
Kenora's Economic Recovery Plan



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Development Services
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Executive Summary

The City of Kenora's Development Services Department in conjunction with staff from Community Services and Administration have prepared Kenora's Economic Recovery Plan which outlines activities the City can undertake to effectively respond to the devastating impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on local businesses.

There are a total of twenty-two actions organized according to four different priority areas that form the objectives of the recovery effort. They are based on research conducted amongst other municipalities in the midst of reopening, input received from the community during the crisis and the measures put in place since the public emergency commenced. These objectives are as follows:

- Bring Tourists Back to Kenora
- Restoration of Downtown Activity
- Grow the Resiliency of the Business Community
- Infrastructure that Supports Recovery

The underlying action for each objective is further classified as being targeted for either Phase 2 or the Phase 3 of the recovery. In proceeding with a phased approach, Kenora's Economic Recovery Plan is aligned with the City's Reopening Framework. Actions taken as part of Phase 1 are also captured in the document, however, these are recognized as being on-going and focused around crisis response.

Phase 1:

Limited number of businesses are permitted to be open. The City is engaging with local businesses as they face the impacts of government restrictions on public life.

Phase 2:

Businesses are reopening, and life is returning to public space. The City is adapting to the new challenges and limitations with the risk of COVID-19 still present.

Phase 3:

With a vaccine developed, or transmission risk low, a full return to post-COVID normality. Work continues on helping businesses rebound from the pandemic.

Phase 1: The City's Crisis Response

Kenora's Reopening Framework illustrates how the City has responded to the COVID-19 outbreak from the perspective of facility operation and core service delivery. Provided below is a summary of actions implemented on the basis of supporting local businesses and economic stabilization during the grip of the crisis.

Immediate municipal tax and payment relief for residents and businesses

In March, City Council waived interest and penalties on property taxes 6 months until August 31, 2020. The tax due date which has historically been the third week in July has been extended to August 26, 2020. Further, interest on utilities (water and sewer services) has been waived for the 6 months ending August 31, 2020.

Additionally, in June, Council approved lease concessions for direct tenants of the City of Kenora that have experienced a material loss in revenue as a result of restrictions due to COVID-19.

Collaborating with partner agencies to be responsive to the needs of local business

The Kenora Business Partners is a group of six organizations including the City of Kenora, Northwest Business Centre, Lake of the Woods Business Incentive Corporation, Harbourtown BIZ, Kenora and District Chamber of Commerce and the Northwestern Ontario Innovation Centre. Since March 24th, the group has been meeting weekly to discuss resources, information, program supports and other opportunities to support the local business community during COVID-19.

These meetings also included representation from senior levels of government including the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines as well as FedNor.

The work undertaken to date includes, but is not limited to:

- Creation of a "Help for Businesses" during COVID-19 webpage, hosted on the City of Kenora website;
- Development of the Kenora Delivers Facebook page – targeted to promote adapted service models with information provided by local business;
- Support for innovative Shop Local programs – including assistance to a local Union to offer broad based gift cards to its employees for any Kenora restaurant as well as a similar program with another local employer;
- Partnership with the Manitoba Tourism Education Council to deliver the Clean it Right program to City of Kenora and Kenora District businesses – an online training course developed to encourage consumer confidence during and post-COVID-19.

Gathering data for the creation of evidence-based solutions

The Kenora Business Partners delivered two surveys to the local business community to gather information and data as well as attempt to gauge how to best position and communicate available supports. These surveys were developed as a response to a request for information from the federal and provincial governments.

Initial Business Impact Survey: 78 total responses;

- 47.77% indicated that they were open, open with reduced hours or open with modified function;
- 83.33% indicated that they were experiencing a drop in revenue or business;
- 32.05% responded that they had either asked or required employees to work from home;
- 50% of respondents indicated that they would find delayed municipal property taxes without penalty as a relief measure of benefit;
- 71.79% of respondents included access to zero percent interest loans as a relief measure of benefit.

Follow up Survey: 67 total responses;

- 58.2% indicated that they were open, open with reduced hours or open with modified function – the last survey had 47.44% as open, open with reduced hours or open with modified function
- 33.8% of respondents have experienced a decrease in revenue of less than \$20,000;
- 17.7% of respondents have experienced a decrease in revenue of \$100,000 or more;
- 43.28% of respondents indicated that they have accessed or are planning to access the Canada Emergency Response Benefit;
- 10.45% of respondents indicated that have accessed or are planning to access zero percent interest loans through LOWBIC

All of these results have been shared with the Northern Policy Institute and Northwest Training and Adjustment Board with the intent of informing federal and provincial policies addressing impacts to businesses.

Taking a regional approach to information-sharing

The Regional Economic Development Group is chaired by two members of staff in the Development Services Department and is comprised of economic and business development professionals in the Kenora and Rainy River Districts. There have been bi-weekly meetings to share resources and best practices. The group has received sector presentations focused on ICT, housing and tourism amongst other topics with a focus on providing relief and support to business and industry during COVID-19.

Action Plan

Priority Area:

Bring Tourists Back to Kenora

Reopening**Phase #**

Action #1: Create a video campaign to showcase the resiliency of local businesses

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Rationale: The intent behind this project will be to profile businesses and provide testimonials on how local businesses have adapted given COVID-19 impacts and the importance of consumer spending by both year-round and seasonal residents.

Action #2: Collaborate with Travel Manitoba on an In-Province Marketing Campaign

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Rationale: Continue to focus on the Manitoba tourism market to drive the economic recovery.

Action #3: Launch an Official Reopening of Kenora event

2

Rationale: A formal re-opening event will be planned that celebrates the re-opening of the local economy and offers a welcoming message to seasonal residents.

Action #4: Allow the use of designated parking spaces for pick-up in the downtown to support shop local and accommodate easy pick-up **2**

Rationale: Businesses will be allowed to place signage that identifies spaces as being reserved for pick-up to accommodate the new reality facing restaurants and retail.

Action #5: Free parking downtown until the end of July to support resident and seasonal visitor traffic **2**

Rationale: As businesses re-open, the City will seek to ensure that the cost of parking does not impede their recovery

Action #6: Waive the fee for the Whitecap Pavilion for public events **3**

Rationale: To revive public life in the downtown and along the Harbourfront, staff will exercise discretion in waiving fees for special events under the Whitecap Pavilion.

Action #7: Develop, Support and Promote Outdoor Patio Space

2

Rationale: Recommended revisions to the policy included the waiving of application fees, flexibility in required insurance provisions and ability to use or impact municipal parking spaces, at no charge, to a maximum of four spots. The amendments were approved at the June 16, 2020 Council meeting.

To further support the development of outdoor commercial patios on municipal property, the Lake of the Woods Development Commission approved the delivery of a grant program to provide financial assistance for business owners funded through the Municipal Accommodation Tax.

Action #8: Partner with employment agencies to facilitate virtual job fairs/social spaces

2

Rationale: Through the Kenora Business Partners and the Services Sector Working Group, staff will support innovative practices to facilitate economic recovery in a safe manner.

Action #9: Implement an “Explore your own community” program **2**

Rationale: There will be a number of different projects that highlight things to do and experience locally. This includes a Staycation contest and a community scavenger hunt/activity based photo contest. The Stuff Magazine will be revised with emphasis on local shopping. Lastly, the City will explore the feasibility of integrating the OnThisSpot app into the existing Kenora Tours and Trails App.

Action #10: Discount to application fees for eligible projects until January 2021 **2**

Rationale: For those sectors most significantly impacted by COVID-19, Development Services will offer discounted rates for both planning and building applications.

Action #11: Work with Kenora Business Partners on the delivery of a Go Local Shopping Program **2**

Rationale: This project could take the form of offering gift cards that can be utilized at any local business and provide rewards/incentives based on spending.

Action #12: Promote and celebrate ‘The Big Spend’ on July 25th **2**

Rationale: As part of this national initiative to revive local businesses, the City will seek to mobilize the community to spend at local shops by promoting through communications.

Action #13: Expand and incentivize uptake in the Matiowski Farmers Market

2

Rationale: The market area could stretch across the south parking lot to allow for more vendors and pedestrian traffic. There may also be an opportunity to utilize the upstairs of the Thistle Pavilion as an amenity space.

Action #14: Review regulations in Zoning By-law and Official Plan to encourage safe development

3

Rationale: Through the Comprehensive Review of the City's Official Plan and Zoning By-law, the impacts of COVID-19 will be considered which could include modifying the regulation on the sale of merchandise for home industries and expanding the zones for which they are permitted.

Action #15: Ensure that 5-year Economic Development and Tourism Strategy is responsive those sectors most significantly affected by COVID-19

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Rationale: The Lake of the Woods Development Commission initiated the process to undertake a five year economic development and tourism strategy early in 2020. The project was positioned to determine key economic development and tourism projects that can be delivered using Municipal Accommodation Tax revenues over a five year period in alignment with City of Kenora corporate objectives, amongst other deliverables. Given the COVID-19 crisis, community engagement activities will be undertaken in light of the current global pandemic and the final plan will be developed through a recovery lens.

Action #16: Amendments to CIPs to expand areas or incentives

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Rationale: New grant programs will be developed as part of a CIP Review and will be reflective of new economic realities facing businesses in the aftermath of COVID-19.

Action #17: Implement the Vacant Lands Disposition Strategy with a focus on facilitating projects that support the most vulnerable and drive the economic recovery

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Rationale: Recognizing that municipal land holdings are a tool to support economic development, those properties identified in the Vacant Lands Disposition Strategy will be marketed heavily to leverage investment into Kenora.

Priority Area: Infrastructure that Supports Recovery	Reopening Phase #
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Action #18: Develop an Open Streets Program	2
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Rationale: Assess opportunities to expand public spaces for pedestrians and businesses including street closures and lane reductions, where possible, as a practical tool for public health risk reduction.

Action #19: Advocate for changes to federal and provincial policies that create challenges for economic and social recovery	2
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Rationale: Recognizing the limited fiscal capacity of municipal governments, the City will advocate for funding that helps the City deliver services vital to the recovery effort.

Action #20: Prioritize investment into Kenora’s Harbourfront to stimulate the local economy and attract both local residents and tourists	3
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Rationale: Implementation of the Harbourfront Business Development Plan will assist to position the City of Kenora for economic recovery. Moving the project to a ‘shovel-ready’ state will allow the City to capitalize on broad stimulus funding that may be available post-COVID-19.

Conclusion

In recognition of the evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, Kenora's Economic Recovery Plan is not intended to have a definitive end-date. It will be continually subject to review and tracking to ensure it remains relevant and that actions proceed in a timely manner to mitigate the economic impacts faced by local businesses and by extension the community. Despite this commitment, there is no doubt that COVID-19 has created a 'new reality' for Kenora with there being changes to public life that may be permanent. Many of the actions identified in this Plan are intended to be strategic and help the municipality adapt to both the present and the future.

This document will be used to inform other planning processes supporting economic development and tourism in order to ensure that that new programs and policies are continually reflective of impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. There are numerous challenges that has arisen from this crisis, but there also opportunities to be innovative with policy to create a safer and more prosperous Kenora.



**Kenora
Delivers**

Keep it in Kenora