

LET'S BUILD THUNDER BAY ACTION PLAN

INTERIM REPORT



Introduction

The City of Thunder Bay is pleased to present this interim **Let's Build Thunder Bay Action Plan**, which reflects the collaborative efforts and insights gathered during the Stakeholder Roundtable held on October 9, 2024. This event brought together over 70 development leaders who identified key barriers to growth and proposed actionable solutions to address them. These efforts align with the City's commitment to fostering sustainable growth and building a vibrant, prosperous future.

As part of this commitment, the City has already taken significant steps to strengthen its capacity to support growth. In November 2024, the interim **Growth Department** was established to provide a strategic and coordinated approach to development. Additionally, work is underway to assemble the **Growth Task Force**, a group of leaders from across sectors—including business, academia, and community organizations—who will guide the development of a comprehensive **Smart Growth Action Plan**. Together, these initiatives aim to position Thunder Bay as a model for sustainable, inclusive, and efficient urban development.

This action plan serves as a foundational document, informed by stakeholder input and aligned with the City's strategic priorities. It identifies actionable goals and initiatives under four key themes:

- **Better Customer Service:** Enhancing processes to make development easier and faster.
- **Building Growth Capacity:** Expanding tools, knowledge, and communication to support growth.
- **Updating Policies for Growth:** Modernizing rules and regulations to encourage development.
- **Opportunities for Growth:** Exploring innovative strategies to attract investment and development.

The actions outlined in this plan are not standalone solutions but part of a broader and evolving effort to implement smart growth principles. As a **living document**, this plan will adapt and evolve as new information, feedback, and strategies emerge. It will also serve to inform the Smart Growth Action Plan currently under development by the Growth Task Force.

Through these steps, Thunder Bay is demonstrating a proactive approach to addressing challenges, leveraging opportunities, and ensuring that our city is prepared to thrive for generations to come. We look forward to continuing this journey with the community, stakeholders, and partners as we work together to build a stronger, more sustainable Thunder Bay.

Better Customer Service – Making it easier and faster to navigate the development process.

Goal 1: Create a ‘One Stop Development Shop’

- Modernize and rebrand Development Services to align with the ‘One Stop Development Shop’ model.
- Establish a Development Review Committee to meet with project applicants for enhanced project coordination and problem-solving.
- Provide development permitting concierge services for major or complex projects, with trained Development Navigators.
- Enhance the pre-consultation intake process to engage developers early.
- Promote access to in-person customer services and improve appointment booking options.

Goal 2: Increase Efficiencies in Development Approval Processes

- Conduct ongoing evaluations of delegated authority to streamline approvals.
- Optimize processes for commercial building permits, site plan control, and land sales.
- Secure contract appraisal services to enhance speed and capacity.
- Review staffing levels and capacity to support growth.
- Develop clear guidelines and a flowchart for the sewer and water application process.

Building Growth Capacity – Further developing tools, skills, knowledge and communications to support growth.

Goal 1: Increase the Availability of Self-Serve Tools and Information Sources

- Expand the Property and Permitting Portal to include commercial permits, real estate matters, and additional planning applications.
- Create a first-time home builder’s toolkit.
- Relaunch and expand the "Before You Build" project series.
- Explore digital and AI tools to assist developers in identifying development opportunities.
- Maintain and share updated land supply reports and forecasts.
- Develop a development permitting dashboard and post performance towards targets.

Goal 2: Improve Industry and Public Education

- Create an accessible frequently asked questions (FAQ) document on City-owned land, planning policies, and the Ontario Building Code.
- Improve communication of significant planning and development policy directions.
- Host workshops on acquiring City-owned lands, planning approvals, and building permits.
- Host forums and information sessions on new or changing regulations.
- Promote the benefits of diverse housing types and affordability levels.

Updating Policies for Growth – Modifying rules and regulations to encourage development.

Goal 1: Review Development Policies for City-Owned Lands to Support Growth

- Refine objectives, guidelines, and processes for Innova Business Park to attract diverse investments.
- Adjust development conditions for surplus City-owned lands and opportunity sites after one year.

Goal 2: Provide Enhanced Financial Incentives to Stimulate Growth

- Develop a city-wide Community Improvement Plan to stimulate large scale investment and strategic sectors.
- Enhance financial incentives within the CIP for Strategic Core Areas.
- Review residential tax triggers to accelerate vacant land development.
- Introduce incentives for remediation and redevelopment of underutilized or brownfield sites.

Goal 3: Adapt Development Policies to Support Growth

- Regularly review the Zoning By-law, Official Plan, and other key documents to identify and reduce barriers.
- Monitor alignment between existing policies and growth objectives, making strategic adjustments as needed.
- Collect continuous feedback from developers and stakeholders to inform policy updates.

Goal 4: Report on Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) Progress

- Evaluate HAF performance and make strategic and operational adjustments.
- Review and refine affordable housing definitions and support frameworks.

Opportunities for Growth – Finding fresh ways to support development and attract investment.

Goal 1: Expand Lands Available for Development

- Service the Central Avenue Development Lands using HEWSF to enable additional housing.
- Use HAF and Building Faster Fund resources to service additional lands.
- Conduct pre-development studies to de-risk City-owned lands for purchase.
- Develop and implement an Employment Land Action Plan based on the 2020 Employment Land Strategy to improve commercial and industrial land availability.
- Identify and allocate lands for community and net-zero demonstration projects.

Goal 2: Reduce Vacant and Dangerous Buildings

- Establish a vacant and dangerous buildings action model to encourage occupancy, rehabilitation, or demolition.
- Develop recommendations to support redevelopment of vacant buildings and lands in strategic areas.

Goal 3: Promote a Growth-Oriented Culture

- Implement change management initiatives to foster a growth mindset within the City of Thunder Bay.
- In collaboration with CEDC, further develop a marketing strategy to improve the city's image as a thriving place to live, work and do business and support the CEDC in its marketing efforts to attract new residents, businesses, and investments.

Goal 4: Strengthen Workforce Development Through Advocacy and Partnerships

- Collaborate with partners to promote skilled trade employment opportunities.
- Advocate for increased capacity in post-secondary institutions and trade schools in the region.
- In partnership with the CEDC and the multicultural centre evaluate Thunder Bay as a welcoming city for newcomers.
- Support the CEDC in their delivery of immigration programs to support population growth.
- Evaluate and recommend participation in the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program to support local youth.

Goal 5: Develop a Comprehensive Growth Plan for Thunder Bay

- Assemble a Growth Task Force and facilitate the development of the Growth Plan.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The **Let's Build Thunder Bay Action Plan** represents a significant milestone in addressing the challenges and opportunities identified during the October 2024 Stakeholder Roundtable.

Guided by principles of smart growth, long-term community well-being, and adherence to legal obligations, this plan is designed to foster collaboration, remove barriers, and position Thunder Bay for sustained development and prosperity.

This action plan is both interim and living, meaning it will evolve as new information emerges and priorities shift. While clear goals and actionable steps have been outlined, specific timelines and assigned responsibilities have not been included at this stage. These details will be defined

as the Growth Task Force completes its work and the Smart Growth Action Plan is finalized, ensuring a thoughtful and strategic approach.

This work is already a priority, and progress is underway. The One Stop Development Shop is being established to simplify and streamline development processes, making it easier for stakeholders to navigate and a City wide Growth Community Improvement Plan is in progress to provide additional tools to stimulate and incentivize strategic development. Concurrently, the Growth Task Force is being assembled, bringing together diverse leaders to guide the creation of a comprehensive Smart Growth Action Plan. These foundational initiatives underscore the City's commitment to turning ideas into measurable outcomes.

As a living document, this action plan will be continuously refined based on community feedback, new insights, and Thunder Bay's evolving needs. Regular updates will ensure it remains relevant, actionable, and aligned with the City's broader vision for growth.

Next Steps

- Finalizing the Growth Task Force: Assemble a diverse and inclusive group of stakeholders to lead strategic growth initiatives and finalize the Smart Growth Action Plan.
- Advancing the One Stop Development Shop: Accelerate efforts to reform and rebrand Development Services to deliver streamlined and coordinated development processes.
- Completing the Growth CIP to stimulate development growth.
- Implementing Priority Actions: Begin executing key initiatives identified in the action plan, including enhancing customer service, increasing land availability, and modernizing policies for growth.
- Engaging Stakeholders: Maintain open communication with stakeholders and integrate their feedback into future iterations of the action plan.
- Tracking and Reporting Progress: Develop metrics to measure success and share regular progress updates to maintain transparency and accountability.

This plan is just the beginning. By working together—community members, stakeholders, and City leaders—we can create a more prosperous, sustainable, and vibrant Thunder Bay. Let's continue building on this momentum and shaping a brighter future for our city.