

TOWARD

ESPANOLA STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN 2023-2027

When Espanola last did a strategic plan in 2013, the Town adopted these goals:

Improved and well-maintained Infrastructure

Sustainable Economic Growth & Prosperity

A Safe and Healthy Community

Excellence in Government

These goals still summarize the Espanola we want, but much has changed over the past 10 years and more change can be predicted. So, the first step is to take stock:

- Looking at those Goals, what has changed over the past few years – changes in Espanola, in the broader world, and within the Town government itself – that have presented opportunities and challenges we should address?
- Looking at those Goals, what can we predict for the next few years that will present opportunities or challenges we should prepare for?
- We're a small town: we can't do everything. But what specific actions COULD we take that will yield the greatest value and make the most progress for Espanola?

This spring, Council will prepare an Espanola Action Plan 2023-2027. To prepare that plan, we need your input. What are your answers to those questions?

Below FOR DISCUSSION is a preliminary view of some opportunities and challenges. It's not finished. Do you see – or predict in the future – other opportunities and challenges that the Town should address? While recognizing that “the sky is not the limit”, what specific actions would you recommend to pursue the Town's Goals?

YOUR THOUGHTS?

Most of our roads, water supply, and sewage treatment is in satisfactory condition, but keeping infrastructure in a state of good repair is a costly never-ending task. Our Asset Management Plan indicates that, to ensure continued good condition, the Town should be investing \$ half-million more per year in roads and bridges and a similar amount for water and sewer services.

Espanola is fortunate to have a wealth of recreation facilities, both indoor and outdoor. The taxpayers' expense to maintain these facilities is justified only if they are heavily used. The Regional Recreation Complex, for example, requires repairs and upgrades. In turn, expenditures on good repair, programming, and community events have been made and are essential to uphold/increase usage.

Walking and cycling are a low-cost, do-it-when-you-can form of activity that is healthy for all ages. Many of us recognized the value of our trails during COVID and would like to see more trail development.

Recently, Espanola has seen new residential Growth at a rate not seen for decades, and types other than single-family residential units. Our Official Plan, as well as Provincial policy, call both for steady continued growth and for more of such “gentle-density” development. As everywhere in Ontario, home prices have accelerated at a time when we need more attainably-priced housing – both for sale and for rent – for downsizing seniors, for employees new to Town, and for young families. While the Town is not in a position to be a home builder or landlord, expectations are that we will actively facilitate efforts to address this issue.

The reconstruction of Hwy 6/Centre Street and its underground services – at a cost of \$ millions both from the Province and from the Town – will be completed during this term of Council. Hundreds of thousands of people pass through Espanola every year to or from Manitoulin. They do support our grocery, lumber, and fast-food businesses, but this massive investment might have greater “payback” if more stopped, for longer, and spent more tourism \$\$, in Espanola.

Similarly, the “payback” from the Hwy reconstruction would be enhanced if it spurred more business, more density, and more upgrading in downtown properties. Espanola offers modest incentives for main street properties to improve their appearance. Nonetheless, our main street has some vacant and poorly maintained properties and may not project a prosperous image of our town.

While fortunate to have Domtar, Espanola also seeks a mix of small industries, tradespeople, and tech-oriented firms. The installation of new fibre-optic cable will be a huge advantage, but our industrial park is full.

With a hospital, long-term care, and other medical services, the health sector is one of our largest employers and critical to our quality of life for all ages and to our place in a larger region. Provincial investments in health and home care may present new opportunities.

Espanola households want to minimize the amount of waste going to landfill. Licensed landfill space is at a premium and a wasteful use of money and our environment. New Provincial regulations will standardize recycling across the province. Successful waste management is an ongoing challenge.

Volunteers make Espanola the fine place it is. Service clubs, sports organizations, local charities, and more – they all rely on volunteers. On the one hand, in many organizations the number of volunteers is dwindling. On the other hand, young families and returning retirees may present an opportunity.

Espanola is not immune to the mental health challenges and addictions that affect the quality of life across the country. While solutions are elusive, many agencies and programs play a part, including policing, schools, recreation programs and health services. The 2021 LaCloche-Foothills Community Safety and Well-being Plan contains “to-dos” for all partners.

Taxes: Provincial legislation provides municipalities with little alternative to property taxes to fund most infrastructure and services, but property taxes do not necessarily correspond to a household’s income. Recent high inflation affects both households’ ability to pay and the cost of Town projects and operations. Espanola’s property taxes are not exceptional among similar municipalities in Northeastern Ontario, and are similar to those in Greater Sudbury and Blind River. In recent years, our tax rates have not increased with the rate of inflation. New development helps somewhat but also increases the cost of services.

LET’S TALK