

TOWN OF ESPANOLA



STRATEGIC PLAN

Our Gateway to Growth

2023 - 2027



Espanola
Welcome • Aanii • Bienvenue

Prepared by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Created by you, members of our broader community, board and committee members, service club members, along with Council and staff, this plan will help guide the municipality towards achieving the goals and specific objectives identified throughout the strategic planning process.

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INTRODUCTION

The final draft of the Town of Espanola's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan was adopted by Council on June 13th, 2023.

Mayor and Council are grateful for the community contributions, comments and commitment to help direct Espanola through this term of Council and beyond.

Mayor, Council and Staff look forward to the implementation of this vital document and are excited by the possibilities, challenges and opportunities that will only strengthen our vibrant community!

MESSAGE FROM MAYOR & COUNCIL

It's a new era in Espanola. We have new opportunities, such as new developments, a growing population, the reconstruction of Highway 6/Centre Street, and the revival of community activities after COVID. We certainly have challenges... the lack of housing options, vacant properties downtown, our always-aging infrastructure, and our always limited municipal resources, just to name a few. Now is the time for the Town to plan ahead.

We've developed a plan that takes stock of our situation and will guide the municipality through this term of Council and beyond. We can't do everything, so what will the Town's key priorities be? What initiatives should – and can – the Town take to make progress for the community? Where can we expect support from citizens and our partnerships with volunteers, community organizations, and other governments?

This Plan does not touch on everything the Town does. It does, however, focus on things we want to do more of or do better, on the challenges we want to address and the opportunities we want to seize. The Town provides many basic services and does them well. Those will continue, doing what you expect them to do.

On behalf of Council, I want to thank everyone that contributed to the development of this plan including Town staff, the numerous organizations, committees, boards and interest groups, as well as the 546 citizens of Espanola who took the time to complete our survey.

Work has already begun to implement the initiatives described in this plan and we look forward to your support!

Douglas Gervais, Mayor

OUR MISSION

The Corporation of the Town of Espanola is committed to effective governance and operations while working toward the creation of a plentiful and varied supply of affordable housing. We will strive to build a place residents are proud of and visitors are attracted to, with the provision of infrastructure that reliably serves existing and new development. We will aspire to advance a prosperous and diversified local economy and a healthy and active quality of life for all ages.

CORPORATE VALUES

Working together:

- We value respect and integrity
- We value affordability
- We are open and accessible
- We value inclusion



OUR STRATEGIC GOALS

This plan is organized into six broad community goals for Espanola:

1. Housing

A plentiful and varied supply of housing, including low and medium density, ownership and rental market, and rent-geared-to-income.

2. Pride of Place:

A place residents are proud of and visitors are attracted to.

3. Infrastructure:

Infrastructure that reliably serves existing and new development.

4. Quality of Life:

A healthy and active quality of life for all ages.

5. Economy:

A prosperous and diversified local economy.

6. Town Government:

Effective Municipal Governance and Operations.

GOAL 1: HOUSING

Like most small northern towns, Espanola's housing stock is predominantly single-family homes built in an earlier generation. Rental housing is scarce. As throughout Ontario, the price of housing and rents have recently escalated rapidly, due to both a lack of supply and to demographic factors. On the positive side, Espanola is seeing an unprecedented interest from housing developers.

Responses to the March 2023 public survey showed "A lack of housing options" to be by far the Town's most serious issue. Respondents favoured the Town offering incentives to developers to build affordable housing units, identifying municipal land for affordable developments, and conducting a housing needs assessment. Responses to the survey's "Top-of-Mind Issue" question emphasized the need not just for more housing, but also for a greater variety of housing types, including senior-oriented options.

Our consultation with community organization and agencies identified a lack of housing, certainly a lack of rental housing, to be a key impediment to attracting employees, professionals, and trades, to recruiting doctors and nurses, and to accommodating the needs of young adults and aging seniors. We heard strong support for a clear Town priority and bold solutions.

The District Social Services Administration Board is responsible for offering housing subsidies and rent-geared-to-income housing. The Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board has several hundred on their wait list for subsidized housing in Espanola. The need is glaringly obvious.

In 2023–2027, the Town will pursue this goal through the following initiatives:

1. Reviewing and updating the Town's Community Improvement Plan (CIP) and investigating the provision of a tax increment grant incentive for all new rental units, accessory units in existing homes, and encouragement for new units to meet accessibility standards.
2. Investigating the potential of existing Town-owned properties for the purpose of facilitating housing development.
3. Expanding water & sewer infrastructure to facilitate new housing developments while also allocating water and sewer capacity to facilitate more infill units in existing parts of town.
4. Developing a Housing Action Plan which incorporates Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) funding pre-requisites for affordable/geared-to-income housing.
5. Engaging with interest groups and community partners that may have an interest in sponsoring and/or developing more housing, including more Seniors Housing.
6. Exploring opportunities to acquire property to facilitate housing development or redevelopment, and to proactively pre-plan, pre-zone, pre-subdivide such property for sale on condition that the development will be built as planned.



7. Reviewing building and planning processes to ensure:
 - a. Applicants are made aware as soon as possible of all applicable submission requirements.
 - b. Clear and useful explanatory materials and guidelines are available.
 - c. Regulations applied are, to the extent legally possible, tailored to the complexity of an application.
 - d. Applicants, particularly for new housing, commercial and industrial projects, continue to be given support through the process.
8. Upgrading the Town's website to provide guidance on the creation of accessory apartments in existing dwellings and other building requirements.
9. Advocating with the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board and other relevant parties for a substantial allocation of funding for Espanola rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing.



GOAL 2: PRIDE OF PLACE

The Town of Espanola began as a company town and was incorporated in 1958. The original downtown's role as the commercial hub has declined as the more modern stores in the south end sprang up. Gas stations and motels on small highway sites could no longer meet modern expectations. Centre Street is now dotted with vacant sites, revolving businesses, and some poorly kept buildings.

The public survey made it clear that the public has had enough of the poor appearance and lack of vitality on Centre Street. Respondents had a lacklustre view of community beautification and property standards enforcement. Centre Street's appearance – both in terms of the public streetscape and private properties – was among the highest “Top-of-Mind” issues.

Our community group consultations confirmed public impatience with the vacant lots, rundown buildings, and lack of community pride they witnessed on Centre Street, and with the Town's perceived lack of action in the past.

Although funds and legislation may limit the Town's practical ability to deal with private properties, the public has expressed support for a proactive approach to the appearance of Centre Street.

The Town's existing Community Improvement Plan does provide for a Tax Increment Grant program for new multi-residential, seniors, or affordable units, but the program has not been aggressively funded or utilized.



Town of Espanola

In 2023–2027, the Town will pursue this goal through the following initiatives:

1. Using its Community Improvement Plan, and potentially tax increment grant incentives, to stimulate beautification and redevelopment on Centre Street.
2. Taking a more proactive approach to property standards on Centre Street.
3. Exploring ways to create local outdoor art, sculptures, murals etc.
4. Investigating the establishment of a multi-purpose Tourist Information Centre on Centre Street, potentially featuring Indigenous and local history/ arts and farmer's market.



GOAL 3: INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure – roads, water and sewer pipes, drainage, public buildings – are the bones of the town. The survey demonstrated this. Aging infrastructure was second to housing among public concerns voiced in the public survey. Road quality and maintenance is considered somewhat unsatisfactory. The Town's Asset Management Plan lays out the daunting dimensions of this issue: to maintain all its existing infrastructure in good repair, the Town would continually need to spend at least \$500,000.00 per year more than it typically has. Very few if any towns can afford to do so, nor can Espanola. Prioritizing is essential.

The multi-year, multi-million-dollar reconstruction of Centre Street/Hwy 6 has clearly been established in the previous Council term as a continuing priority with this Council, subject to ongoing "Connecting Link" funding from the Province. Cost escalation on this project has required a significant draw on the Town's reserves.

Similarly, the Town is committed to a two-stage upgrade of its water system. The first stage was completed in 2022 with a total investment of approximately \$6 million. An additional \$8.8 million is slated for 2023 and 2024.

Pipes in the eastern section of town are 60 -70 years old, originating to the development of the area and long-recognized as in need of updating. Design work for replacement has already been undertaken, but once again the cost is beyond the Town's means; funding from upper levels of government will be required.

Infrastructure – particularly water and sewer capacity – is essential to accommodate both new development properties and to infill in existing developed areas. A study is already underway to determine how much new development can be serviced before the formidable question of expanding water and sewage treatment facilities will need to be addressed.

The Town will pursue the completion of Highway 6/Centre Street reconstruction through the following initiatives:

1. Phase 3 of Hwy 6 Reconstruction (McDonalds to Second Avenue) – 2023.
2. Phase 4 of Hwy 6 Reconstruction (from Station Road to Tudhope Street) – 2025, subject to MTO approval of a prior year funding submission from the Town.
3. Phase 5 of Hwy 6 Reconstruction (From Foucault to Kei Will Drive) – 2027, subject to MTO approval of a prior year funding submission from the Town.



The Town will pursue the expansion and upgrading of water and sewer services through the following initiatives:

1. Undertaking a study to determine water and sewer capacity available to accommodate new development, and subsequently maintaining an accurate sense of available water and sewer capacity.
2. Replacing the trunk watermain on Mead Blvd.
3. Developing a multi-year program and seeking funding to replace water and sewer services in East Espanola (south of Second St.)
 - a) When developing the multi-year replacement program, consider opportunities to service additional industrial lots in conjunction with the replacement program.
 - b) Initiating the multi-year replacement program, subject to federal and/or provincial funding.



GOAL 4: QUALITY OF LIFE

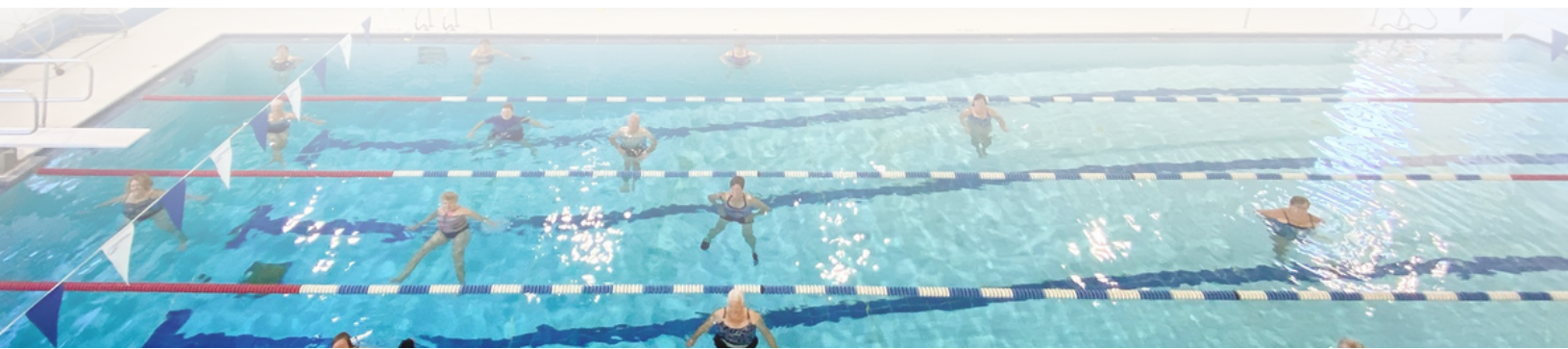
Espanola's quality of life arose consistently in our consultations as the key feature of the town, drawing people from Sudbury and area and drawing both old and young to return to town. Asked what is most appealing about Espanola, respondents cited its proximity to amenities, its parks and trails and open spaces, and its recreation/culture opportunities. The Library and recreation facilities were among the services with which people are most satisfied.

In answer to the "Top-of-Mind-Issues" question, recreation for all ages, and community activities more generally, led the list of public desires.

Our consultation with community organizations consistently highlighted both past successes of recreation and library programming as well as the need for more volunteers and more support for volunteer-driven community activities. The trails, Boogie Mountain, and the Lions skating oval were some of the most often mentioned. Similarly, the Regional Recreation Complex is recognized as a rare jewel for a town of Espanola's size, but underutilized.

In addition to the issue of seniors-suitable housing, our consultations noted the transportation issue for residents – particularly but not only seniors – without cars.

The constellation of health and seniors' services in Espanola is a source of community pride and a pillar of the economy. Support for recruitment in that sector remains strong.



The Town will pursue its support for volunteers generating community events and activities through the following initiatives:

1. Tasking the Recreation and Culture Committee to revisit all previous recreation-related plans and studies and to prioritize potential initiatives arising from them.
2. Organizing a forum for dialogue with and among volunteer organizations to share best practices and ideas for promoting more volunteerism.
3. Continuing to find ways to support volunteer groups and local organizations developing local recreation facilities, community activities, and green spaces (e.g., Black Creek Trail, the Snowmobile Trail, Boogie Mountain, walking and bicycle trails, and the Lion's skating oval).
4. Seeking opportunities to increase the year-round use of the Espanola Regional Recreation Complex.
5. Finding ways to support volunteer groups and local organizations highlighting Espanola's history and heritage, through such means as walking tours, heritage plaques, school programming, and exhibition spaces.



Town of Espanola

The Town will pursue its priority to improve access to health and seniors' services through the following initiatives:

1. Continuing to support the recruitment program for doctors and nurses.
2. Continuing to support the implementation of the Community Safety and Well-being Plan and improved communication of the social services and seniors' services available within Espanola and area.
3. Consulting with relevant parties concerning the Care Van service.

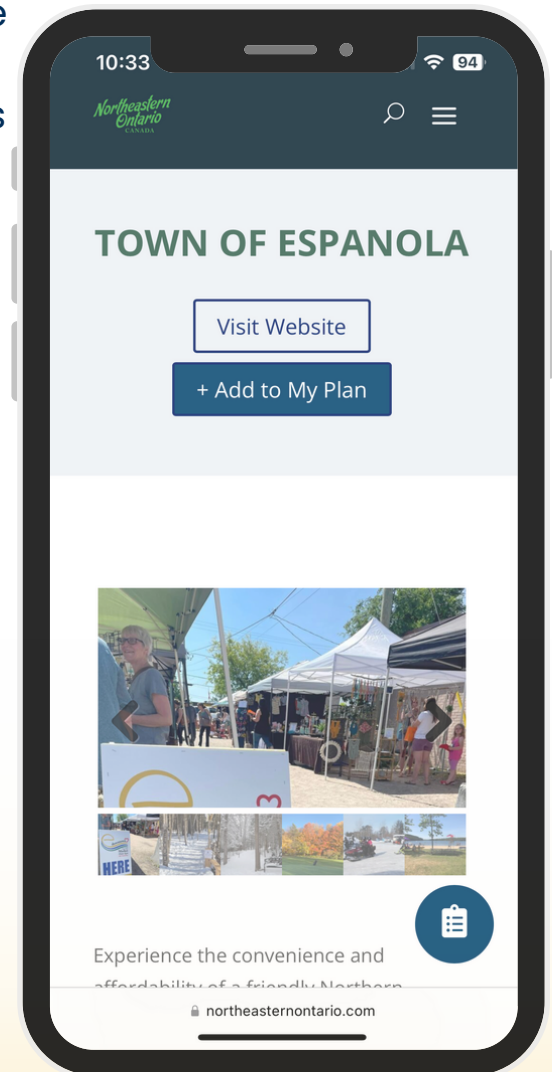


GOAL 5: ECONOMY

The economy of Espanola is heavily reliant on the pulp and paper operations as well as its hospital, schools, and retail sector. As a result, residents are well aware of a need to diversify the local economy.

The most obvious approach, as noted both by survey respondents and local organizations, would be to aggressively extract tourism dollars from the high volume of Manitoulin-bound traffic and from the Sudbury area. A wide variety of potential events and other attractions were proposed.

In addition, the need to market Espanola as a desirable place to live, work and to start a business was identified.



Town of Espanola

In 2023–2027, the Town will pursue this goal through the following initiatives:

1. Exploring ways to support and help to publicize community-driven, inclusive events that draw visitors from the broader region and the traffic to/from Manitoulin.
2. Investigating ways to increase the number of EV charging stations in Espanola.
3. Approaching various agencies to obtain funding for an aggressive campaign to market Espanola as a desirable location for trades, professions, businesses and entrepreneurs.
4. Working with educational institutions, local industries, and other partners to attract the trades and skilled labour to Espanola.
5. Exploring opportunities to address accommodation service gaps.



GOAL 6: EFFECTIVE MUNICIPAL GOVERNANCE AND OPERATIONS

Espanola's financial position provides a solid basis for pursuing Council and community priorities. Its debt load is well below the maximum permitted by the Province and its reserves remain healthy. A review of its residential tax rates and tax burden compared to other northeastern Ontario towns shows that Espanola taxes are moderate, certainly compared to towns within Greater Sudbury. Likewise, median household incomes and median population age are in that comparative middle-of-the-road area.

Turnover on staff has been significant. Leadership positions including CAO/ Treasurer, Chief Building Official, and head of Recreation have all experienced turnover recently.

The Town recognizes its obligation to refurbish the Public Works building to meet the standards in the Access for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. The garage portion of the building also requires attention due to the number and size of service vehicles.

Respondents to the public survey indicated concern that the Town was not doing what it could to mitigate the energy use and environmental impact of its facilities and operations. The Town expects to be able to take advantage of new federal grant programs to combat climate change as well as to achieve operating cost savings.



The Town will pursue its priority on the retention and productivity of staff through the following initiatives:

1. Supporting staff training and development activities.
2. Enhancing corporate events, including thank-you events, in collaboration with volunteer groups and community event organizers.
3. Ensuring sufficient cross-training so that some aspects of each Town position can be performed by one or more other positions.
4. Considering hours of work options.

The Town will pursue its priority on planning for future facility needs through the following initiatives:

1. Designing (2023) the upgrades to the Public Works office to meet accessibility standards and constructing (2024) the upgrades.
2. Designing (2026) the upgrade of the Public Works garage to expand capacity and constructing (2027) the upgrade.
3. Seeking opportunities, including grants and returns on investments, to reduce the net energy use and environmental impact of municipal buildings and operations.
4. Inviting the Library Board to investigate and report on future options to address the lack of adequate Library space.
5. Investigating and reporting on future options to address the lack of adequate space for the Town administration.

MOVING OUR STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN FORWARD:

As Council and staff, we intend to do the following:

- Post this Plan and our annual progress reports on the Town's website.
- Provide copies of the Strategic Action Plan to community organizations in the Town, other neighbouring municipalities and agencies, and our employees.
- Use this plan to promote our path forward to community organizations and other governments. Knowing what we're trying to achieve, can we team up and get further faster together?
- Staff will refer to this Plan when making relevant recommendations to Council.
- Council will refer to the Plan when we make individual decisions throughout the term. Is it helping us to get where we said we wanted to get?
- Every annual budget will itemize how it furthers the priorities of this Plan.
- The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) will report to Council each year on progress achieved toward the priorities, noting any new opportunities or barriers relevant to our priorities.

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- Council will convene a public meeting each year to review the action plan, to report on progress, and to explore partnerships for the future.
- At the end of the 2026 term of office, Council will encourage the incoming Council to review the Plan to identify and address the local challenges and opportunities at that time.

Adopted: June 13th, 2023

