

TOURISM KENORA 5 YEAR STRATEGY
2014 – 2019

Lake of the Woods
KENORA



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Message from the Tourism Development Officer

You can come a long ways in 5 years. If we look back to 5 years ago, we have advanced leaps and bounds from where we were. Over the past 5 years, we have seen the building of the Lake of the Woods Discovery Centre and the White Cap Pavilion, and we have had the pleasure of providing three times the visitors with information about Kenora. We have adopted a new brand, and we are now proud to call Kenora, North America's Premier Boating Destination. We have also seen special events, including the Matiowski market, flourish and expand, providing Kenora with a vibrancy that it has not seen before. All of this was accomplished in only 5 years because Tourism Kenora had a strong Tourism Strategy and vision which we were successful in executing.

It is with that thought in mind that I am excited to bring forward this new 5 year strategy that will help us to develop Kenora into a world class destination. I look forward to the progress and development of our community, the new jobs we create, the cultivation of new markets and to welcome the new visitors which will result from the clearly laid out plan contained within these pages.

In the past, we have not been able to succeed without valuable partnerships and working together with all those who are working in unison to achieve a common vision for Kenora. These partnerships and relationships are critical and we will continue to build and strengthen them, as well as develop new ones over the next five years.

I would like to thank all of those who were involved in realizing the goals of our previous 5 year strategy. I would also like to thank the Tourism Committee and Lake of the Woods Development Commission members, past and present, for their vision and commitment to developing a thriving Tourism economy in Kenora. I look forward to working with all of you again and to seeing what heights we can achieve over the next 5 years.

Heather Gropp
Tourism Development Officer
City of Kenora/ Lake of the Woods Development Commission



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Message from the Tourism Committee Chair

In 2007, I was invited to join an ad hoc committee to develop a tourism strategy and, once that plan was developed, was invited to join the new group leading Kenora Tourism forward. As a member since then, and now as chair of the Tourism Committee, I am proud of the making and implementation of the last plan and doubly proud of the new one we are about to put in play.

Consider the improvements and additions we aimed for, and how far we have come since 2007. For reference: the tourist visitor office was on the east highway entrance, most of our tourism marketing was of the 'hook and bullet' variety, with little else offered, and our marketing dollars were minimal; we relied on membership dollars.

Today we welcome visitors year-round to our beautiful Discovery Centre, we provide additional summer visitor information at the Thistle Pavilion, we promote and offer a tremendous choice of events and experiential activities. We have conducted extensive market research, identified locations and demographics, and run many targeted advertising campaigns. We have increased visitor numbers thanks to following the direction identified by that research.

Downtown Revitalization is now in Phase Three, we have a great venue in the Whitecap Pavilion, activities, events planning and infrastructure, improved docking areas. There is now a large library of video and photos to draw on and a tourism webpage to promote that imagery. We have developed a tourism sector analysis for investors and we have adopted an exciting new brand that challenges us to fulfill its potential.

We work with senior government agencies, and city departments, have built a strong foundation of community and business partners which has proven essential for leveraging previously inaccessible funding used to build a more wide-reaching, year-round advertising impact.

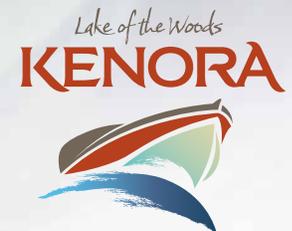
Many of the major benefits that we aimed for in the last strategy have accrued. Hard work, determination, initiative and adherence to the plan has paid off; Kenora is a tourism success story with an engaged community that understands the value of tourism.

We present this document as our map to moving forward. This new plan advances six bold steps toward making Kenora a four season destination while prioritizing implementation of our brand and acting in concert with the City's new strategic plan.

We recognize our challenges, we see the opportunities, and we have planned for seeing our vision thrive with the help of our essential partners and support agencies. We have high expectations; this is the plan to make those goals realistic and attainable.

I wish to extend my thanks to the Tourism Kenora staff for the quality of their work, and to all members of the committee, past and present for their volunteer efforts that have brought us this far. I would also like to extend my appreciation and thanks to the current committee for developing this new strategy, our map to a brighter, healthier, more prosperous future.

Mort Goss
Tourism Committee Chair



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BRAND PROMISE

Kenora is North America's Premier Boating Destination.

We are the connection to Lake of the Woods and its 14,522 Islands. Through our events and amenities we celebrate our history and build our future.

We love our lake; we are its stewards and we nurture its pristine environment.



Introduction



Kenora has a clear view of what sets our community apart. We know that it is our distinctive landscape and Lake of the Woods with its 14,522 islands that make us truly special. We are proud to see visitors astounded on a daily basis by the beauty in which we are surrounded.

Our natural beauty, combined with strong leadership, and destination management have uniquely positioned Kenora to become a top 4 season destination. That is the vision we hope to realize with this strategy.

Kenora has a strongly established visitor market in Manitoba, the United States and Ontario. In recent years there has also been an increase in the presence from Western Canada.

Historically Kenora's summer season represents the busiest visitor period, however, increasingly over the past 5 years, much of Kenora's Tourism Visitor Growth is occurring in the shoulder and winter seasons. We are very excited about this and are looking forward to new opportunities that will help Tourism in Kenora reach its full potential.

Total visitor spending in our region has increased to \$543 million in 2011 from \$482 million in 2008. This spending increase represents the significant growth which is taking over the industry in recent years.

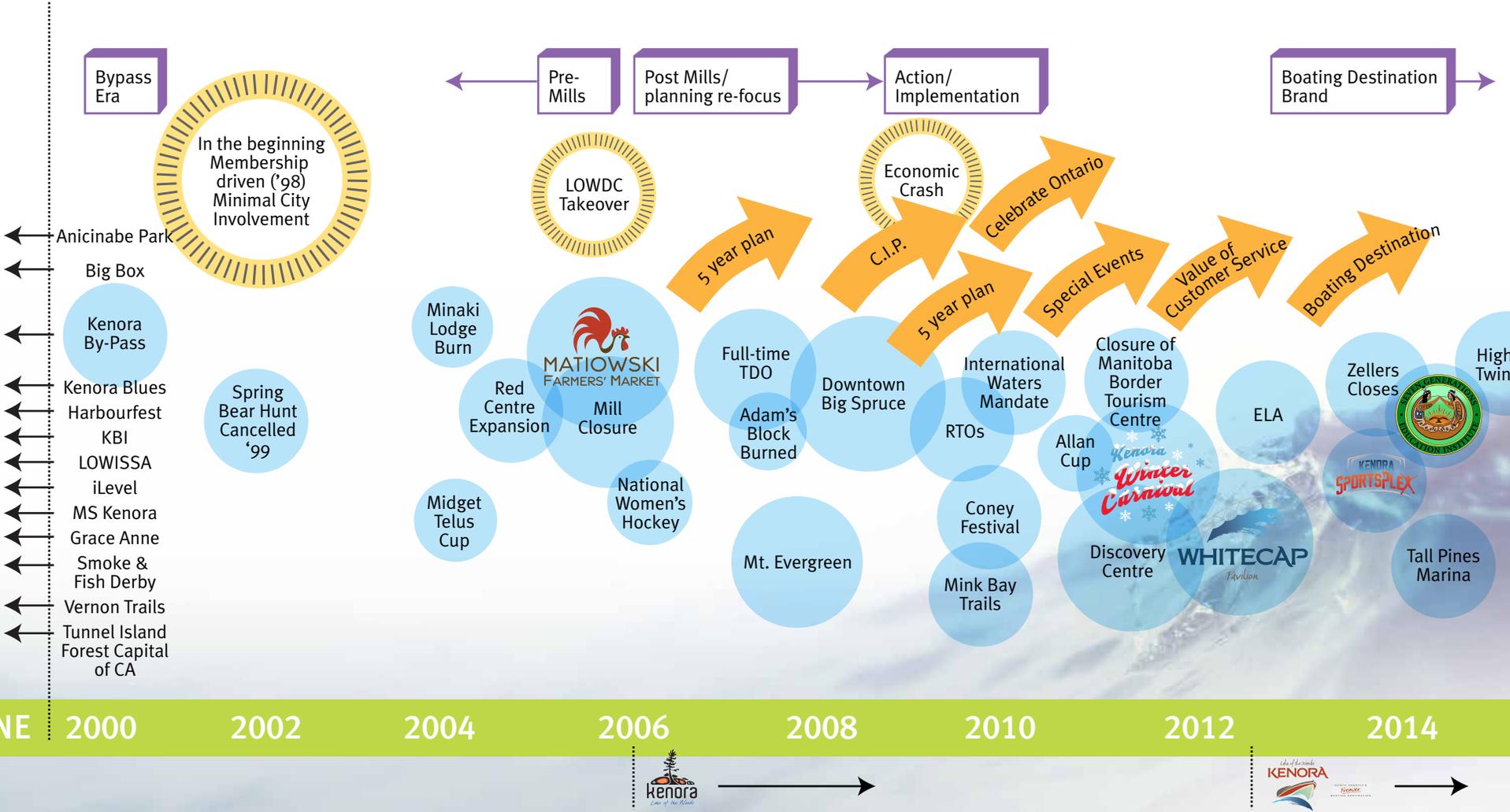
In 2014, we realized the vision of our very first tourism strategy. Over the past 5 years we have successfully implemented a 4 season marketing program, initiated the service excellence customer service training, witnessed the building of both the Lake of the Woods Discovery Centre and Whitecap pavilion, developed a strong special events plan and adopted a new brand and direction for Kenora as North America's premier boating destination. The success of the Tourism Kenora, and the Lake of the Woods Development Commission is based our development of community partnerships. This strategy document will also be successful because the communities ability to come together to work on the common vision outlined within these pages. This strategy will be of use and interest to many different audiences in Kenora and throughout Northwestern Ontario. It will be widely circulated to include anyone with an interest in Kenora and regional tourism who wishes to realize the full potential of our region and its people.

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History of Tourism



Strategic Context



The Tourism Industry today, provincially, regionally and locally is not what it was 5 years ago. In 2009 the Province of Ontario released a report written by Greg Sorbara, entitled “Discovering Ontario a report for the future of Tourism.” With the adoption of that report the entire industry within the Province was restructured. New regionally focused Tourism Organizations emerged and synergies were realized and expanded on. The industry in many senses has come together to realize the reports goal of doubling Provincial Tourism receipts by 2020. This dramatic change has affected Tourism Kenora. It has allowed us to expand our partnership building and allowed us to realize success beyond our municipal boundaries. We are active participants in regional collaboration efforts which promote our similarities and highlight our unique differences to potential visitors.

The past 5 years have been that of finding ourselves in a new model. It has been a period of new beginnings, laying ground work, and growing pains, yet we have advanced significantly. Today, things are much more established, strong relationships and partnerships have been forged. We have experienced steady growth and industry investment. We are poised to really excel and develop Tourism in Kenora to its full potential.

It is within that context that we have built our plan through a series of strategic planning sessions with SquarePeg solutions. These sessions have helped us to understand our past and present situations and to look forward and establish a clear vision for the future.

Our SPOT Matrix and Context Map identify the realities of Tourism in Kenora.

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CONTEXT MAP – Tourism in Kenora

● DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

- RVing is on the rise
- More out-of country travel
- Baby Boomers are retiring – have the most \$\$
- Young professionals are investing
- Young families desire nature
- Higher-education exports
- Business succession (changing of the guard)
- Bus tours declining
- New Canadians market growing (plus visiting families)
- Stay-cations

● POLITICAL FACTORS

- Upcoming elections
- Funding availability is tied to government programming
- Border-related policy(ies)

● ECONOMIC CLIMATE

- Gas pricing & hydro rates
- USD\$
- Generational transfer of wealth
- Discretionary spending is tied to global markets/investments
- Eurozone is down
- People are value-seeking

● TECHNOLOGY TRENDS

- Self-booking travel (airbnb)
- Peer reviews & recommendations carry weight
- Everything is in real-time
- Office at the lake capabilities
- Distance education
- GPS = ease of exploration
- Mobile applications

● VISITOR NEEDS

- | | | |
|-------------------------|--|--------------------|
| • Special events | • Safety & security | • Ability to learn |
| • Packages | • Cultural experiences | • Incentives |
| • Boat services/rentals | • Experiential activities | • Clean beaches |
| • Access to lake | • Visitor information sources (handheld) | |
| • Parking | • Technology (wi-fi) | |
| • Customer service | | |

● UNCERTAINTIES

- Weather & climate
- Vagrancy
- Private sector services, investments, opportunities
- Community buy-in



SPOT MATRIX – Tourism in Kenora

● STRENGTHS

Capabilities, skills, resources, reputation & recent successes

- + Access point to Lake of the Woods & surrounded by lakes
- + Geographic location
- + Variety of activities
- + Summer residents: investment & vision
- + Marketing partnerships (associations, private, government)

- + Surrounding communities
- + Flagship events
- + Strong brand recognition in target markets
- + Engaged committees
- + Political buy-in
- + Improving infrastructure
- + Improved community buy-in
- + Generational / histories ties
- + Distinct seasons
- + Brand direction

● OPPORTUNITIES

Specific activities and projects of benefit that build on strengths, solve problems, or creative new products/services in the future

- FOUR SEASONS
- CO-MARKETING
- EDUCATION
- CULTURAL TOURISM
- SPORT TOURISM
- REGIONAL COLLABORATION
- HIGHWAY TWINNING
- AMBASSADORSHIP
- QUALITY, BOUTIQUE HOTEL
- EXPAND TARGET MARKETS

● PROBLEMS

Weaknesses, difficulties, gaps, shortcomings, issues.
Whatever is getting in the way of success

- Customer service (open/accessible)
- Infrastructure: No year-round facility for events
- Lake of docks
- High taxes
- Year-round events
- Limited air/rail transportation
- High hydro costs
- "town" mentality
- Summer-centric "boating"
- Trail infrastructure
- Vagrancy
- Limited financial resources
- Outdoor focus
- Visitor demographics
- Residual mill-mentality
- Snowmobile permits
- Not near high-density populations

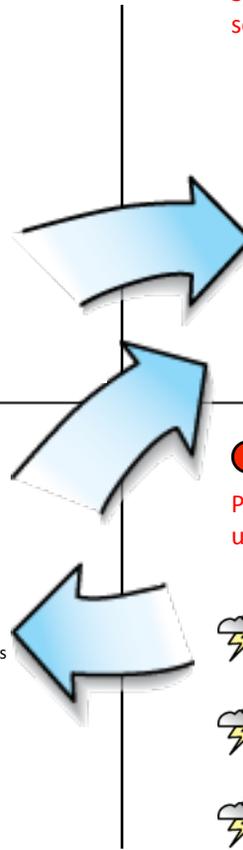
● THREATS

Possible future developments that could seriously impede, undermine or set off-course tourism success.

- Day-boaters
- Cost of living
- Building costs
- Visitor demographics
- Hotel reputation
- Gas pricing
- Economic climate
- 2013-14 Winter impact
- Weather: summer trip vs winter trip
- Government regulation on private sector
- Boating regulations on horizon
- Lake of regional buy-in
- Changing government = changing programming
- Technology infrastructure

CURRENT/INTERNAL

FUTURE/EXTERNAL



Our Vision:
To become a top four-season destination.

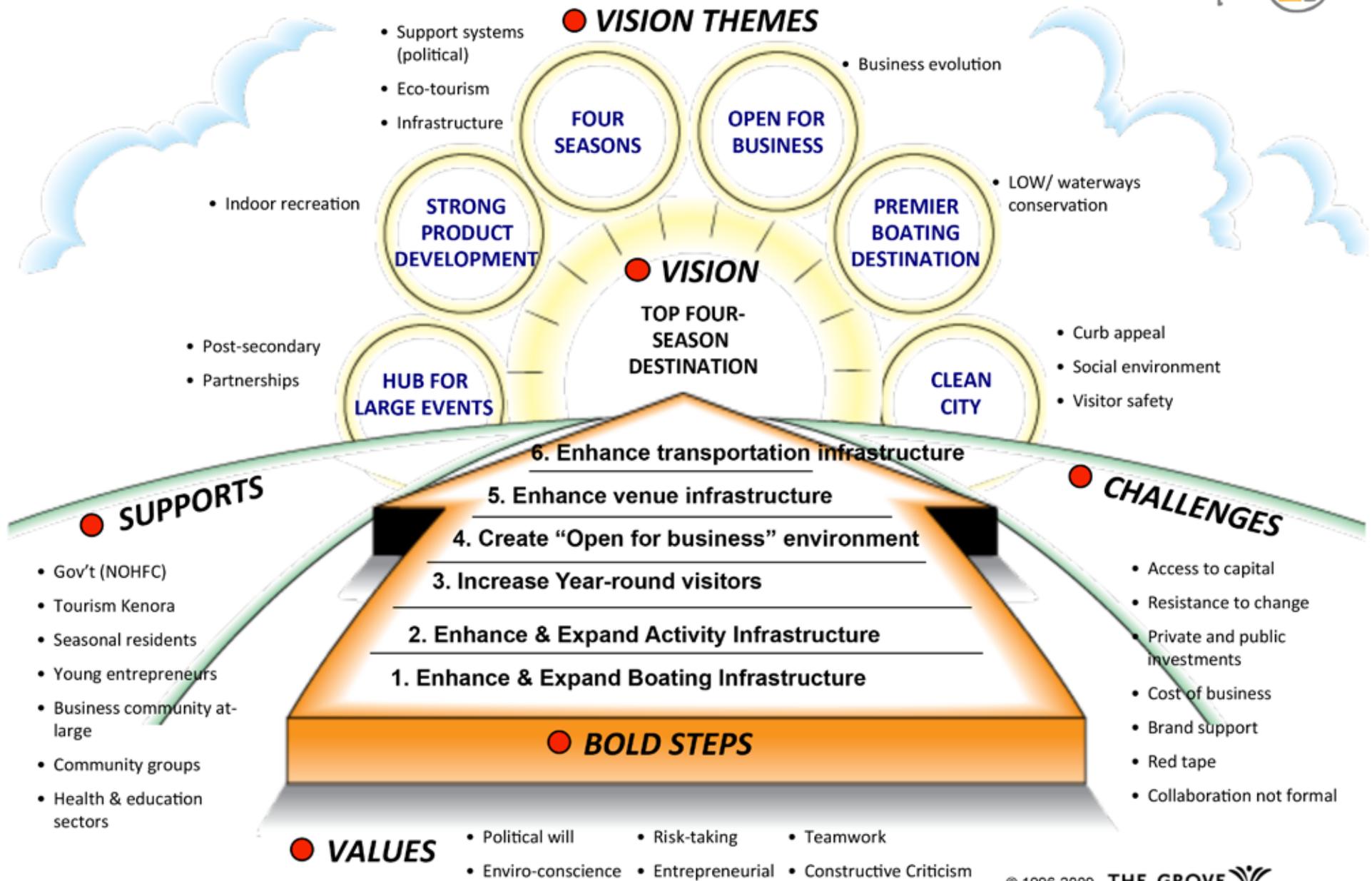


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SIX BOLD STEPS – Tourism Kenora



Implementing our Vision



In its strategic plan, Our Vision is 20/20, The City of Kenora has identified developing the economy as one of 3 overarching goals. Tourism is a key component to developing our economy. We have seen increased spending within the industry and significant growth and development, which cannot be ignored.

Expanding the Tourism industry has been identified by the City of Kenora as one of its corporate actions:

“The City will support, promote, and expand the Tourism Industry. In recognition of the growing importance of tourism within the economy, Kenora will pursue the recruitment and facilitation of a new event(s) which celebrates Kenora as a thriving and dynamic year-round destination.”

The tactics outlined in this strategy are aligning with the direction of the City of Kenora and will be instrumental in achieving our common goals.

The Tourism Committee understands that the goals they have set out are lofty. It is realized that they will not all be accomplished at once. Each year this strategy will be reviewed, as part of our work planning process. Our annual priorities will be identified and realized. At the end of the 5 year period we hope to have accomplished at least 85% of the tasks we have outlined.

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Tactics

These are the specific tactics that we will undertake to realize our vision.

1. Enhance & Expand Boating Infrastructure

Develop awareness of public docking

- Enhance signage on all public docks including time frames
- Create a map that shows all public docking spots or include on future city maps (may cause clutter)
- Inform public through media channels where public docking is located
- Develop a communication plan
- Increase education on public boating

Initiate the creation of a new and effective overnight docking program

Working collaboratively with the City of Kenora to :

- Create a overnight docking policy on current public docks
- Create a strategy to police overnight docking
- Implement the overnight docking program

Develop a private/public partnership to increase the number of overall docks (public/private)

- Work with the private sector to create a strategy to increase the # of docks
- Locate optimal locations for private/public docks
- Ensure docking for larger boats with access to power is in the plan
- Increase docking by 50%
- Create Non-Motorized boat parking (Harbourfront/ Rec Center)

Enhance Mooring Balls

- Create a new policy for mooring ball rentals
- Work with planning and property to determine location of new mooring balls
- Install at least 10 more mooring balls that cater to larger boats (current capacity is 40 feet)

Enhancement of existing public dock infrastructure

- Secure funding through all government levels
- Use funds to enhance current public docks (all docks have protective bumpers, handicap accessible, etc)

Generate revenue through boating infrastructure

- Development of a fee for use program on all public boat launches
- Ensure revenue from the development of a fee for use program is reinvested in maintaining and improving our boat launches.
- Creation of launch attendant program (summer student)
- Creation of overnight docking policy

2. Enhance & Expand Activity Infrastructure

Identify potential new attractions

- List all potential new attractions
- Build a strategy to help develop these products
- Work with Tourism Northern Ontario and determine fits within their regional product development strategy.

Continue to work with First Nations on developing products to fit visitors needs (cultural tourism)

- Partner with First Nations to help circulate a Powwow guide and increase awareness of the events.
- Help to promote an understanding of Powwow etiquette
- Seek out First Nations organizers for new events

Support the development of the Events Center

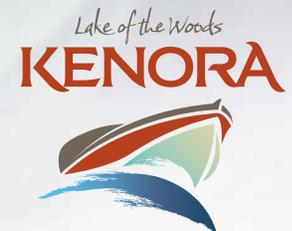
- Work with the Events Centre Committee and provide support when necessary.

Attract or host at least one major event each year outside of peak season (September to May)

- Work with current event organizers interested in bringing new events to the community
- Research and identify new event opportunities for the off-season in Kenora
- Recruit new events to the community in the off-season

Work with tourism operators/event organizers to help them enhance their product

- Help operators seek funding on all three government levels
- Raise awareness through media outlets to promote the new or enhanced product
- Present options for future, non hunting or fishing usage



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Tactics

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Create an attractions guide for Kenora and surrounding area

- Compile a list of all attractions
- Apply for funding to create the guide

Create fishing and hunting services guide

- Compile a list of all fishing guides & hunting guides
- Work with the private sector to determine models that will work for information on these services.
- Apply for funding to create the guide

Work with the private sector to develop new activities and tourism product

- Work with Northwest Business Centre to develop high school (summer company) presentations
- Provide support to the Economic Develop Officer when necessary

3. Increase Year Round Visitors

Continue with our 4 season marketing plan

- Develop a baseline model visitor and visitor profile
- Continue to develop our photo library
- Do not permit the use of stock photography in our advertising
- Develop and implement strategies to target the new Canadian market
- Maintain and build on our partnership model with the Kenora Hospitality Alliance

Prioritize and increase shoulder and winter season Tourism Events Grants

- Lobby for increase in tourism grant dollars
- Implement changes to the Tourism Grant policy to reflect shoulder and winter season events as a priority.

Develop winter product

- Identify potential products and gaps
- Work with the BDC and private industry to fill the identified voids
- Work with the KHA, Restaurant, association and Winter operators to develop strong winter vacation packages.
- Explore options for indoor winter events (video game tournaments, music/arts events)

Work with Kenora Recreation Center on indoor sporting tournaments

- Develop information packages for visiting sports tournaments
- Assist, where possible in the application for sporting events bids.

Continue to work on enhancing the snowmobiling experience in Northwestern Ontario and Kenora

- Create partnership with OFSC
- Participate in regional snowmobiling tourism initiatives
- Work on implementing interprovincial snowmobile passes
- Improve current infrastructure

Support the development of the boat museum concept

- Assist with funding applications
- Develop and promote winter experiential programming in relation to the museum

Continue to enhance attractions & exhibits at the Lake of the Woods Discovery Center

- Continue to build our partnership with Science North
- Complete and expand the Discovery Forest and Model Shoreline
- Complete the Discovery Centre amphitheatre
- Investigate opportunities for public and private investment opportunities to fully outfit the Discovery Centre to its full capacity.
- Build a suitable library of promotional video.

Create and enhance culinary events

- Work with the restaurant association to enhance and expand the winter bites promotion
- Establish the development of a new multi venue culinary event in the fall time

Explore a signature series of events (1 per month)

- Identify possible events
- Develop a promotional program

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Tactics

These are the specific tactics that we will undertake to realize our vision.

Expand the Winter Carnival

- Involve more private sector business
- Span over 2 weeks
- Develop multi-venue music event
- Engage local schools and community groups

4. Create “Open for Business” Environment

Increase the number of food trucks

- send RFP's regionally and into Manitoba
- develop and promote food truck event, invite from region
- Improve the electrical access at the Harbourfront to accommodate more trucks.

Develop street festival infrastructure between Main street & Matheson Street

Working with Harbourtown Biz:

- Compile an inventory list of existing and available community infrastructure
- Assist in sourcing out funding opportunities to enhance and obtain required infrastructure

Increase the number of Artisan events throughout the year

Working with LOWAC and other arts groups

- Enhance and develop new arts markets, expositions and fairs

Continue to work with EDC and Northwest Business Centre to develop new ideas

- Conduct annual or semi-annual joint committee meetings

Create three shop local events yearly

Working with Harbourtown Biz

- Develop three shop local events (May Long, Mid-Summer and Fall/Winter)
- Provide marketing and promotional support
- Assist in providing necessary infrastructure

Continue to support and enhance car and boat shows in Kenora

- Work with classic car clubs to organize 2 or 3 more harbourfront shows/rally's
- Work with motorcycle enthusiasts to organize a motorcycle show
- Continue to support and attract events such as the Northern Lights car show

Develop and expand on Motorcycle infrastructures

- Collaborate with regional partners to learn and determine best practices
- Conduct motorcycle friendly training and information sessions for local businesses
- Ensure we are included and promoting on regional and provincial touring route
- Develop Touring resources

Educate businesses on the needs of ethnic travellers

- Determine the needs of our new visitors
- Request and bring cultural sensitivity training for business to Kenora
- enhance dining options in hotel restaurants

Create a staff position specifically geared for events attraction

- Explore funding possibilities
- Develop a strong business case for the position

Continue to assist and advocate for community beautification

5. Enhance Venue Infrastructure

Complete the Whitecap Pavilion

- Apply for grant funding to assist with necessary improvements
- Winterize to acceptable temperatures (12-15 Celsius)
- Fix acoustic issues with sound baffles
- Fix rigging over the stage to allow 'flying' sound
- lease a sound system
- purchase permanent lighting system
- Create storage for infrastructure
- Make Whitecap Pavilion a turn-key events center
- Develop Small business infrastructure on docks & green belt

Improve Thistle Pavilion observation deck

Working with the Property and Planning department we will lobby for and ensure that there is capital budgets built that include:

- Replacement of the deck, refresh general area (paint)
- build permanent cover for weather to extend use of the area
- develop as viewing area for general use and special events
- Increase and make more prevalent, visitor information signage on the Harbourfront.

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Tactics

These are the specific tactics that we will undertake to realize our vision.

Create additional washroom facilities in Downtown Core

- Develop a case study, demonstrating need, for a new washroom
- Search for community partners
- Investigate the possibility of a coin operated washroom

Improve portable washroom infrastructure on the Harbourfront

- Investigate options and identify realistic opportunities for washroom trailers that drain directly into the sewer system
- Develop site plans to decrease the reliance on unsightly porta-potties

Create additional smaller community venues

- Help to support the development of a stage at Anicinabe park
- Work with encourage Ski Club to develop possible small entertainment space

Enhance the infrastructure at Coney Island

- Improve the dock to allow MS Kenora to operate a shuttle service
- Install a storage/locker area for visitors
- improve boat and swim docking at beach area
- work with local businesses to develop a feasible model for a boat shuttle or boat taxi service that makes it easier for visitors to access Coney Island.

Improve and enhance special event infrastructure

- Develop a comprehensive list of ideal infrastructure that we require
- Identify infrastructure required to accommodate special events on the Greenbelt (bleachers, viewing areas)
- Explore potential events infrastructure funding opportunities
- Work with existing event organizers to develop partnership opportunities surrounding events infrastructure.

Support the re-opening of a boat lift or create of a lock system from Lake of the Woods to the Winnipeg River

6. Enhance transportation infrastructure

Establish a relationship with the Kenora airport to learn about their future plans

- Jointly investigate the possibility of attracting a new air carrier
- Development of vacation packaging that includes flights, accommodations and activities.

Continue to provide support & lobby for the twinning of the highway

- Work with the Ministry of Transportation for improved signage into Kenora at the by-pass on both entrances.
- Work with the Ministry of Transportation for improved and permanent visitor information signage for the Lake of the Woods Discovery Centre.

Improve biking infrastructure

- Installation of bike racks downtown and in key areas
- Increased promotion of biking (trails & maps)
- Investigate the possibility of Bike Trail development

Establishment of Farmers Market Shuttle

- Identify possible opportunities for a private sector person to undertake this initiative.

Complete an internal traffic flow study

- Work in partnership with the City, Harbourtown Biz and Chamber of Commerce
- Work to pedestrianize more of downtown



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