



KLCFDC Community Consultation

FALL 2007

Summary Report

As part of its strategic planning process and periodic outreach to support community economic development, the Kawartha Lakes Community Futures Development Corporation initiated an extensive public consultation earlier this year to get a sense of community feeling on various issues, including those of economic interest. This report focuses on the key highlights and potential outcomes from the consultation. More detailed material from the community consultation is available in companion documents.

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Overview

The ambition to do a community consultation stems from one of the main mandates of the (Ontario) Community Futures Program -- strategic community planning and socio-economic development.

Within the community economic development process, the Kawartha Lakes CFDC has the opportunity to create a strategic plan for the organization, which takes into account the goals and desires expressed by community stakeholders regarding local assets, trends, needs, opportunities and future direction.

The 2007 Community Consultation was a project designed to provide an analysis of community needs based on several focus groups and individual interviews. It also considered linkages between these findings and other City or local community-based plans, such as the Community Vision 2002-2012 and the Long-term Economic Development Mission for the City of Kawartha Lakes.

Consultation Process

The Kawartha Lakes Community Futures Development Corporation (KLCFDC) has a mandate to:

- Help create and improve employment and economic prosperity in the area
- Serve as an accessible source of advice and information on business start-up and expansion, and the support available from government programs.
- Undertake activities to encourage community economic development.

This past March, as the first step in its strategic planning process, the CFDC Board initiated a broad round of consultations with citizens from across the community and leaders in various economic sectors.

More than 110 participants contributed in one-on-one interviews and small group discussions about opportunities to be pursued and problems to be solved -- the beginning of a dialogue about where the community wants to go in its efforts to achieve economic prosperity, sustainability and a state of general well-being.

This work helps prepare the groundwork for the Board's development of a new strategic plan to guide the CFDC's activities over the next three years.

As noted in the cover summary, the consultations did not restrict or limit participants to narrow topics -- all enthusiasms and concerns were welcome -- and, as a result, some of the input spoke to a vision of community development beyond the scope of the CFDC's mandate. On those points, the participants' heartfelt and considered comments will be compiled and shared with the committees, agencies and various CFDC partners with the authority or mandate to take action on this feedback.

Process

The development of this plan incorporated a series of activities, including:

Planning and Preparation:

- A review of several community-based documents, plans and studies on future directions for the City of Kawartha Lakes. (See list next page.)
- Several planning meetings with the KLCFDC Board.
- Recruitment of interview subjects and consultation participants suggested by Board members, staff, businesses, agencies and local government officials. The mix included both business and community leaders. Major employment sectors were represented along with those involved in essential infrastructure.

Consultation:

- Six group consultations, involving 11-13 participants in each, were held in centres across the City of Kawartha Lakes: Omemee and Lindsay (Apr.18), Fenelon Falls (Apr.19), Bobcaygeon (Apr.25), Coboconk and Little Britain (both on May 3).
- Three similar consultation sessions focused on particular business sectors: Retail (Apr.19), Manufacturing (Apr.26), and Services (Apr.26).
- One-on-one interviews were also conducted in May with a dozen other community and business leaders.

Deliberation:

- In June, the KLCFDC Board reviewed the common themes and more than 60 suggestions and ideas for action that emerged in the community consultations and interviews (documented in file reports totalling more than 55,000 words).
- This review led by July to the development of a shortlist of 15 potential priorities, which were then considered by the Board in more detail to produce the final high-level strategies presented in this report.

Communication:

- Upon final approval, this report will be made available to participants, partners and the public for review, follow-up, discussion and action.

Other Community Strategies and Plans

The consultation process included a review of various community planning documents. In a number of instances, the feedback received from the consultation focus groups related to some of the points in those documents.

Reference List of Studies and Reports

- Kawartha Lakes CFDC Plan
- City of Kawartha Lakes Community Vision 2002-2012
- City of Kawartha Lakes (CKL) Long-term Economic Development Mission
- Economic Development Task Force Final Recommendations (2000)
- CKL Tourism Advisory Board Strategic Plan
- CKL/ Peterborough County Agriculture Impact Study
- Kawartha Innovation Centre Business Plan
- CKL 2006 & 2007 Business Plans/ Budgets
- Lindsay & District Chamber of Commerce Membership Survey Results 2006
- United Way Report (Sept.2006) *Engaging Communities - Building Communities*
- TOP Report -- Workforce Development Board

The KLCFDC Mission and Context for Consultation

The Kawartha Lakes CFDC is one of 61 Community Futures Development Corporations in rural and Northern Ontario funded by Industry Canada's Community Futures Program through FedNor. CFDCs deliver a wide variety of programs and services to support community economic development and small business growth.

This community consultation summary highlights many aspects of direct interest to the Kawartha Lakes CFDC. The extensive public input speaks to many ways of building a stronger community -- some of interest to the City and to other groups, and some of direct concern to the CFDC, particularly in light of its expanded role as a management resource to the City's Economic Development effort.

Business activity, development and job creation provide the essential economic platform that supports the community's prosperity and a full range of services linked to its socioeconomic well-being. The Kawartha Lakes CFDC has a general mission to promote business and community economic development in the City of Kawartha Lakes. It aims to create and improve employment and economic prosperity by providing information, advice, capital, and community economic development leadership.

There's little doubt the CFDC has an opportunity to extend its effort consistent with the CKL Long-term Economic Development Mission. As it states, one of the "foundation missions of the City of Kawartha Lakes (is) to enhance prosperity by:

- Providing accessible, well-paying employment opportunities,
- Growing a diversified and enduring economy, and
- Building upon the past while embracing the potential of the future."

Two Primary Strategies:

Consistent with the Community Futures program, the KLCFDC's programs and activities animate two primary strategies:

- **Supporting Enterprises Directly:**

Providing start-ups, existing or relocating businesses and other economic organizations with access to information, advice, capital, funding, and other forms of support.

- **Building Our Enabling Capacities:**

Enhancing the community's capacity for economic development (e.g. strengths in the workforce, technology, promotion, and competitive advantages) as well as developing a local environment conducive to business operations.

In practice, this means the CFDC is involved in outreach, acting as an agent of change. By supporting the enterprises that create jobs and pay taxes, and ensuring they have a welcoming environment in which to operate, these strategies will help to deliver the sustainable prosperity that is our goal.

The Consultations: Some General Findings and Observations

- Although not all of the business and community leaders invited to participate in the consultation were able to take part, the vast majority (probably 90%) would have liked to contribute. It seems clear that the community was anxious to be heard.
- Several issues affect stakeholders across all of the City of Kawartha Lakes, and many consistent themes emerged:
 - Promote a welcoming, streamlined and positive economic environment;
 - Encourage a more open and receptive attitude toward change;
 - Actively coordinate and promote opportunities in Kawartha Lakes;
 - Explore strategic investments in the community;
 - Provide support for volunteerism, vibrant downtown/main street hubs and forums for community dialogue.

Other discussion points were more specific to individual communities and particular economic sectors, and are likely to be followed up in community forums (described more fully in the section on priorities for action).

- Business and industry leaders made a clear call for public initiative, support, and consistent, coordinated efforts to create a fertile environment for entrepreneurship. To this end, consultation participants also expressed a desire to see the City and stakeholders outside the municipal structure come together in constructive dialogue. Responding to these various concerns is of direct interest to the KLCFDC, but as participants recognized, one organization can't do it all.
- While amalgamation may now be a fact, there is still a sense of alienation among the smaller communities and hamlets, and a concern that their voices are not heard. There was also a tangible sensitivity to a "Lindsay-focused" orientation.
- Leaders of businesses and many smaller communities expressed some frustration with their attempts to work within City processes to make things happen or seize opportunities. In some cases, community leaders just can't relate to the municipal structure and process. In other cases there may be a lack of public understanding of the municipality's jurisdiction, or the application of provincially or federally legislated standards and practices.

Priorities for CFDC Action on the Input:

The Kawartha Lakes CFDC has set for itself an initial task of developing courses of action on four priorities emerging from the community consultations and Board deliberations:

- **Supporting interaction and understanding among stakeholders through project, sector and community forums;**
- **Promoting local business and industrial growth;**
- **Working with the City -- serving as a management resource, an advocate for economic development and a connection to the business sector; and**
- **Supporting initiatives involving partners and community.**

While a special priority has been placed on efforts in these four areas, they should be viewed within the context of the CFDC's ongoing operations. In fact, they are complementary to CFDC activities such as business advisory and support services, assisting in job creation, providing access to capital, building technology capacity and community economic development.

■ Improving Communication Through Forums ■

The Kawartha Lakes CFDC will initiate, encourage partners or otherwise support an on-going process of public dialogue, sector forums and planning sessions on identified community economic development issues.

In the spirit of the idea that we “all must prosper together,” this initiative involves facilitating projects that help connect business leaders, entrepreneurs, business owners, developers, investors, civic officials, community leaders and residents from across Kawartha Lakes to share information and co-ordinate their plans and efforts.

Project Forums: There is a need to organize some discussion forums to bring interested parties together around specific projects, such as resolving issues between planners and developers, connecting those interested in collaborating on a “buy local” campaign, or making plans to pursue a new hotel development.

Sector Forums: Individual stakeholders in key economic clusters would benefit from forums to pursue sector-specific initiatives -- for example, tourism development, growing the manufacturing base, agriculture product marketing, festival and event coordination, growing the skilled trades workforce, or enhancing the City’s various downtown, main street and retail areas.

Community Forums: The community also expressed interest in the possibility of holding open follow-up discussion groups hosted in various locations across the City of Kawartha Lakes. These sessions could be similar in format to the CFDC’s consultation focus groups, but might best be pursued by the municipality and focused specifically on developing follow-up action plans to address local issues of concern.

■ Promoting Business and Industrial Growth ■

The CFDC will promote growth through development of local businesses, retention of manufacturing industries, and attraction of new employers in sectors of strategic interest, such as information technology and tourism.

- **Acting on the Vision:** The City’s economic development plan identifies five strategic thrusts -- in tourism; agri-business; innovation and entrepreneurship (Innovation Centre, young entrepreneurs); and business retention, expansion and attraction (high-tech, environmental, medical, bio-tech, alternative energies, aggregate industry, water-based recreational products). The CFDC’s role will be to contribute in meaningful ways to the successful achievement of that overall economic development vision.

- **Promotion:** This tactic responds to the community's sense that more has to be done to externally promote local business opportunities, sell the appeal of the community's lifestyle, prepare for development and compete for new business expansion.
- **Buy Local:** Input from the community consultations spoke to the importance of encouraging people to shop at businesses in their own neighbourhoods rather than, for instance, distant communities where they might work. A project in this area might also consider the need to address gaps in local retail product or services that would enable residents to "buy local." Another component would be farm gate product and marketing.
- **Facilities:** Community consultations have identified needs for additional hotel accommodation, facilities for meetings, convention business and trade shows, and a desire for a major sports facility that potentially could host large tournaments or world-class competitions. Activities to encourage discussion among stakeholders, explore opportunities, and assess feasibility of these developments could all potentially involve the CFDC in some way.

■ Working with the City on Economic Development ■

Serving as an advocate for economic development and a connection to the business sector, the Kawartha Lakes CFDC will work closely with the City to address the need for strategic investments in the community, streamlined customer service and approvals processes, and a new entrepreneurial "open for business" attitude.

- **Welcoming Business:** Business attraction, retention and growth depend on the quality of the local economic environment, tax levels, infrastructure, regulation and many other issues that fall under the jurisdiction of the City of Kawartha Lakes. The CFDC's role should be to advocate for a business-friendly "open for business" approach to development.
- **Celebrating Successes:** To promote the idea that the City is "open for business," steps might be taken to recognize recent accomplishments, celebrate success stories, and present awards for examples of great customer service. These activities could generate a broader awareness of the community's successes, both within the City of Kawartha Lakes and beyond its boundaries.

- **Contributing to Infrastructure Development:** Within the scope of initiatives in this area, the CFDC could work collaboratively with other stakeholders to support various efforts to enhance the infrastructure needed for growth and prosperity. Input from the community consultation stressed the need for water and sewer services, broadband access, improved highways and tourism infrastructure such as docks.
- **A “Customer First” Attitude/A Better Path for Business:** Input suggested that a better method was needed to expedite, mediate and troubleshoot economic development projects that become or currently are “stuck”. One example was the idea of establishing a role for an Ombudsman. Another was to help entrepreneurs determine the best pathways to and through the levels of government. The CFDC might explore these ideas further with the City.
- **Process Enhancements:** In virtually every discussion group or interview, feedback from the community consultations called on the City for more streamlined processes, faster approvals, better communication and interaction with stakeholders, more practical application of regulations and policies, and a comprehensive up-to-date Official Plan to guide future development. The CFDC should explore options with the City that would respond to these concerns.

■ Supporting Initiatives Involving Community Partners ■

Recognizing that we all must work together if we are to do more, the Kawartha Lakes CFDC will continue to play an active role within its mandate to support initiatives led by others in the community.

A number of findings from the community consultation related to ideas more appropriately pursued by other groups and agencies in the community, but which the CFDC will follow with interest as well as support where it is able:

- Supporting the continued development of a skilled, talented and employable workforce and potentially, in working as a partner, establish a Skilled Trades Centre.
- Supporting attractive and healthy downtown areas.
- Supporting the development of the Kawartha Innovation Centre.
- Supporting doctor recruitment.
- Supporting trails development and action on the Trails Master Plan.

Additional themes that emerged from the consultations included further development of the Trent-Severn Waterway, supporting volunteerism, community beautification, active downtowns and main street hubs, coordination of special events, affordable housing, and opportunities and services for youth.

Conclusion

The findings of the community consultation process present the organizations and residents of the City of Kawartha Lakes with a number of challenges and opportunities to move forward. Action on several of the priorities mentioned should be led by others, including KLCFDC partners, who have the mandate and resources to take action. As an element of its strategic planning, the process has allowed the CFDC to identify those areas where it can have a direct influence, particularly in its role as a resource to the community. For its part, the Kawartha Lakes CFDC will take immediate steps to:

- Help stakeholders who want to engage with each other and take action instead of operating in silos. This means developing plans and working collaboratively to facilitate problem-solving meetings and forums focused on specific opportunities, economic sector issues or community concerns identified in the public consultation. The CFDC can help start this process.
- Continue to respond to priority issues through the CFDC's ongoing programs. The CFDC, for example, supports enterprises directly with access to capital, funding, information, advice and other forms of support. The priority placed on promotion of business and industrial growth will be well served by these ongoing activities. Its efforts in the area of community economic development, such as advocating for Broadband capacity, will also remain a focus of its operations.
- Advance findings with the City and other lead organizations. To a surprising extent, much of the feedback spoke to opportunities and issues that fall more properly within the jurisdiction of others such as the City of Kawartha Lakes, Chambers of Commerce and various business and industry associations. The CFDC's next steps will be to advance these ideas and forward relevant suggestions to the appropriate departments and agencies for their consideration and potential follow-up. It will also support community leadership of other initiatives that may not be specifically CFDC-driven. These could include doctor recruitment, maintaining attractive and healthy main street and downtown areas, developing the Kawartha Innovation Centre, and enhancing our natural environment.
- Finally, the KLCFDC will work towards a longer-term vision and course of action within the development and submission of its three-year Business Plan for 2008 to 2011, to be provided to Industry Canada/ FedNor.

Acknowledgements: More than 120 community residents, local business leaders and CFDC Board and staff members contributed in substantial ways to this report. The many ideas and numerous suggestions for action that came forward in the consultation process clearly indicate that much can be done to make the City of Kawartha Lakes a stronger, more sustainable place to live and work. Thanks are extended to them all for their active support and continuing interest in the KLCFDC's community economic development activities.