



TOWNSHIP OF BONFIELD
Growing Bonfield Together

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

2026 - 2031 | Executive Summary

Prepared by



for the Township of Bonfield

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A summary of the Economic Development Strategy 2026-2031
and the three background reports behind it

For presentation to the Council of the Township of Bonfield, September 8, 2026

Executive Summary

The Township of Bonfield acknowledges that this Strategy concerns lands within the traditional territory of the Algonquin First Nation peoples, and that Indigenous peoples represent approximately 13.6 percent of the Township's population. We are grateful for the opportunity to live, work and build here, and we commit to pursuing this Strategy in genuine partnership with Indigenous governments, organizations and residents - as set out in Action F.6.

The Township of Bonfield has never had a formal economic development strategy. For most of its history it did not obviously need one. That changed in the last five years. The Township grew 7.8 percent between 2016 and 2021, faster than Ontario and among the fastest rates in Nipissing District. Remote work turned distance into a choice: 17 percent of surveyed residents already work fully from home. Half of the businesses surveyed plan to expand within eighteen months. Growth has arrived. This Strategy answers whether Bonfield shapes it, or is shaped by it.

The community's answer, documented across four independent lines of evidence, was consistent: shape it, on Bonfield's terms.

What the evidence said

The Strategy rests on the Growing Bonfield Together initiative: a Community Economic Profile, a Business Retention + Expansion survey of 24 businesses, a community survey of 81 residents, and a program of working sessions, focus groups, key informant interviews and a public town hall. Six findings recurred across all four.

- **Bonfield is growing and the community wants that, on conditions.** Seventy-seven percent of survey respondents welcome or encourage growth; almost all attach conditions - protect the lakes and water quality (61 percent), affordability (52 percent) and rural character.
- **The everyday basics are the unanimous gap.** A gas station (71 percent) and a grocery or general store (70 percent) top the most-wanted list, and every engagement session raised fuel unprompted.
- **The economy runs through North Bay.** Seventy-eight percent of employed residents commute to the city and 85 percent of respondents spend mostly or almost entirely outside the Township.
- **Support what exists before chasing what does not.** Businesses are loyal, rooted and expansion-minded; none plan to close. What they asked for is inexpensive: visibility, connection, information and follow-through.
- **Space, servicing, approvals and connectivity are the bottleneck.** Commercial space to lease is the lowest-rated business factor (1.50 of 4), and 55 percent of residents say internet or cellular service limits their ability to work, run a business or study from home.
- **Trust is the currency.** Businesses rated the Township's economic development function 1.92 of 4 - a mandate for this Strategy rather than a complaint - and residents have identified a need for additional information to support them with their business growth and development plans.

Our vision for 2031

- *Bonfield in 2031 is a growing, welcoming rural township where more families put down roots each year; where the businesses we already have are visible, supported and expanding; where residents can buy fuel, food and a meal - and gather - without leaving home; and where the lakes, forests and farmland that make people choose Bonfield are protected by the same plan that grows us. One township, many communities, building an economy on our own terms.*

How the Strategy is built

Five pillars stand on one foundation. The foundation is how the Township governs and partners; Pillar 1 creates the conditions; Pillars 2 to 4 build the near-term economy; Pillar 5 grows the longer-horizon sector bets.

Pillar	What it does	Flagship moves
1. Foundations First	Fixes the enabling conditions everything else depends on: connectivity, roads, approvals, commercial space, energy, and answers on Highway 17	Broadband advocacy; approvals modernization; identify additional commercial lands
2. Support What We Have	Makes Bonfield's existing businesses visible, connected and supported - retention before attraction	Business directory; networking events; funding navigation
3. Everyday Anchors	Restores the daily essentials and gathering places the whole community named: fuel, food, market, meeting places	Fuel service restoration; weekly market; community hub feasibility
4. Homes That Work	Grows and diversifies housing - the township's realistic economic engine and its workforce precondition	Community improvement plan (CIP) incentives; additional dwelling unit (ADU) uptake; rental & seniors' partnerships
5. Sector Bets	Invests in the two evidence-backed sectors - agri-food and value-added wood - plus a visitor economy that benefits residents first	Co-op formation series; forestry scoping; signature festival
Foundation: Govern for Trust	The way everything above gets done: quick wins, honest communication, one-township inclusion, Indigenous and regional partnership, measurement	Year 1 quick wins; annual public report; partnership protocols

The Township's role is to facilitate, not to operate. It will not build or run gas stations, grocery stores or factories. It enables, convenes, brokers, advocates and, where an asset is genuinely municipal, invests. Every one of the Strategy's numbered actions names which of those roles the Township is playing, alongside its timing, its partners and its indicative budget.

Year One: prove it

The first year is deliberately weighted to low-cost, high-visibility actions with documented demand behind them, deliverable within existing capacity plus the intern and program funding already identified.

- Publicize the standing free Saturday-vending resolution and anchor a consistent weekly farmers' market.
- Launch the Township business directory and continue to build and improve upon Bonfield's online presence.
- Hold the first quarterly business networking event, champion-led with the Township as secretariat.
- Bring Business Centre workshops and employment drop-ins to Bonfield on a standing schedule.
- Promote the additional dwelling unit subsidy and celebrate each completed unit.
- Advance fuel-service restoration: support the Rutherglen rebuild and complete diligence on the card-lock suggestion, an unstaffed card-activated fuel outlet.
- Elevate and grow the community economic development committee and publish the quick-wins tracker.
- Adopt the broadband advocacy program and table the Township's formal request for Highway 17 answers with MTO.
- Route every assistance request recorded in the BR+E to the right partner, closing the loop that was promised.

How success will be measured

Fourteen indicators with documented baselines are reported publicly every year and refreshed at mid-term. Among them: satisfaction with municipal economic development (baseline 1.92 of 4, target 2.5 by 2028); commercial space availability (1.50, target 2.25 with at least one new leasable premises created); households limited by connectivity (55 percent, target under 25 percent); local shopping and services (1.65 of 5, target 2.5); roads and infrastructure (2.10 of 5, target 3.0); fuel service in the Township (none, target at least one outlet operating); and a weekly seasonal market operating every season from 2027. Where an indicator misses, the annual report says so, and says why.

The ask

Of Council: adopt the Strategy, fund its modest first year, receive its annual report, and hold every future budget conversation with its evidence on the table. Of Township staff and partners: deliver the quick wins fast, honestly track everything else, and let the community see the machinery working. Of the community: use what gets built - the market, the directory, the events, the businesses.

Bonfield does not need to become something else to succeed. The evidence is unambiguous that its future is a better version of what it already is: a growing rural township on beautiful water, close to a city, affordable to families, loyal to its own, with fuel at the corner, food on Saturday mornings, neighbours it can find online and in person, and a municipal partner that says what it will do and

shows what it did. That township is five years of disciplined, visible, evidence-bound work away. This is the plan for it.

The full document set

- **Economic Development Strategy 2026-2031** (Final Draft, September 2026) - the Strategy itself.
- **What We Heard: Engagement & Evidence Report** (Final Draft, September 2026) - the consolidated engagement findings.
- **BR+E Community Survey Report** (Final Draft, September 2026) - the confidential business survey and its analysis.
- **Community Economic Profile** (June 2026, revised September 2026) - the statistical baseline.