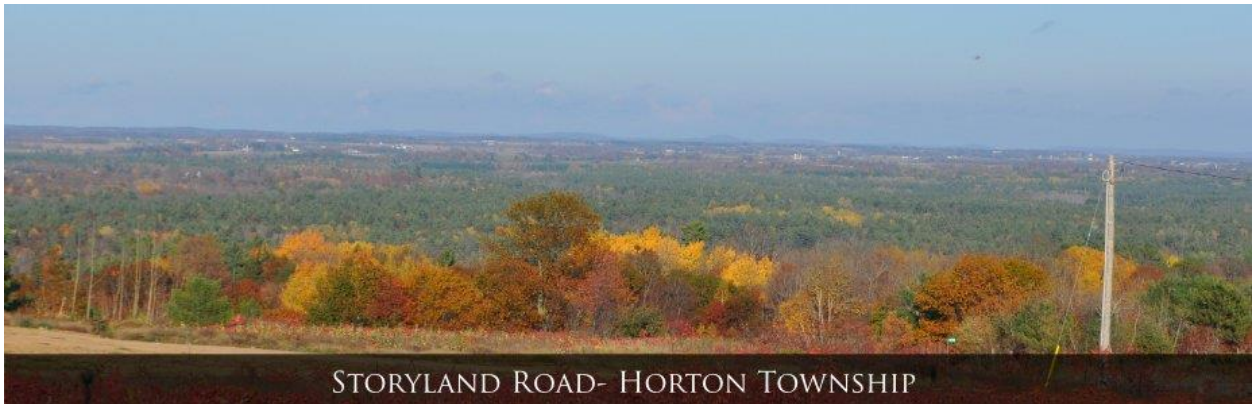


Horton Township Community-Based Economic Development Plan

**Report on the
Seniors' Community Focus Group
Held April 21, 2017**



Introduction

In February 2017 the Municipal Council of Horton Township voted in favour of developing a new community-based economic development plan for the Township. As one of several first steps in this process, a two-hour focus group was conducted at the Horton Community Hall on Thursday, April 21, 2017. This event was open to residents aged 55 years and older and was intended to identify economic development opportunities and challenges facing the Township from the perspective of local seniors. The focus group was facilitated by Chris Fullerton, an Associate Professor in the Department of Geography & Tourism Studies at Brock University. Also in attendance were Chris Drost and Avis Price from Grant Writing Solutions, the two individuals who will be authoring the Township's community-based economic development plan, and Horton Township's CAO, Sue Klatt.

List of Questions:

The following ten questions were asked over the course of the focus group session. Although the number of participants was small, the discussion was a lively one and filled the entire two hours.

- How would you describe Horton to someone who has never been here?
- What do you feel are some of the Township's biggest strengths/assets as a place to live?
- What do you feel are some of the Township's biggest weaknesses as a place to live?
- Do you feel the Township is a good place for seniors to live? Why or why not?
- What types of changes might improve the quality-of-life for seniors living in Horton Township?
- Are there any particular types of businesses that you feel are lacking in Horton Township?
- Economic development plans typically identify particular types of industry as targets for growth, such as manufacturing and tourism. What do you think might be the most logical ones for Horton Township to focus upon in its upcoming economic development plan?
- Economic development plans often also include goals and objectives related to attracting new residents. Do you think that Horton Township should include these in its economic development plan?
- Thinking particularly about the needs of local seniors, are there any issues related to any of the following that you feel Horton Township should try to address within its economic development plan?
- Do you have any other ideas about how the Township might promote economic development in the near of distant future?

Presented on the following pages is a synopsis of the responses, as well as the actual comments that were provided by the participants and recorded during the focus group session.

Question #1: How would you describe Horton to someone who has never been here?

- The majority of responses to this question were quite positive and had much to do with intangible community assets. Comments included “Best place to live in Canada!”, “a place where everyone talks to you”, and “good leadership”. Most participants also felt that Horton Township could be described as a “friendly” place, although one person felt that it was “not as friendly as they say.”
 - Also mentioned here was the presence of a strong volunteer base in Horton, which was seen to serve as the “heart of the community.”
 - Finally, life in Horton was described as “rural living with urban proximity and amenities,” including four-season recreation amenities, hospital access (in Renfrew), and an active Golden Age Club.
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Question #2: What do you feel are some of the Township’s biggest strengths/assets as a place to live?

This question generated a lengthy list of responses, which goes to show how favourably most participants viewed their home community. Answers to this question related primarily to: the municipal government; the number and variety of services available locally and in Renfrew; transportation infrastructure and services; and also the Township’s ability to attract new residents and tourists from various places. More specifically, the responses recorded during the focus group were the following:

- Good mix of people
- Good leadership including Staff and Council
- Horton was the only Township in the area that did not go through amalgamation in the late 1990s
- As per MPAC assessments, Horton had the highest growth in 2016
- Horton is affordable—taxes are reasonable and less than Renfrew even though there has been an 18% spike in farms, waterfront went down 3%
- Upper tier (Renfrew County) is supportive with grants, etc.
- No signage pollution in Horton
- Varied social and recreational activities available in Township and Renfrew
- Volunteer fire department
- Horton participates in the Physician Recruitment Program through Renfrew
- Good services from Renfrew
- Ottawa River
- Highway 17
- Taxi and Sunshine Coach available as transportation services (although they are expensive)
- Able to draw from Ottawa
- Ability to attract visitors from Quebec and east end of Toronto

Question #3: What do you feel are some of the Township’s biggest weaknesses as a place to live?

This question was asked in order to determine whether any community and economic development interventions might be needed to improve some aspect(s) of life in Horton Township. Responses here generally related to Horton’s primarily residential nature (with a correspondingly small business sector), deficiencies in some local services, transportation-related weaknesses, and the lack of promotion of Horton as a great place to live. Below are the responses recorded during the meeting:

- Horton is a bedroom community of Renfrew but Renfrew is on its own
- No business hub or downtown
- Difficult to start a business
- Youth out-migration
- People don’t want to participate
- Internet service bad—little broadband service – many still on dial-up
- Bad telephone service in some areas
- Not everyone has a physician and the waiting lists are long (new doctors take a maximum number of patients that is well below the number that retiring ones had)
- Little help from Ontario Government for this area
- Only two lanes in Horton
- Transportation—little or no help for getting to medical appointments. Existing services seen as too expensive, i.e. Sunshine Coach or Taxi
- Roads “could be better”
- Too humble – we don’t promote ourselves enough as a place for clean rural living

Question #4: Do you feel the Township is a good place for seniors to live? Why or why not?

This question sought to learn more from the seniors participating in the focus group about how they, personally, or their friends and acquaintances might be better served in the Township. The responses were mixed:

- It can be lonely here for some people. If you enjoy neighbours, you may not like being in the country. Depends on age & stage you are at. Gets tougher as you get older.
- Some areas of the Township are not good for persons with disabilities due to accessibility constraints
- Some areas of Horton are not as isolated as others
- Love it here. Went away but came back.

- Great for country living, quiet, neighbours helping neighbours.
 - Some seniors have trouble getting out and there is little help—a reason why some people are selling and leaving
 - Some seniors move to senior apartments or residences outside of Horton, but it may not be a better life.
 - Good hospital but there is a waiting list for doctors.
 - Physician recruitment program with Renfrew
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Question #5: What types of changes might improve the quality-of-life for seniors living in Horton Township?

This was a follow-up question meant to find possible solutions to the problems identified in Question #4. Volunteerism and social life-related issues dominated here:

- Efforts to form a book club, coffee club and walking club didn't get support from local residents.
 - Active clubs include euchre, dances, and the Township's quilting club
 - The Township and others must take the time to get people interested in participating in clubs such as those above.
 - Need more people to participate.
 - Better transportation services would help people access programs.
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Question #6: Are there any particular types of businesses that you feel are lacking in Horton Township?

Given the Township's desire to create an Economic Development Strategy, the focus group participants were also asked to consider any types of businesses they'd like to see started in Horton. Rather than identify specific businesses, however, the conversation revolved primarily around land use issues and the distribution of commercial development in the Township:

- If you Google "Horton Business" only seven come up.
- Horton needs a hub or downtown core.
- Could have a "chunk of land" zoned as Commercial to create such a hub.
- "We want a hub, but not here"
- If we have people who cannot get out, do we need more businesses to help those people out?
- Provincial planning regulations limit what the Township can do.

Question #7: Economic development plans typically identify particular types of industry as targets for growth, such as manufacturing and tourism. What do you think might be the most logical ones for Horton Township to focus upon in its upcoming economic development plan?

The bulk of responses here had to do with strengthening two of the Township's existing business strengths, agriculture and tourism:

- Land prices are an issue
- Land use and zoning are factors –some people don't want growth but farm expansions would be accepted.
- Agri-food sector has potential for growth.
- Agri-tourism.
- Farmers' Markets
- "Glamping"
- Bed & Breakfasts/Bed and Bales/tent and trailer parks
- Tourism—white water rafting, proximity to Algonquin Park
- Utilize Ottawa River, Highway 17 and Bonnechere River proximity for tourism development.
- Railway used to have spurs connecting the area but all gone now – are now roads.
- Solar energy might be good but may not be accepted by residents
- Many residents don't want anything new in their backyard
- Manufacturing might ruin the quality of life. Each possibility should be looked at on its own merit.

Question #8: Economic development plans often also include goals and objectives related to attracting new residents. Do you think that Horton Township should include these in its economic development plan?

There was strong support for this idea, as many people pointed to the Township's ongoing population growth as a sign that people are attracted to rural living in Horton. However, land use planning regulations and bureaucracy were seen to be significant impediments to future housing development and population growth:

- Residential growth is the biggest opportunity in Horton.
- Horton went up in population over last five years.
- People from Ottawa are selling and moving to Horton for more reasonable real estate. Ottawa is only 40 minutes to Ottawa, perfect for encouraging new residential growth.

- Developers are coming.
 - Growth in residences will bring an increase in home-based business.
 - Horton has been easy to deal with, but now due to County it can take more than a year for a severance.
 - Process for zoning very cumbersome.
 - Severances difficult.
 - Population density growth at Cotieville and along the Ottawa River. The province wants to have growth directed to these areas but many people want to move to this area to be more rural
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Question #9: Thinking particularly about the needs of local seniors, are there any issues related to any of the following that you feel Horton Township should try to address within its economic development plan?

Two topics were discussed here: affordable housing and recreational opportunities. As far as affordable housing is concerned, it was noted that an old Township school was converted to a nursing home but has since been sold and will be converted to apartments. It was also noted that seniors must currently move into Renfrew when they are ready to sell and down-size due to a lack of more suitable housing options within Horton Township.

In terms of recreational opportunities, a comment was made that the local trail is going to be expanded, which will be another asset for the community.

Question #10: Do you have any other ideas about how the Township might promote economic development in the near of distant future?

This last question was asked in order to see if participants had any other ideas that may not have been discussed over the previous two hours. Here, improvements to local utilities loomed large, along with the suggestion of tax incentives for economic development:

- Three-phase hydro
- Water
- Sewers
- Hi-speed internet
- Some annexation from Renfrew
- Tax incentives