

Potential Funding

Infrastructure funding is available for small, northern communities through the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund. This formula-based funding can be requested for infrastructure projects such as roads, must be applied for prior to January, and funds can be carried forward for a period of five-years to build up a larger sum to support extensive projects.

The Rural Economic Development Fund provides funding opportunities that could support many of the marketing efforts laid out within this strategic plan. Applications are strongest where two or more communities enter into a partnership, a clear vision for spending is supported by documented need, and projected returns on investment are outlined.

NOHFC funding for various internship positions may support new graduates (of a certain age range) in entering the workforce for the first time. Wages for approved positions are funded up to fifty percent (some restrictions apply).

Economic Development and Marketing

Planning for success means investing in the resources with the greatest return. Capturing current and foreseeable economic growth opportunity, experiencing measurable success, and sustaining said success, will require a knowledge base and skill set anchored in economic development, customer service, and commitment to the community. Full-time economic development staff can be costly to a municipality where supportive funding is not available. Economic development internships through NOHFC are partially funded and can be helpful in the short term. Nevertheless, Pickle Lake may be in need of a more seasoned approach when considering both the challenges and opportunities ahead. One approach may be to contract out economic development work to trained professionals, until greater traction is experienced, and a full-time position is warranted. Regardless of who performs economic development work with the community, a positive attitude and belief in the upward potential for Pickle Lake is paramount to success.

Effective marketing is an important factor in the economic growth of Pickle Lake in terms of attracting investment, promoting tourism, and encouraging passerby traffic to come into town for supplies, a hot meal and accommodations. In turn, marketing is influential in promoting Pickle Lake as viable option for relocation as well as retaining those who already reside within the community. Through targeted marketing efforts, Pickle Lake is afforded the opportunity to reach a large audience comprised of both primary and secondary markets, at a relatively low cost. Being a small municipality, the cost

of supporting full-time marketing staff is unreasonable. Current staff members with an aptitude for writing, customer service and marketing could be afforded specialized training and workshops in social media and marketing to take on new responsibilities in this area.

*Note that professional marketing consultants are highly recommended for initial municipal rebranding

Pickle Lake’s 2018 – 2023 Strategic Priorities

STRATEGY 1	Improve upon Pickle Lake Branding
STRATEGY 2	Support Local Small Business Investment
STRATEGY 3	Increase Volume of Visitors/Tourists
STRATEGY 4	Build and Leverage Partnerships
STRATEGY 5	Improve Infrastructure

STRATEGY 1	Improve upon Pickle Lake Branding
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OBJECTIVE 1	Craft strengths-focused website content
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ACTION STEPS	TIMEFRAME
Utilize municipal staff skilled in marketing and/or writing, or find funding to contract a professional, to refocus the website content to be framed from the perspective of an outsider (showcase the opportunities for enjoying the outdoors, potential sport and recreation activities, community events, and gatherings). Focus less on the road ending and more on what the remoteness of the community means in positive terms. Everything a visitor or potential community members needs to know about the town should be framed positively. Pickle Lake has much to offer those who enjoy the outdoors and a true sense of community.	3-6 months
Update website content related to activities, stories related to the natural landscape, etc., regularly to keep it fresh and increase search engine optimization (SEO) so that Pickle Lake shows up more prominently in web searches related to fishing, hunting, and other activities Pickle Lake can be known for.	Ongoing

OBJECTIVE 2	Create a more modern and memorable municipal logo	
ACTION STEPS		TIMEFRAME
<p>Contract a graphic designer with experience in municipal branding to work with the municipality to create two to three logo options. Showcase the logos on the Pickle Lake website to gather input in the form of a vote.</p> <p>Tie the look and feel of the logo into Pickle Lake’s branding “story” Options may include embracing the following elements: -Pickle in Pickle Lake -Mining History -Nature (trees, water, wildlife)</p>		3-6 months

OBJECTIVE 3	Develop a specific Pickle Lake branding “story” to inform all marketing and promotional endeavours	
ACTION STEPS		TIMEFRAME
<p>Create branding story in one of the following manners:</p> <p>a) Hire a marketing agency to work with the community to devise a story reflective of the strengths of, and opportunities available in, Pickle Lake</p> <p>or;</p> <p>b) Form a local committee of informed and creative locals to collaboratively “story” the strengths of Pickle Lake and opportunities therein</p>		3-6 months

OBJECTIVE 4	Design a new Pickle Lake sign for highway 599	
ACTION STEPS		TIMEFRAME
Secure funding for the design of the Pickle Lake sign		3-12 months
Following the rebranding of the municipality, an engaging sign for Pickle Lake will be designed and created using professional services.		6-18 months

STRATEGY 2	Support Local Small Business Investment	
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OBJECTIVE 1	Develop small business and investment information packages	
ACTION STEPS		TIMEFRAME
Utilize municipal economic development officer, or skilled contractor, to gather information related to financing options, insurance requirements, municipal tax rates, set-up requirements, and business plan development services (Business Development Bank of Canada provides small business loans and much of the resource information necessary to develop information packages)		3-9 months

<p>Craft resource materials using accessible language and package in the form of a digital document to save on costs associated with paper and printing. This digital package should be available on the Pickle Lake website. The package may be printed at the municipal office as requested.</p> <p>Where funding is secured, these packages may be made available in quality hard copy form.</p>	
<p>Review and revise where necessary twice per calendar year</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

<p>OBJECTIVE 2</p>	<p>Adequately inform potential investors and business owners</p>	
<p>ACTION STEPS</p>		<p>TIMEFRAME</p>
<p>Focus an area of the Pickle Lake website on business. Potential investors and small business owners need to have readily accessible information regarding who to contact about available retail or commercial space, the landscape of primary and secondary markets in Pickle Lake, future development affecting market opportunities, how to get started, where to find funding, etc.</p> <p>Whoever is responsible for business/economic development in the area should be adequately versed in the local landscape, have a positive outlook for the future of the community, and hold strong customer service skills and abilities.</p>		<p>6-12 months</p>
<p>Ensure knowledgeable and informed customer service is available to those interested in investing in business opportunities in the area by scripting responses to most commonly asked questions – allowing various municipal personnel to provide adequate service.</p> <p>Focusing on the strengths of Pickle Lake and the opportunities, rather than the limitations, is highly recommended. Instead of focusing on the current lack of available retail space, highlight the positives</p>		<p>Immediately</p>

<p>such as the low tax rate, high volume of traffic passing by on highway 599, and large secondary markets comprised of future Far North development.</p> <p>Related: When fielding municipally owned cottage lot sales inquiries, the focus should remain on allure of the off-the-grid lifestyle, including water and snowmobile access. A lack of hydro service, limitations of winter access and the like should be part of the sales pitch rather than negative factors deterring investment. Many popular water only access cottage areas are without hydro service and can be used recreationally throughout the year.</p>	
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OBJECTIVE 3	Engage in retail/commercial ownership succession planning	
ACTION STEPS		TIMEFRAME
<p>Create a succession planning framework to assist business owners with their exit strategy due to planned retirement, relocation, etc.</p> <p>Plan should include options to engage interested parties and assistance with navigating financing opportunities where possible.</p>		1-2 years

STRATEGY 3	Increase Volume of Visitors/Tourists
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OBJECTIVE 1	Promote local eco-tourism	
ACTION STEPS		TIMEFRAME
Further develop and maintain trail routes within municipal and crown land territories where possible.		1-5 years
Develop trail maps for both hiking and trail cycling		1-3 years
Develop and maintain trail map guide materials focused on hiking and cycling. Distribute via Pickle Lake website, social media, eco-tourism tradeshow, and online cycling and hiking groups located within Ontario, Manitoba and Minnesota.		2-5 years
Participate in larger sportsmen shows within Ontario, Minnesota, and Winnipeg. Costs can be shared if partnerships with local outfitters are entered into for mutual benefit. Funding may be available for such endeavours.		1-5 years
Make eco-tourism a major focus of the Pickle Lake website, partnering with local outfitters and offering ad space.		1-5 years
Design and build a rustic information kiosk with shelter roof, to display visitor information such as a map of the town with all amenities marked, trail maps, historical mining locations, and advertising space for local businesses and outfitters.		1-2 years

<p>Potential location: Northwest corner of highway 599 and Pickle Lake road (significant use of otherwise contaminated land).</p> <p>Funding for the design and construction of the kiosk as a simple information centre could meet the guidelines for Rural Economic Development funding. If not, fundraising is another option.</p> <p>*See Appendix "A" for example kiosk image</p>	
<p>Plan and develop waterfront area to attract visitors to stay in Pickle Lake and enjoy their surroundings.</p>	<p>1-3 years</p>

<p>OBJECTIVE 2</p>	<p>Promote local events and activities</p>	
<p>ACTION STEPS</p>		<p>TIMEFRAME</p>
<p>Advertise and promote events and activities such as fishing and ice-fishing derbies, snowmobiling and motorcycling group rides, breakfast club, and hockey and curling tournaments on the Pickle Lake website, local and surrounding online community boards, and Pickle Lake social media such as Facebook (utilizing municipal best practices for social media use).</p>		<p>Immediately</p>
<p>Host larger local events and festivals</p>		<p>3-5 years</p>

OBJECTIVE 3	Capitalize on the history of Pickle Lake	
ACTION STEPS		TIMEFRAME
	Create and maintain signage and historical markers to promote/support historic and genealogy-focused tourism. The historic nature of mining in Pickle Lake is an opportunity for tourism as family members of miners past become more interested in connecting with their heritage and seeing where their grandparents, etc. settled and worked to provide for their families.	2-3 years
	Showcase the history of Pickle Lake’s formation on the municipal website.	1-2 years

STRATEGY 4	Build and Leverage Partnerships
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OBJECTIVE 1	Build partnerships with surrounding First Nation communities	
ACTION STEPS		TIMEFRAME
	Mayor to reach out to various First Nation Chief and Councils to set up a meeting to discuss how they can work together to plan for better mental health and addictions service delivery in Pickle Lake. Reaching out will open the lines of communication to hear how others view issues related to drug and alcohol misuse, and potentially effective, culturally appropriate, treatment strategies.	6-12 months

Work to better communicate local activities and festivals within surrounding First Nation communities, via radio, newsletter, websites, and social media.	6-12 months
Explore co-hosting festivals with a cultural component reflective of the participating First Nation community. According to Statistics Canada, close to 38% of the Pickle Lake population identified as Aboriginal in 2016.	1-3 years

OBJECTIVE 2	Build partnerships with local eco-tourism outfitters	
ACTION STEPS		TIMEFRAME
Build a business case to support partnership with local outfitters.		6-12 months
Present local outfitters with business case, showcasing how working together can be mutually beneficial (e.g. advertising Pickle Lake on Outfitter websites, and advertising outfitters on Pickle Lake website; sharing costs associated with attending sportsmen's shows and benefiting from Pickle Lake's access to non-profit organization focused funding).		1 year

OBJECTIVE 3	Increase babysitting service training opportunities for youth	
ACTION STEPS		TIMEFRAME
Partner with local school to host babysitting courses every six-to-twelve months, as demand dictates.		3-9 months
Partner with the Canadian Red Cross, or St. John Ambulance to provide training locally, or via video conferencing if possible.		3-9 months

OBJECTIVE 4	Recruit and retain volunteer base	
ACTION STEPS		TIMEFRAME
Promote volunteerism by engaging youth in opportunities to shadow and be mentored by active community members.		6-12 months
Show appreciation and recognition of volunteers in the community by choosing a volunteer of the month and sharing their bio and whatever volunteer work they are involved in on the Pickle Lake website and social media (also promotes volunteerism through exposure).		6-12 months

OBJECTIVE 5	Support a local shared economy	
ACTION STEPS		TIMEFRAME
To retain a skilled workforce, reasonable access to services is important. Build a system to allow for Pickle Lake residents to share in booking skilled services that can only be offered from out-of-town workers. For example, a baseline number of customers is predetermined to calculate cost, then a hairdresser, or other service provider is hired to travel to Pickle Lake once the baseline number has been met (somewhat like the Groupon model).		1-3 years
Organize and support the pooling of construction material orders to save on deliver fees, somewhat lowering the costs of construction materials. Shared delivery would need to be organized with the supplier so that the municipality is not involved in the exchange of monies or the like.		1-3 years

OBJECTIVE 6	Partner with local farmers to create greater local food sustainability	
ACTION STEPS		TIMEFRAME
Meet with local farmers to discuss the option of the construction of a large green house, and the viability of storing some vegetables throughout winter months (gauge facilities required for supporting such initiatives).		1-2 years
Gauge community support for more affordable, locally grown food (including greenhouse construction and storage vegetables).		1-2 years

Explore and apply for funding to support the construction of a greenhouse in partnership with local farmers, as a food sustainability, and educational (school could be involved as well) initiative. *See Appendix B for photo of Dryden area greenhouse example	2-4 years
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STRATEGY 5	Improve Infrastructure
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OBJECTIVE 1	Increase and improve wayfinding signage	
ACTION STEPS		TIMEFRAME
Secure funding for wayfinding signs		6-9 months
Design, construct and erect signs where the Trans-Canada highway meets highway 599		1-2 years
Design, construct and erect playful signs along highway 599 that also advertise amenities in Pickle Lake. The signs should reflect the rebranding. *The sign that used to stand for Pickle Lake was memorable, playful and attracted the attention of visitors.		1-2 years

Following the rebranding of the municipality, an engaging sign for Pickle Lake will be designed and created using professional services. This sign will stand to both the North and South of Pickle Lake Road, on highway 599	6-18 months
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OBJECTIVE 2	Build and maintain roads and sidewalks	
ACTION STEPS		TIMEFRAME
An additional road leading into/out of Pickle Lake to make retail and commercial business more accessible from the airport (long-term funding will need to be secured as previously outlined)		3-5 years
Plan and install sidewalks in key areas of town		3-5 years
Create an active transportation plan		2-3 years

Appendix A



Appendix B

