Growing Bonfield Together

Economic Development Strategy

Five-Year Strategy for the Township of Bonfield, 2026 to 2031

Presentation to Council, Township of Bonfield
Tuesday, September 22, 2026
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What this Strategy is, and is not

The kind of document Council is being asked to adopt

A facilitation strategy

The Township has a budget of roughly $5 million and a lean staff. It will not build or run gas stations, grocery stores or factories. Its role is to enable, convene, broker, advocate and, where an asset is genuinely municipal, invest. Every action names which role the Township is playing.

Sequenced, not everything at once

Start small, prove value, scale what works. Year One is weighted to low-cost, high-visibility actions with documented demand behind them. Larger moves are staged behind feasibility work and funding.

Evidence-bound

No action appears without a documented basis in the Community Economic Profile, the BR+E, the community survey or the engagement sessions. Where the community diverged, the Strategy names the trade-off rather than hiding it.

Not a land-use plan, a budget or a promise

It does not promise specific businesses. It works alongside the Official Plan review, the zoning by-law update and annual budgeting. Naming a gap records community demand and directs Township effort. It does not guarantee an outcome that depends on private investment.

Bonfield's first formal Economic Development Strategy. Every pillar, objective and action traces to the evidence Council received on September 8, and Appendix A shows the mapping.

The vision for 2031, and the rules behind it

Every phrase in the vision is earned by the evidence

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.

Seven guiding principles

1. Facilitate, don't operate
2. Support what exists first
3. Start small, prove value, scale what works
4. Growth on Bonfield's terms
5. One township
6. Partner deliberately
7. Be honest about trade-offs, money and time

The choices this Strategy makes

Five places where the community genuinely diverged, and where the Strategy takes a position

Bedroom community: embrace it, and exceed it

Accept the bedroom-community foundation and be excellent at it, while building the local-economy layers a pure dormitory strategy would forgo. Farm stands and home businesses count as part of the economy.

Highway 17: seek answers, plan for both futures

No position on four-laning. Demand information from MTO, protect the existing corridor economy, and plan employment land so either a bypass or an interchange finds Bonfield ready rather than frozen.

Rental housing: yes, market and seniors' rentals first

The shortfall is real and binding. Pursue market rentals, seniors' options and small units through partnerships, and address subsidized-housing questions openly through the planning process.

Municipal commercial space: broker first, build last

Planning, matchmaking and incentives for private and co-operative investment come first. Municipal space is considered only where the market demonstrably will not act and a feasibility case exists.

Large capital projects: feasibility before commitment

The community hub or medical centre advances as staged feasibility work with partner models, not as a construction commitment the current tax base cannot carry.

The What We Heard report documented five real divergences. A strategy must choose. These are the choices, and the reasoning behind each is set out in Chapter 3.

The strategic framework

Five pillars standing on one foundation; the logic runs from the bottom up

Vision 2031 *a growing, welcoming rural township, building an economy on its own terms*

1

Foundations First

Connectivity, roads, approvals, commercial space, energy and Highway 17 answers

2

Support What We Have

Every existing business visible, connected and supported to grow in place; retention before attraction

3

Everyday Anchors

Fuel, food, a market and gathering places restored through private and co-operative investment

4

Homes That Work

A diverse housing supply that grows the tax base and houses the workforce

5

Sector Bets

Agri-food and value-added wood built patiently; a visitor economy that benefits residents first

Foundation: Govern for Trust the way everything above gets done: quick wins, honest communication, one-township inclusion, Indigenous and regional partnership, measurement

Pillar 1: Foundations First

Infrastructure and investment readiness

Why this pillar

3.97 of 5

Better internet and infrastructure: the survey's top-rated priority

1.50 of 4

Commercial space to lease: the lowest-rated business factor in the BR+E

55%

of households say internet or cellular limits work, business or study from home

Flagship moves

timing | Township role | cost band

1 Broadband and cellular advocacy program

Year 1, ongoing | Advocate | Low

Connectivity as a standing Council agenda item; monthly carrier follow-up in writing; escalation through the MPP and FedNor; interim options published for unserved residents.

2 Approvals modernization

Years 1 to 2 | Lead | Low to Mod

Plain-language permit guides and target timelines; pre-consultation for commercial and multi-unit applications; fees reviewed against neighbours, with options reported to Council.

3 Commercial land and space answer

Years 1 to 3 | Lead | Mod

Small commercial and light-industrial pockets designated through the Official Plan and zoning by-law update; an inventory of available land and buildings matched to BR+E demand.

4 Highway 17 answers

Year 1, ongoing | Advocate | Low

A formal Township request to MTO for corridor timelines and alignment; MTO at the Official Plan table; employment land planned for both a bypass and an interchange future.

For Council Connectivity becomes a standing agenda item. A fees and charges options report, a shore road allowance policy and the plain-language roads capital plan come forward. Roads are the pillar's one significant cost and proceed only as senior-government funding is secured.

Pillar 2: Support What We Have

Business retention, visibility and growth

Why this pillar

50%

of BR+E businesses plan to expand within 18 months; none plan to close

13 of 24

businesses asked for a Township directory and for e-marketing workshops

1.92 of 4

rating of the Township's economic development service: a mandate and a baseline

Flagship moves

timing | Township role | cost band

1 **Business directory and online presence** — *Year 1, ongoing | Lead | Low*

A defensible business inventory; an online directory two clicks from the homepage; Google listings claimed and corrected for the township and willing businesses.

2 **Quarterly networking events** — *Year 1, ongoing | Facilitate | Low*

Champion-led business mixers with the Township as secretariat, on the chamber model; the first event within six months of adoption.

3 **Service days and workshops in Bonfield** — *Year 1, ongoing | Facilitate | Low*

Business Centre one-on-ones, employment-services drop-ins at commuter-friendly hours, and the e-marketing and social media workshops businesses asked for.

4 **Funding navigation and the BR+E** — *Ongoing | Facilitate | Low to Mod*

Every recorded assistance request routed to the right partner; program intakes tracked; annual check-in visits and full BR+E repeats in 2028 and 2031.

For Council Almost everything here begins in Year One and most of it is staff time. Council's own items are the business signage program, a local procurement review, and continued support for the BR+E Leadership Team as the retention vehicle.

Pillar 3: Everyday Anchors

Services and gathering places

Why this pillar

71% and 70%

want a gas station and a grocery store: the most-wanted businesses everywhere

47%

want a restaurant; fuel, food and a place to gather came up in every session

2

live paths to restored fuel: the Rutherglen rebuild and the card-lock proposal

Flagship moves

timing | Township role | cost band

1 Fuel service restoration

Year 1 | Facilitate, Lead | Low

Responsive approvals for the Rutherglen fuel rebuild; diligence on the card-lock proposal for the township-owned four-corners lot, with a go or no-go recommendation to Council within Year One.

2 The Bonfield market

Year 1 | Lead | Low to Mod

Publicize the standing free Saturday-vending resolution now; fix a time and place; open the first full season in summer 2027; add power hookups as funding allows.

3 Food and gathering-place enablement

Years 1 to 3 | Facilitate | Mod

Pre-clear candidate sites, including the former gas station gateway property; apply CIP incentives; market the documented demand to operators; explore a co-op grocery delivery depot.

4 Hub and medical centre feasibility

Years 2 to 3 | Lead | Mod

A staged study of need, siting, partner models and funding, scoped to include community and small-commercial space; design only on a positive result and identified funding.

For Council A card-lock go or no-go decision comes to Council in spring 2027, along with the hub feasibility scope and its NOHFC funding request. There is no construction commitment until feasibility and funding are in hand.

Pillar 4: Homes That Work

Housing diversity and resident attraction

Why this pillar

11.2%
of housing stock is rental, against roughly 31% across Ontario

+7.8%
population growth 2016 to 2021, district-leading; housing is a named hiring barrier

$50,000
additional dwelling unit subsidy already available through DNSSAB, with no income test

Flagship moves

timing | Township role | cost band

1. **Community Improvement Plan** — *Years 1 to 2 | Lead | Mod*
   Adopted under the new Official Plan, with incentives targeted to rentals, small units, seniors' options, mixed use, and design diversity in new subdivisions.

2. **ADU acceleration** — *Year 1, ongoing | Lead | Low*
   Promote the subsidy; publish a plain-language ADU guide; celebrate each completion publicly; ten or more completed units by 2031.

3. **Rental and seniors' housing partnerships** — *Years 2 to 5 | Partner | Mod*
   Purpose-built rental and seniors' projects with DNSSAB, non-profit partners and private proponents, using the lease-back and partnership models documented in the region.

4. **Builder and resident attraction** — *Years 1 to 3 | Facilitate | Low*
   Market the demand evidence to additional builders; carry design diversity into the zoning by-law; a modest, always-on presence anchored in what residents actually value.

For Council The CIP by-law and its incentive budget come to Council, as do the design-diversity provisions of the zoning by-law update and partnership decisions on rental and seniors' projects as they arise.

Pillar 5: Sector Bets

Agri-food, value-added wood, and a visitor economy on community terms

Why this pillar

3rd and 2nd

agri-food's rank on survey priority and on residents' investment allocation

2

independent expert endorsements of small-scale, value-added wood manufacturing

54%

support tourism if it benefits residents too

Flagship moves

timing | Township role | cost band

1. **Co-op formation series** — *Years 1 to 3 | Facilitate | Low to Mod*
   Convene producers and food businesses with the Verner co-operative presenting its model; light feasibility on purchasing, freight, labour and consignment retail; facilitate for up to two years, then step back.

2. **Wood sector scoping study** — *Years 1 to 3 | Lead | Mod*
   Engage the forestry associations and licence holders; scan Northern Ontario mills for value-added gaps; assess modular and component manufacturing; options to Council by Year Three.

3. **Signature events, gateway and park** — *Years 1 to 5 | Lead | Low to Sig*
   Build the Halloween parade toward a full-day signature festival; pursue grants for the gateway boardwalk and the Rutherglen park revitalization, proceeding as funding is secured.

4. **Lake stewardship as economic policy** — *Ongoing | Lead, Partner | Low*
   Hold the line on lake development capacity; support septic standards, monitoring and boater education: the precondition for every waterfront value in the Strategy.

For Council Wood sector options come to Council by Year Three. Grant applications for the gateway and Rutherglen park come forward as windows open. SCAP cost-share is promoted to local farms before that window closes around 2028.

The foundation: Govern for Trust

The way everything above gets done

1. Quick-wins program and public tracker: every action's status, updated quarterly, including what is not progressing and why
2. Annual plain-language progress report to Council and community; mid-term Strategy refresh in 2028 to 2029 using the repeated BR+E and community survey
3. Community economic development committee, open to any resident with energy and ideas, with clear terms of reference, rotating membership and a direct line to Council
4. One-township inclusion: deliberate balance of investment, programming and presence across Bonfield, Rutherglen, Blanchard's Landing and Grand Desert
5. Indigenous partnership: a consultation and partnership protocol with Nipissing First Nation, and joint opportunities in food systems, forestry, tourism and procurement
6. Regional co-operation, redesigned: design principles before membership, starting with concrete joint projects rather than a standing bureaucracy
7. Council and staff continuity: economic development orientation for every incoming Council, starting right after this fall's election, and a documented handover of the Strategy and its evidence

Businesses rated the Township's economic development function 1.92 of 4. That is a mandate and a baseline. The foundation is the operating system the Strategy runs on, not a communications plan bolted on at the end.

Year One: prove it

Twelve commitments, Fall 2026 to Fall 2027, each with documented demand behind it

Q1 *Fall 2026*

- Adopt the Strategy; establish the community economic development committee; publish the quick-wins tracker; post-election Council orientation
- Publicize the Saturday free-vending resolution; set the market's time and place for 2027
- Route every recorded BR+E assistance request to the right partner

Q2 *Winter 2027*

- Launch the business inventory and directory build; claim and fix the township's online presence
- First quarterly networking event; confirm the Business Centre and employment service-day schedule
- Table the formal MTO request on Highway 17; adopt the broadband advocacy program as a standing Council item

Q3 *Spring 2027*

- Complete card-lock diligence and bring the go or no-go recommendation to Council; continue support for the Rutherglen fuel rebuild
- Launch the ADU promotion campaign and plain-language guide
- Open the market's first full season; connect SCAP cost-share programs to local farms

Q4 *Summer 2027*

- Convene the first co-op formation session, with the Verner co-operative presenting
- Publish approvals guides and permit checklists; launch the welcome package with local business offers
- First annual progress report to Council and community against the Chapter 13 baselines

Every Year One item has documented demand behind it, a named action in the Strategy, and a cost band of Low. Together they are deliverable within existing capacity plus the intern and program funding already identified.

Who does what, and who pays

Capacity is the honest constraint; partner programs carry much of the Strategy

Who does what

Council

Owns the Strategy: adopts the plan, receives the annual report, and holds the budget levers

CAO and Clerk-Treasurer

Accountable officer; the economic development and planning function leads day to day, backed by intern and capacity funding

Committee and BR+E Leadership Team

Standing community and business partners; the committee co-owns the quick-wins tracker, the BR+E team carries retention

Regional and provincial partners

NECO, the Business Centre, the Labour Market Group, the ministries, NBMCA, DNSSAB and the colleges deliver much of this through their own programs

Where the money comes from

NOHFC: capacity and interns, feasibility studies, community infrastructure, events

FedNor and ISED: broadband advocacy support, business and sector development

RED and Rural Ontario programs: implementation, gateway revitalization, marketing

OCIF and CCBF: roads capital, culverts, climate-resilient works

SCAP and OMAFA: on-farm cost-share and agri-food development, window to about 2028

DNSSAB, CMHC and housing programs: the ADU subsidy, rental and seniors' housing partnerships

NRCan and utility programs: EV charging infrastructure

NECO, Business Centre and LMG: advisory, loans and workforce programming, delivered rather than referred

Cost bands are planning signals, not budget commitments. Every action remains subject to annual budgeting, and every significant-cost action proceeds only as senior-government funding is secured.

How Council will know it is working

Fourteen indicators with documented baselines, reported publicly every year

Satisfaction with municipal economic development

1.92 → 2.75

BR+E rating out of 4, by 2031; at least 2.5 by 2028

Households limited by connectivity

55% → under 25%

community survey, 2031

Commercial space availability

1.50 → 2.25

BR+E rating out of 4, and at least one new leasable premises created

Fuel service in the township

None → 1 or more

outlets operating within the Strategy period

Roads and infrastructure rating

2.10 → 3.0

community survey rating out of 5, 2031

Additional dwelling units completed

Minimal → 10+

completed units under the ADU subsidy by 2031

Baseline (2025 to 2026) and 2031 direction. The BR+E and the community survey are repeated in 2028 and 2031. Where an indicator misses, the annual report says so and says why. That is the point of publishing baselines.

What the Strategy asks of Council

1

Adopt the Strategy

Bonfield's first formal Economic Development Strategy, 2026 to 2031, built on the community's own evidence

2

Fund its modest Year One

Twelve commitments, all Low cost, deliverable within existing capacity plus the intern and program funding already identified

3

Receive the annual report

A plain-language progress report each year against fourteen published baselines, including where progress has not been made

4

Keep the evidence on the table

Hold every future budget conversation with the Strategy's evidence in front of Council, and refresh it at mid-term

"Use it or lose it" was the residents' phrase, and it applies to the Strategy itself. Services died here when they were not used, and thrived where the community showed up.

Of staff and partners: deliver the quick wins fast, track everything else honestly, and let the community see the machinery working. Of the community: use what gets built. Thank you to every resident, business owner, community leader and partner who shaped this Strategy.