



Municipality of French River

Economic Development MASTER PLANS

2024 – 2028

Economic Sectors

This document provides Economic Development Master Plans for the following six sectors:

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Introduction

French River's economy is intricately linked to its stunning natural resources, including historic rivers, pristine lakes, and diverse wildlife. These assets provide the foundation for thriving tourism, outdoor recreation, and eco-tourism industries that attract visitors from far and wide.

A strong and diverse economy is essential for French River's residents' overall quality of life.

Economic Initiatives

Economic development initiatives can create jobs, improve infrastructure, enhance public services, and increase access to educational and healthcare facilities. These benefits not only raise the standard of living for current residents, but also make the municipality an attractive destination for new families and businesses, ensuring our long-term sustainability. To the right is a summary of the participation in our Community Consultation process.

6

**Focus Group
Sessions**

22

**Key
Community
Stakeholders**

2

**Public
Consultation
Sessions**

Commercial Retail



Workshop Summary

On August 15th, 2023, the Municipality hosted a Focus Group for the Commercial Retail industry. Local business stakeholders provided insight to help form the conclusions within this report.

Invitations to participate were included in the Spring Taxation/Newsletter mailout, printed and posted throughout the community, and online on multiple platforms. Individual invitations were also sent to 30 local establishments.

Key Community Stakeholder participants were asked a series of questions regarding their views on the importance of municipal services provided to their sector, how well our municipality is doing in providing those services, and if they could suggest any innovative ideas for change or opportunity in the future.



What We Heard

Amenities:

Commercial Retail affects our lives by providing local access to essential goods and services, offering convenience, and helping to make French River a better place to live and work. Participants expressed the need for more amenities with longer hours that would be open year-round.

Economic-booster:

The Commercial Retail industry contributes significantly to economic development by generating revenue, creating jobs, and fostering a vibrant business ecosystem that attracts investment and drives local growth. The industry is vital in attracting residents and tourists, increasing our community's revenue.

Promotion:

Commercial Retail industries serve as a platform for brand promotion and product visibility of locally produced goods, benefiting manufacturers and consumers.

Survey Responses

"Add more stores and restaurants to attract tourists. Some cute specialty shops and antique stores."

"Encourage extended opening hours at essential retail locations (i.e. Food and pharmacy)."

"More things to do, stores, boutiques, coffee shops and such. Help people build our community locally. Develop more jobs for youth and for adults."

Emerging Themes

Incentives for Local Businesses:

- Adding more stores, restaurants, specialty shops, and antique stores to attract tourists.
- Encouraging the extension of operating hours for essential retail locations.
- Requesting competitive pricing from local grocery stores.

Economic Growth and Public Services:

- Seeking capital funding from higher levels of government for infrastructure development.
- Expressing the need for more gas stations and public healthcare.

Environment and Quality of Life:

- Proactive enforcement concerning property standards to deal with various unsightly items.
- Attracting more festivals, bands, and concerts to stimulate community culture and spin-off growth.
- Encouraging local building and sustainable growth decisions to be more environmentally friendly, such as e-charging stations, solar power, etc.



Action Items

- 1 Implement a "Shop Local" campaign to enhance community support for local establishments
- 2 Collaborate with the Chamber of Commerce and other community partners to encourage businesses to extend their hours to accommodate residents and increase sales
- 3 Install services in commercial areas, such as electric vehicle charging stations, and kiosks with QR codes for local attractions and amenities, which will attract customers to the retail stores and promote other businesses in our community
- 4 Plan for the future extension of municipal sewer services when funding becomes available

Health & Social Services



Workshop Summary

On August 17th, 2023, the Municipality hosted a Focus Group for the Health and Social Services industry. Local business leaders provided insight to help form the conclusions within this report.

Invitations to participate were included in the Spring Taxation/Newsletter mailout, printed and posted throughout the community, and online on multiple platforms. Individual invitations were also sent to 8 local establishments, including provincial and federal agencies.

Key Community Stakeholders were asked questions regarding their views on the importance of municipal services provided to their sector and if they could suggest any innovative ideas for change or opportunity in the future.



What We Heard

Quality of Life:

Health and Social Services are vital for everyone in our community. Ensuring access to medical care, support in times of need, and promoting overall well-being produces substantial economic impacts. Benefits include a healthy, productive workforce, reduced healthcare costs, and increased stability and growth of our community.

Economic Well-being:

Investments in preventive healthcare can reduce long-term healthcare costs and improve overall economic well-being; social services reduce poverty rates and improve overall economic stability.

Strengthen Services:

Working with Healthcare partners to facilitate the provision of high-quality healthcare and social services to attract new residents, contributing to the overall community's economy.

Survey Responses

"When previously considering living here year-round, lack of childcare was a big concern"

"Have childcare locally so I can go back to work. Almost 3 years now and still on the waiting list."

"If solid, reliable healthcare, affordable housing, affordable grocery stores and other resources are readily available without having to travel 45 minutes to an hour away, it would be more attractive to folks who want a cleaner, greener community to reside in or visit."

Emerging Themes

Community Well-Being and Recreation:

- The importance of utilizing parks and beaches for community well-being and recreation is highlighted. This suggests a strong focus on promoting outdoor activities and spaces for residents.
- Consider attracting younger residents and retaining the aging population, highlighting the importance of healthcare and social services in catering to the diverse needs of a changing population.
- Focus on community safety by keeping the OPP station in Noëlville.

Senior Support and Housing:

- Address the need for seniors' housing and accessible transportation.
- Explore opportunities for seniors to interact with youth and participate in community programs.

Childcare and Education:

- The need to provide local education and employment opportunities to support community development.
- Ensure access to English Education beyond grade 8 and promote the availability of childcare services.
- Attract Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) to the area.



Action Items

- 1 Respond to the challenges of our aging population through the construction of a seniors' housing complex
- 2 Collaborate with our local partners to design and implement a campaign to attract and retain additional healthcare and social services professionals to our community
- 3 Implement a Community Health and Well-being plan
- 4 Explore opportunities for additional shared services agreements with our health and social services partners to reduce costs and provide better service to residents

Industrial Activity



Workshop Summary

On August 15th, 2023, the Municipality hosted a Focus Group for the Industrial Sector.

Invitations to participate were included in the Spring Taxation/Newsletter mailout, printed and posted throughout the community, and online on multiple platforms. Individual invitations were also sent to 4 local establishments.

Unfortunately, none of the key stakeholders came to the focus group session.



What We Heard

Attracting Families:

While high-paying jobs may not be a priority, there's a strong desire to attract and retain young families to ensure year-round population and community vitality.

Creative and Innovative Ideas:

Exploring renewable energy sources and improvements in internet services can foster innovation and growth in the local technology and energy sectors.



Survey Responses

"Encourage growth of tourism or industry or both. Allow industry to come in, and provide more, better jobs for the people who live and work here."

"Capital funding from higher levels of government for infrastructure to encourage growth in the region."

"Create a solid foundation to support the growth within the community."

"More jobs that are not seasonal so locals don't have to travel out of town so much."

"Job futures for our young people"



Emerging Themes

Growth and Sustainability:

- Plays an essential role in economic development by generating jobs, increasing production, and growing the local economy.

Service & Raw Material Delivery:

- Creates demand for various services, including transport, logistics, raw material supply, distribution and sales, leading to a robust supply chain network.
- Can increase tourism by producing commodities such as artisanal crafts, local food and beverages, and handmade goods that appeal to tourists seeking unique and authentic souvenirs.

Childcare and Education:

- Ability to "Go Green" and adapt to be environmentally sustainable through practices that prioritize energy efficiency, reduce waste, minimize emissions, and use eco-friendly materials and technologies.



Action Items

- 1 Simplify and expedite permitting processes to reduce administrative burdens and costs for small businesses
- 2 Support marketing initiatives and festivals to showcase the unique products and services offered by our industries and micro-industries
- 3 Monitor infrastructure improvements, such as upgraded utilities, roads and bridges, and the provision of faster, more reliable connectivity for businesses and residents to provide basic infrastructure for growth.
- 4 Facilitate networking opportunities to empower business owners by providing them with the knowledge and connections needed for success.

Agriculture



Workshop Summary

On August 17th, 2023, the Municipality hosted a Focus Group for the Agriculture Sector.

Invitations to participate were included in the Spring Taxation/Newsletter mailout, printed and posted throughout the community, and online on multiple platforms. In addition, individual invitations were sent to 9 local establishments as well as provincial and federal agencies that assist this sector in our community.

Key Community Stakeholder participants were asked questions regarding their views on the importance of municipal services provided to their sector, how well our municipality is doing in providing those services, and if they could suggest any innovative ideas for change or opportunity in the future.



What We Heard

Impact of By-Laws and Building Permits on Agriculture:

Participants stressed the importance of by-laws and building codes in supporting agriculture. Building inspectors should be familiar with farming requirements, which are essential to the community.

Balancing Growth and Farming:

Participants expressed a need for controlled or gradual growth and development that doesn't hinder farming activities or land use around farms.

Maintenance of Drainage Concerns:

Participants proposed a maintenance schedule for drainage systems to ensure maximum crop yield. It was noted that a more proactive approach would be welcomed to reduce animosity when the farmer requests work.



Survey Responses

"Forestry, agriculture, tourism, bedroom community to Sudbury. Drives your community. You can't operate with champagne tastes on a beer budget."

"Creating an indoor market space for local farmers, vendors and artisans"

"Long-term visioning should include a plan to support a niche market of farm-to-table for the people willing to pay for it."

"Focusing on the quality of products over the quantity."



Emerging Themes

Agricultural Sustainability and Development:

- Supporting local farmers in maintaining crop yield through effective drainage systems.
- Balancing growth and farming activities to protect the interests of farmers.

Regulation and Communication:

- Awareness and education of farming regulations and requirements through our building, by-law and planning departments.
- Encouraging the participation of the agriculture community to facilitate effective communication.

Youth Engagement and Skill Development:

- Retaining younger workers in the agricultural sector by providing attractive job opportunities.



Action Items

- 1 Encourage the addition of agriculture representation to the Economic Development Committee to facilitate effective communication with municipal officials, provincial officials, and the French River business community, particularly during land use planning and development discussions
- 2 Protect farming operations and farm land by encouraging residential development in existing settlement areas through infilling
- 3 Monitor municipal drainage systems regularly and complete necessary maintenance in a timely manner
- 4 Work with community partners to publicize and operate a Farmers' Market to make fresh fruit and produce available to residents and visitors

Recreational Opportunities



Workshop Summary

On August 17th, 2023, the Municipality hosted a Focus Group for the Agriculture Sector.

Invitations to participate were included in the Spring Newsletter mailout, printed and posted throughout the community, and provided on multiple online platforms. In addition, individual invitations were sent to 13 local establishments as well as provincial and federal agencies that assist this sector in our community.

Key Community Stakeholder participants were asked questions regarding their views on the importance of municipal services provided to their sector, how well our municipality is providing those services, and if they could suggest any innovative ideas for change or opportunity in the future.



What We Heard

Holistic Well-Being:

There's a strong consensus on prioritizing a holistic approach to well-being. It emphasizes the importance of addressing physical and mental health, recognizing that it's crucial for overall wellness within our community.

Social Connectedness:

Community members have expressed a clear message about the significance of social connections and community engagement. They value activities that bring people together, as they believe fostering social connections contributes significantly to an improved quality of life for individuals and strengthens the bonds within the community.

Promoting Meaningful Engagement:

Community members have emphasized that activities and programs must be designed to provide multiple interests to individuals across all demographics.



Survey Responses

"More summer recreation events/festivals in French River—fishing derbies or contests—would be very beneficial."

"Create a rec centre with an indoor pool. This would provide revenue year-round through programming, public swims, parent-and-tot swims, senior swims, etc."

"I suggest the municipality install a large electronic billboard close to the town center. It could advertise community events, activities, businesses, and council news."



Emerging Themes

Community-Driven Resource Allocation:

- A desire for more community involvement in determining the allocation of resources, such as potentially repurposing the Alban baseball diamond.
- The desire to partner with neighbouring municipalities to access more grant funding to encourage a more collaborative, community-driven recreation facility.

Inclusive and Diverse Programming:

- The need for more diverse programs, such as figure skating or "CanSkate" for kids, demonstrates a desire for inclusive recreational activities catering to various interests and age groups.
- The interest in reviving youth groups and exploring ways for seniors to get involved in youth programs reflects a commitment to fostering intergenerational connections and ensuring that programming is accessible to all members of the community.

Economic Prosperity through Recreation:

- The idea to repurpose concert series funding for both summer music and winter activities at the Alban Community Centre, along with potential day camps at lodges, highlights a multifaceted approach to driving economic activity and enhancing the entertainment and leisure options within the community.



Action Items

- 1 Establish recreational programs and events for residents of all ages by using dedicated and engaged volunteers
- 2 Establish standards for the provision of recreational facilities and programs in our settlement areas
- 3 Maintain our existing recreational facilities to foster a healthier, more connected community and to encourage physical activity, social interaction, and the development of local talent and skills
- 4 Partner with neighbouring municipalities and indigenous groups for the provision and management of recreational opportunities with high capital and operating costs

Regional Tourism



Workshop Summary

On August 16th, 2023, the Municipality hosted a Focus Group for the Tourism Sector.

Invitations to participate were included in the Spring Newsletter mailout, printed and posted throughout the community, and provided on multiple online platforms. In addition, individual invitations were sent to 22 local establishments as well as provincial and federal agencies that assist this sector in our community.

Key Community Stakeholder participants were asked questions regarding their views on the importance of municipal services provided to their sector, how well our municipality is providing those services, and if they could suggest any innovative ideas for change or opportunity in the future.



What We Heard

Investing in Tourism, Festivals, and Small Businesses:

The community highlighted the importance of investing in tourism, festivals, and small businesses as a strategic approach to drive revenue growth and enrich the local economy. Residents and stakeholders expressed a shared interest in expanding local recreational options, including parks, walking trails, and accessible waterfront areas.

Boosting the Local Economy and Tourism:

An overwhelming desire for livelier summer activities in town was echoed to stimulate the local economy and dispel the perception of a "quiet" town. Residents expressed the need for extended operating hours for essential services, especially groceries.

Equitable Services and Tourism Expansion:

The community strongly voiced the need for uniform access to services across the entire municipality. Participants highlighted a collective desire to promote the growth of the tourism sector to attract more visitors to the region. The community suggested that more robust communication was necessary to promote local attractions and provide information about events, potentially through an improved web presence or a seasonal publication.



Survey Responses

"Add more stores and restaurants to attract tourists. Some cute specialty shops and antique stores."

"More amenities, stores open past 5 pm and Sundays not just during May-October, but for year-round residents."

"French River has the potential of being the next Muskoka. We are featured in a lot of articles about Christmas-related towns. We should lean into that. Market it. Christmas in July festival."



Emerging Themes

Economic Impact and Growth of Tourism:

- Acknowledgment of tourism as a significant driver of the local economy, generating revenue and creating jobs.
- Recognition of opportunities for further expansion and diversification in the tourism sector to benefit the local economy and community.

Community Benefits and Quality of Life:

- Emphasis on how tourism benefits local residents through increased job opportunities, improved infrastructure, and enhanced amenities.
- Highlighting the positive impact of tourism on physical well-being and environmental appreciation, showcasing the beauty of the French River region.

Tourism Sector Support and Collaboration:

- Exploration of funding options to support an association or the hiring of a Tourism Coordinator.
- Advocating for the active participation of the tourism sector in the Chamber of Commerce to strengthen the voice of tourism for the betterment of all local businesses.



Action Items

- 1 Encourage the tourism sector to re-establish a sector association for French River resorts
- 2 Discuss with the tourism sector the benefits of hiring a French River Tourism Co-ordinator to support local businesses, organize events and festivals, and market the tourist attractions in the community
- 3 Investigate the tourism sector's interest to fund the establishment of a sector association and the hiring of a Tourism Coordinator.
- 4 Encourage the active participation of the tourism sector in the Chamber of Commerce to provide a strong voice for tourism for the betterment of all French River businesses

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR PARTICIPANTS

Your input during the public consultation period helped the future of our community.



Municipality of
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