City of Kawartha Lakes
Pre-Design Report

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents 2
Overview 3

SECTION 1
ONLINE SESSIONS

BIA & Chambers Session. 5
Communications, Economic Development, Tourism & Strategy Stakeholder Session 6
Realty Services, Planning, By-Law, Fire Prevention Stakeholder Session . 7
Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Engineering and Corporate Assets Stakeholder Session 8
Tourism Stakeholder Session 9

SECTION 2
IN PERSON SESSIONS

Fenelon Falls Public Engagement. 11
Lindsay Public Engagement 12
Bethany Public Engagement. 13

SECTION 3
ONLINE SURVEY

Online Survey Results 15
Online Survey Results 16
Online Survey Results 17
Online Survey Results 18
Online Survey Results 19
Online Survey Results 20

SECTION 4
SIGN AUDIT

Municipal Entrance/Exit Signs 22
Community Entrance Signs 23
Community Entrance Signs 24
Service Club Signs. 25
Vehicular Directional 26
Parking. 27
Pedestrian Directional 28
Additional Observations 29

SECTION 5
REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Economic Development Strategy 31
Active Transportation Master Plan 32
Information and Communications Accessibility Design Standards 33
Next Steps 34

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Overview

The engagement process for the City of Kawartha Lakes Wayfinding Strategy brought together residents, businesses, Chambers of Commerce, BIAs, tourism partners, and City staff through workshops, department meetings, and an online survey. This comprehensive approach ensures that local knowledge, operational insight, and community identity directly shape the design and implementation of the new wayfinding system.

Engaging a broad range of voices builds understanding of how people move through and experience the city, highlights unique local destinations, and identifies challenges that may affect accessibility or consistency. Most importantly, this inclusive process fosters collaboration, transparency, and shared ownership, resulting in a wayfinding program that is functional, authentic to each community, and widely supported across the City of Kawartha Lakes. The following sessions and activities took place:

- November 18th, 2025: BIA & Chambers Stakeholder Session (Virtual)
- November 19th, 2025: Communications, Economic Development, Tourism & Strategy Stakeholder Session (Virtual)
- November 21th, 2025: Realty Services, Planning, By-Law, Fire Prevention Stakeholder Session (Virtual)
- November 24th, 2025: Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Engineering and Corporate Assets Stakeholder Session (Virtual)
- December 1st - January 4th, 2026: Online Survey
- December 9th - 11th, 2025: In person Site Audit
- December 9th, 2025: Fenelon Falls public Engagement Session (In person)
- December 10th, 2025: Lindsay Public Engagement Session (In person)
- December 11th, 2025: Bethany Public Engagement Session (In person)
- December 15h, 2025: Tourism Stakeholder Session (Virtual)

Section 1 Online Sessions

BIA & Chambers Session

Stakeholders want a cohesive, non-corporate wayfinding system that feels warm, historic, and nature-connected, reduces sign clutter, clearly guides people to downtowns, parking, waterways, and key “hidden gem” destinations, and is easy to maintain and update. They emphasized better visibility at gateways and key intersections, clearer routing between communities, sensitivity to service club signage, and long-term durability and funding for implementation.

Community First Impressions & Identity

- Desired impression: “Community that cares” about appearance
- Want gateway approach with gradual visual changes, not sudden signage
- Balance between quaint village feel and modern growth

Key characteristics mentioned:

- Safe, warm, welcoming community where people say hello
- Clean downtown areas
- Historic charm with preserved buildings
- Connected by waterways (Trent-Severn system)
- Free parking generally available
- Space and natural surroundings

Key Destinations & Hidden Gems

Major attractions needing better signage:

- Grove Theatre (Fenelon Falls)
- Highland Cinema (Kinmount) with cat sanctuary
- Globus Theatre
- Fenelon Falls (actual waterfall) - very under-signed

Community assets:

- Ken Reid Park - huge park with multiple activities
- Logies Park (Lindsay) - exceptional children’s playground
- Trans Canada Trail and Victoria Rail Trail
- Various locks and waterway
- Museums in historic buildings
- Downtown areas as community hearts

Current Wayfinding Challenges

- Sign clutter and fatigue, especially entering Fenelon Falls
- Inconsistent visual identity across communities
- Destinations in odd locations requiring navigation through parking lots/gates
- Street name changes within communities (e.g., Highway 121 becomes Lindsay Street, then Colborne Street)
- Confusion between City of Kawartha Lakes vs. Kawarthas region
- Municipal office signage inadequate (residents confused about City Hall locations)
- Poor visibility for waterfront access points
- Difficult navigation between communities

Transportation & Connectivity Issues:

- Virtually no public transportation, taxis, or Ubers between communities

Key problematic intersections identified:

- Highway 15 and 35 junction
- Kent Street and Highway 35 north
- Connection from Highway 35 to Highway 8 for Bobcaygeon access
- Routes between communities rely on local knowledge

Design Considerations & Preferences

- Avoid corporate/urban look - want authentic community feel
- Incorporate natural materials reflecting landscape
- Interchangeable components for easy updates
- Consider lighting/reflective materials for night visibility
- Integrate with existing infrastructure where possible
- Service club signage integration needed but current approach looks poor
- QR codes acceptable for updateable information
- Creative alternatives to traditional signs: banners, road paintings, public art integration

Success Metrics

- ☑ Proper funding for recommendations
- ☑ Community pride in final result
- ☑ Reduced reliance on asking locals for directions
- ☑ Increased foot traffic and tourism between communities
- ☑ Clean, well-maintained appearance

Communications, Economic Development, Tourism & Strategy Stakeholder Session

Participants emphasized the need for a consistent, long-lasting, non-trendy sign system that reflects community pride and the "quietly incredible" identity while differentiating the City of Kawartha Lakes from neighbouring municipalities. They also stressed the importance of stronger wayfinding to connect visitors and residents to hidden or hard-to-find assets (such as water access, falls, side-street businesses, and smaller communities) in a way that supports local business, tourism growth, and clearer parking/navigation.

Current Wayfinding Challenges

- Sign proliferation and clutter from multiple organizations
- Inconsistent community entrance signage across 25-year municipal history
- Parking visibility issues in downtown areas
- Businesses off main streets lack visibility (frozen yogurt place, Maryborough Lodge)
- Visitors miss water access points despite seeing lakes
- Geographic separation challenges (downtown cores split by bridges in some communities)
- Service club signs and other programs need coordination to avoid conflicts

Community First Impressions & Identity

- Desired visitor impression: welcoming, friendly, clean, maintained, vibrant
- "Quietly incredible" tourism brand integration important
- Strong community pride and sense of place
- Challenges with brand recognition - visitors often unsure of exact location within region
- Need to differentiate from surrounding municipalities that use similar blue signage

Key characteristics mentioned:

- Geographic diversity: 250 lakes, Trent Severn Waterway, agricultural land, forests
- Small town community feel without feeling isolated or unwelcoming
- Proximity to GTA enables year-round cottage lifestyle vs weekend-only destinations
- Affordability compared to Muskoka, Prince Edward County, Bruce Peninsula
- Strong agritourism and local food scene
- Rich culture, heritage, and accessible outdoor recreation

Key Destinations & Hidden Gems

Major attractions needing better signage:

- Fenelon Falls (not visible from main route)
- Lift Lock and all Trent Severn locks system
- Carden Alvar (internationally recognized birding area)
- Victoria Falls, Sturgeon Point Church (octagonal)
- Temple in Bethany, Bethany Hills
- Various trestle bridges shaping landscape
- Challenge: no single "CN Tower" landmark - diversity requires universal natural elements

Community Tier Consideration

- Population range from 20,000 (Lindsay) to small four-corner communities
- Need criteria for different sign types/sizes based on community scale
- Smaller communities (Lake Dalrymple) express desire for inclusion in municipal branding
- Planning documents may provide framework for community categorization
- Balance between consistency and acknowledging community differences

Success Metrics

- ☑ Visitors have a more enjoyable experience and navigate the area well.
- ☑ Visitors discover more than they initially planned to see.
- ☑ Businesses gain more visibility.
- ☑ Customers have a positive experience without needing to ask for directions.
- ☑ There is a cohesive feeling of pride in the community.
- ☑ Residents and staff appreciate the signage.
- ☑ The strategy is actively used and endorsed, avoiding it becoming an unused document.

Realty Services, Planning, By-Law, Fire Prevention Stakeholder Session

Participants stressed the need for a clean, consistent municipal wayfinding system that reduces sign clutter while clearly directing people to key civic destinations—especially City Hall, bylaw, and municipal parking lots—and better distinguishing municipal from private assets. They also emphasized aligning wayfinding with the new sign bylaw and 911/trail signage, clarifying interdepartmental roles, and supporting tourism and community identity without creating “sign forests.”

Community First Impressions & Identity

- Balance urban/rural, lakes/cottage, full-time/seasonal residents
- Gateway to the North positioning
- Two provincial highways run through municipality
- Second largest municipality in Ontario (similar size to PEI)
- Emphasis on inclusivity for changing demographics
- Historic connection important for tourism

Design Considerations & Preferences

- Clean, consistent system without sign pollution
- Interchangeable panels to avoid full sign replacement
- Integration with existing infrastructure where possible
- Kiosk-style signs for high-information areas resonated well
- Preference for distance measurements over time estimates (accessibility)
- Tourism business integration through paid placement model

Current Wayfinding Challenges

- Inconsistent visual identity across municipality
- Sign clutter and redundancy throughout communities
- Lack of unified wayfinding system
- Outdated gateway signs still showing 2001 branding despite multiple rebrandings
- Staff constantly providing directions to visitors
- Customer service providing handout maps at City Hall
- Parking enforcement: Need better signage to municipal lots vs private lots
- Fire prevention: Currently piggybacks on existing posts, adding to clutter
- Land management: Few wayfinding requests recently (Grove Theater, education facility)
- Building permits: Processing old files with unofficial road names creates confusion
- Hidden municipal lots difficult to find from main streets
- Need for “Green P” style directional signage
- Multiple communities with different downtown cores requiring connection
- Sign bylaw revision in progress
- Wayfinding strategy must align with new sign bylaw
- Parks trail signage project happening concurrently
- Need corporate-level “how to” manual for interdepartmental sign processes

Success Metrics

- ☑ Reducing sign clutter
- ☑ Improving navigation and connectivity
- ☑ Supporting local business visibility and tourism growth
- ☑ Ensuring the wayfinding system reflects the character and diversity of the City of Kawartha Lakes

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Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Engineering and Corporate Assets Stakeholder Session

Staff want a consistent, accessible citywide system that still lets individual communities express their identities, improves parking and gateway clarity, and is easy to maintain (interchangeable panels, durable finishes, local sourcing). They also flagged the need for clear governance, policies on third-party signage, cautious use of QR/digital tools, and better coordination across departments and with volunteer groups.

Community First Impressions & Identity

- Emphasis on creating a welcoming and inclusive first impression.
- Wayfinding system should reflect character and diversity while maintaining a unified identity.
- Strong desire to maintain individual community character within the unified system.
- Communities passionate about their entrance signs and beautification.
- System should express qualities that feel authentically representative of the City of Kawartha Lakes.
- Desired qualities include being warm, welcoming, and accessible.

Current Wayfinding Challenges

- Inconsistent visual identity across communities
- Sign clutter and redundancy
- Lack of unified wayfinding system
- Fading from sun exposure
- Graffiti and vandalism problems
- Unauthorized attachments (fire department signs on gateway posts)
- Poor readability - font too small for driving speeds
- Large municipality size makes coverage difficult

Maintenance issues:

- Different replacement parts needed for each sign type
- Long sourcing times for rare materials
- Difficulty removing unauthorized attachments/graffiti
- Each department handles own signage
- Missing parking signage causing underutilization
- Need for local suppliers and standardized specifications

Digital Integration Considerations

- QR codes gaining acceptance but require careful implementation
  - Balance between functionality and aesthetics
  - Accessibility concerns for older population without smartphones
  - Maintenance burden for keeping linked content updated
  - Security risks from QR code “quishing” scams
- GPS integration potential discussed but limited practical application
- Electronic community signs could replace archaic lettering system

Community Identity

- Strong desire to maintain individual community character within unified system
- Communities passionate about their entrance signs and beautification
- Volunteer groups (horticultural societies) maintain landscaping around signs
- Aging volunteer base creating capacity challenges
- Need policy for third-party signage
  - Currently inconsistent across communities
  - Ranges from zero to every organization gets sign

Cost & Implementation Considerations

- Interchangeable face panels reduce long-term costs
- Anti-graffiti finishes and weather-resistant materials essential
- Breakaway posts needed for roadside safety
- Local sourcing preferred for maintenance efficiency
- Phased implementation approach with different material tiers
- Need graffiti budget similar to other municipalities

Success Metrics

- ☑ Implementing a core element of uniformity across the city while allowing flexibility for local circumstances.
- ☑ Achieving a balance between uniformity and local identity.
- ☑ Ensuring the wayfinding strategy is actively used and not left unimplemented.
- ☑ Creating a system that supports both citywide consistency and individual community pride.

Tourism Stakeholder Session

Staff want a consistent, accessible citywide system that still lets individual communities express their identities, improves parking and gateway clarity, and is easy to maintain (interchangeable panels, durable finishes, local sourcing). They also flagged the need for clear governance, policies on third-party signage, cautious use of QR/digital tools, and better coordination across departments and with volunteer groups.

Current Wayfinding Challenges

- Inconsistent visual identity across communities
- Sign clutter creating cognitive overload at key locations
- No unified wayfinding system
- Businesses adding unauthorized signage due to lack of appropriate display options
- Difficulty finding public water access points despite visible waterways
- Parking visibility issues, especially for boat trailers
- Seasonal navigation challenges (winter visibility problems)

Community Strengths & Tourism Assets

- Key differentiators mentioned:
- Small town community feel and welcoming nature
- “Quietly incredible” tourism brand positioning
- Quality ice cream (Kawartha Dairy) and butter tarts
- Trent-Severn Waterway and lock system
- Multiple theaters including Grove Theater
- Rail bridge and sunset viewing locations
- Heart of the City of Kawartha Lakes: Trent-Severn Waterway, Victoria Rail Trail, Trans Canada Trail
- Underutilized assets: restaurants, downtown areas missed by cottage visitors who bypass communities

Tourism Integration Strategy

- Separate civic facilities from tourism/business assets on signage
  - Reduces confusion for visitors
  - Makes cost structure transparent for for-profit businesses
  - Civic facilities less relevant to tourist navigation
- Interchangeable panel system essential for:
  - Annual subscription model for businesses
  - Maintaining accuracy of displayed information
  - Cost-effective updates without full sign replacement
- Focus on attractions vs. events for permanent signage
  - Events can use temporary directional signs
  - Permanent signs need staying power for regular attractions

Design Direction & Precedents

- Strong preference for Revelstoke approach:
  - Less corporate feel
  - Incorporates local context and materials
  - Community character over heavy municipal branding
- Concerns about Georgina model prioritizing municipal identity over community names
- Community resistance expected to “Kawartha Lakes first, community second” approach
- Support for unified aesthetic while preserving individual community personality

Navigation & Wayfinding Priorities

- Critical visibility needs, parking (including boat trailer parking), public water access points, trail connections (Victoria Rail Trail through Lindsay), Grove Theater, fairgrounds, arena complex in Fenelon Falls, museum and visitor information center and downtown cores for bypass routes (especially Bobcaygeon)
- Seasonal considerations for winter visibility and bridge closures affecting routes

Success Metrics

- ☑ Increased tourism to shops/restaurants during winter months
- ☑ Extended visitor stays and return visits
- ☑ Enhanced community cohesion through unified system
- ☑ Clear wayfinding at critical decision points between communities
- ☑ Integration supporting four-season tourism (not just summer focus)

Section 2 In Person Sessions

Fenelon Falls Public Engagement

Overall Signage Approach

- Signage should be maintained individually by each community, while following a consistent regional theme and style.
- The City of Kawartha Lakes brand should be clearly reinforced at gateways so visitors know when they've entered the region.
- Smaller communities (e.g., Sturgeon Point, Lightning Point, Long Point) should still be clearly identified despite their scale.

Gateway & Identity Signage

- Gateway signs are important for place recognition and tourism (e.g., "Instagram-able" landmark signs like Revelstoke's mountain outline).
- Village slogans and strong visual identities are encouraged.
- Issues noted at Fenelon Falls gateways:
    - Landscaping obstructs visibility (plants in front of signs).
    - Vegetation should not be planted in front of signs.
    - Consider stone or hardscape elements instead of planting.
    - Spikes around signs are problematic.
- Private business signage appearing on gateway signs highlights a need for stronger sign bylaw enforcement.

Visibility & Lighting

- Most locations lack street lighting, reducing sign visibility.
- Illuminated signage should be considered, especially at gateways and key locations.
- Current fonts are generally legible; readability is not a major concern.

Navigation & Wayfinding Issues

- There is significant confusion caused by Ontario road signage, particularly between Lindsay and Fenelon Falls.
- Street name signs are unclear or missing, creating major navigation challenges.
- Wayfinding scope should include:
    - Attractions, entrances, and parking areas
    - Clear direction to avoid visitors entering private property (e.g., museum turnarounds).
- Example issues:
    - Grove Theatre (Fenelon Falls) — visitors cannot find the entrance; clearer direction needed (e.g., turn left on Veterans Way).

Community Signage & Amenities

- Community letter boards and kiosks (e.g., NIS) are valuable local communication tools.
- Parks, including senior play parks, require clear identification signage.
- City-designed primary signs (e.g., green City signs) should be supported by:
    - Short historical descriptions explaining park names to enhance tourism and placemaking.

Wayfinding should clearly indicate public amenities, including public washrooms.

What words would you use to describe the City of Kawartha Lakes' identity and personality?

- Mix and match. The City of Kawartha Lakes is so big. There are multiple personalities and that is ok.
- Community of communities, lakes, folksy, not a city, cuteness, loveliness, hubs, bespoke, trestle bridge

What makes the City of Kawartha Lakes unique or special?

- The lakes, many villages, we are not Muskoka, we are not Durham, down to earth, more relaxed, humble

What are the most impressive, engaging, or memorable places in the City of Kawartha Lakes?

- The locks, Trent Severn Waterway, Grove Theatre, Victoria Rail Trails, on the water.

Where is the 'heart' of the City of Kawartha Lakes?

- In each of the local villages, Sturgeon Lake, Aunty Molly's, The Great Loop Route.

What do you think is working well with the community entrance signs? What would you like to see retained, enhanced, or changed?

- Individuality
- The gateway into Fenelon Falls at HWY 35 when you turn onto Victoria Road 8
- No Entrance sign on Helen Street

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Lindsay Public Engagement

Style, Character & First Impressions

- There is strong support for retaining local character in signage design.
- First impressions matter, especially at gateways; past examples (e.g., of neighbouring community gateway sign) were poorly received by the public and should be avoided.
- Water-themed identity alone is not distinctive, as many places share this feature.
- Other jurisdictions (e.g., New Brunswick) have successfully updated signage systems to stand out and improve destination recognition.

Accessibility & Design Balance

- Accessibility is essential, but there is interest in exploring stylized designs that do not compromise accessibility standards.
- Colour selection must balance heritage identity with accessibility and legibility requirements.
- Typeface choices (e.g., serif fonts used in Okotoks) suggest flexibility if readability is maintained.

Gateway Definition & Messaging

- There is confusion around what constitutes a gateway, particularly for Lindsay, which currently lacks a clear “Welcome to Lindsay” sign.
- Questions remain about service club sign placement and whether existing locations (e.g., Lindsay South) function as true gateways.
- Gateway signs should include a welcome message, but consideration is needed for how the back of the sign functions for outbound traffic.

Downtown & BIA Identity

- Downtown Lindsay should be distinguished from Lindsay overall, potentially through different signage treatments.
- The BIA presence should be clearly incorporated into the wayfinding system and not diluted within generic regional signage.

Wayfinding, Trails & Parking

- Parking signage is currently missing or insufficient in Lindsay and needs to be addressed.
- The region has many walking and trail networks, requiring:
  - Clear identification of trails
  - Naming of trails so they can be referenced in wayfinding signage

Flexibility, Tourism & Temporary Signage

- There is interest in temporary or seasonal signage to support tourism and changing destinations.
- Examples such as Tourism Wellington signage are preferred over the provincial TODS program.
- Standardized pictograms may help improve clarity and consistency across the system.

What words would you use to describe the City of Kawartha Lakes’ identity and personality?

- Osprey, blue and orange, warm and welcoming, not corporate, unity, community of communities, safe, clean, inviting, opportunity.

What makes the City of Kawartha Lakes unique or special?

- Natural beauty, water, lakes, rivers, community of communities, natural beauty, proximity to Toronto, not that far away, local pride, feels like home.

What are the most impressive, engaging, or memorable places in the City of Kawartha Lakes?

- The Kawartha Lakes, Academy Theatre, Main Street, Bobcaygeon, Fenelon Falls, the lock system, more than just water, hard working farmers, historic rail history, trails.

Where is the ‘heart’ of the City of Kawartha Lakes?

- Oakwood, the people, gathering spaces, community centres, cultural places.
- Everything is spread out, everyone has something.
- Lack of central gathering space, no communal gathering space.

What do you think is working well with the community entrance signs? What would you like to see retained, enhanced, or changed?

- Get rid of clutter
- For Lindsay, think about how and from where people are coming in.
- Fire related signs should be separate and no advertisements
- Slogan below signs are too much for drivers to read. You can’t see existing images on the sign and it adds visual clutter
- Metal sounds cold and doesn’t resonate with warmth and historical context.

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Bethany Public Engagement

Community Identity & Engagement

- There is strong interest in allowing each community to be featured individually, while still fitting within a broader system.
- Increasing community engagement is a priority, including using surveys promoted through local newspapers.
- Placemaking elements—such as large, photo-worthy community name signs—are seen as effective tools for pride and visitor attraction.
- Temporary or clip-on panels could help promote local events without requiring permanent sign changes.

Design Appropriateness & Flexibility

- Signage design should reflect community size and character:
    - Larger, more modern designs suit bigger centres.
    - Smaller towns and villages should avoid overly corporate styles.
- Signs should be modular and replaceable to allow updates over time.
- Existing examples show challenges where text is difficult to change (e.g., Omemee), while other gateway designs allow easier updates.

Wayfinding Value

- Wayfinding should provide experiential cues that digital tools like Google Maps do not—encouraging people to slow down, stop, and explore.
- Strategic signage near key destinations (e.g., provincial parks) can highlight attractions visitors may otherwise miss.

Branding & Logos

- Questions remain about whether service club logos should be included and how they fit within the overall signage system.
- Some existing branding elements (e.g., older logos) are perceived as outdated and in need of reconsideration.

Safety & Accessibility

- Sign placement must consider traffic safety, with concerns noted where signs are too low or block sightlines (e.g., Dunford's).
- Signage should be clearly separated from bike routes and vehicle travel lanes to reduce conflict and risk.
- Theft and vandalism are common concerns that should be addressed in design and placement.

What words would you use to describe the City of Kawartha Lakes' identity and personality?

- Lots of geological features, drumlands an escalators, water, lots of personalities, big Irish community, summer fun, beauty, nature, tourism, agriculture, artists, craftsman, culture, heritage, the land between, proximity, accessible, all the facilities needed.

What makes the City of Kawartha Lakes unique or special?

- Communities with their own identities and traditions, city but not a city, protecting heritage, communities of communities.

What are the most impressive, engaging, or memorable places in the City of Kawartha Lakes?

- Doube's Trestle Bridge, Bobcaygeon, Fenelon Falls, Omemee, Devils Elbow, Buddhist temple, Coronation Hall, Coboconk Wharf, Downtown Lindsay, Academy Theatre, Thrift shopping, Balsam Lake, Sandy Lake, Carden, Trans Canada Trail, Industrial Park, Rail Trail, architecture, Old Jail museum, Railways,

Where is the 'heart' of the City of Kawartha Lakes?

- Many hearts, Omemee Coronation Hall, Doube's Trestle Bridge, community pride, Lindsay.
- Do not want to lose identity and spirit of each community.

What do you think is working well with the community entrance signs? What would you like to see retained, enhanced, or changed?

- Retain character and individuality
- Allow the communities to showcase their events
- Blooms take care of planting and landscaping in Omemee
- They're not working.

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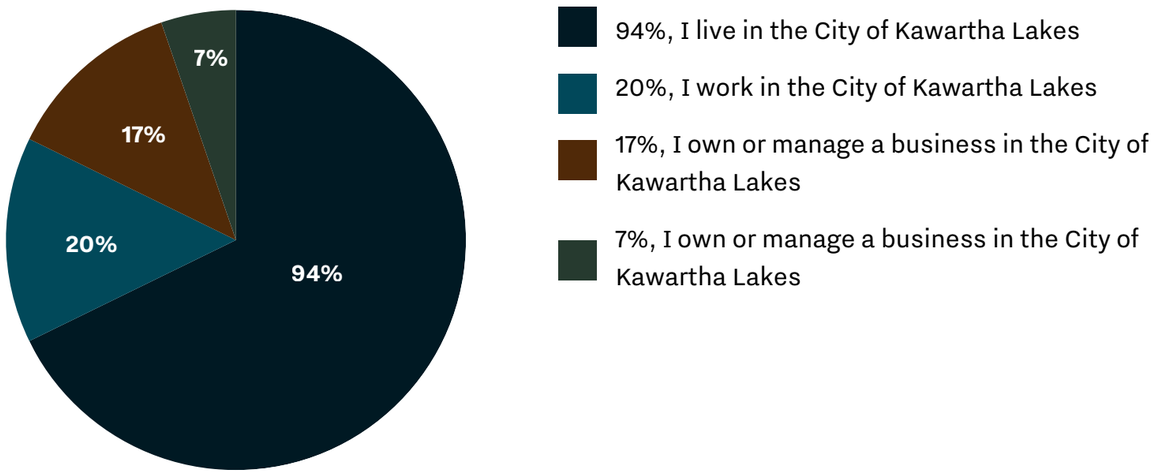
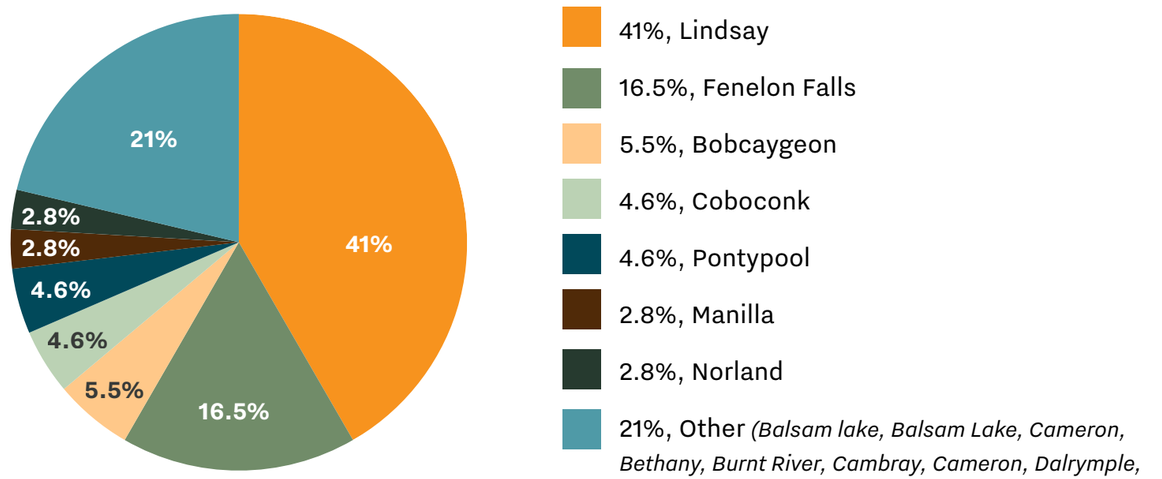
Section 3 Online Survey

Online Survey Results

1. What is your relationship to the City of Kawartha Lakes?



2. If you live or work in the City of Kawartha Lakes, which community do you call home (or work in)?



3. What symbols, images, colours, or visual elements do you feel represent Kawartha Lakes?

This was an open ended question. Common themes identified include:

01 Water & lakes: Water is the strongest unifying visual identity for Kawartha Lakes.

02 Nature & Landscape: Respondents strongly associate Kawartha Lakes with natural beauty and outdoor environments.

03 Wildlife & Birds: Birds, particularly water birds, are a recognizable and meaningful symbol, with strong support for the osprey as an identity marker.

04 Blue & Greens: A natural, muted palette anchored in blues and greens resonates strongly. Some support for seasonal accents (fall colours, gold).

Themes that were also notably mentioned, but appeared less consistently were: agriculture & rural character, trails & recreation, and heritage & cultural landmarks.

4. What words would you use to describe Kawartha Lakes' identity and personality? Why?

This was an open ended question. Common themes identified include:

01 Nature, lakes & water: Described by its natural environment visually and emotionally.

02 Rural, Relaxed & Laid-Back Lifestyle: An antidote to urban life: a place to slow down, breathe, and live simply.

03 Community, Friendly & Welcoming: Residents identify with a sense of belonging and social warmth.

04 Collection of Small Towns / Diversity of Places: Many distinct communities tied together geographically and culturally.

Most commonly described as a nature-rich, water-defined region offering a relaxed rural lifestyle, rooted in friendly small-town communities and characterized by a diverse collection of distinct places connected by lakes and waterways.

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Online Survey Results

5. What makes the City of Kawartha Lakes unique or special?

This was an open ended question. Common themes identified include:

01 Waterways & Lakes: Defined by an abundance of lakes, rivers, and the Trent–Severn Waterway as a key regional feature.

02 Collection of Small Communities: A network of distinct towns and villages, each with its own identity and strong local pride.

03 Natural Beauty & Landscape Diversity: Varied landscapes including farmland, forests, trails, wetlands, and the Canadian Shield.

04 Rural, Peaceful Lifestyle: A slower-paced, rural setting that offers space and calm while remaining accessible to urban centres.

Most commonly described as a water-rich region made up of connected lakes and small communities, offering diverse natural landscapes and a peaceful rural lifestyle.

6. Are there any locations, landmarks, industries, or cultural elements that reflect the City of Kawartha Lakes' history and identity?

This was an open ended question. Common themes identified include:

01 Trent–Severn Waterway & Lock System: Widely identified as the most significant historic and cultural feature, shaping settlement, transportation, and tourism across the region.

02 Lakes, Rivers & Natural Features: Lakes, falls, rivers, and mills are central to the region's history, industry, and sense of place.

03 Historic Buildings, Museums & Downtowns: Theatres, mills, jails, lift locks, museums, rail infrastructure, and historic downtowns reflect local heritage and community identity.

04 Agriculture, Industry & Rural Heritage: Farming, logging, dairy production, railways, and fairs highlight the region's working and agricultural roots.

Most commonly described as a region shaped by waterways and lakes, with a strong legacy of transportation, industry, agriculture, and locally significant historic landmarks spread across its many communities.

7. Where or what do you consider the "heart" of the City of Kawartha Lakes to be? Why?

This was an open ended question. Common themes identified include:

01 Downtown Lindsay: Due to its size, central location, concentration of services, historic role as the county seat, and function as the primary destination.

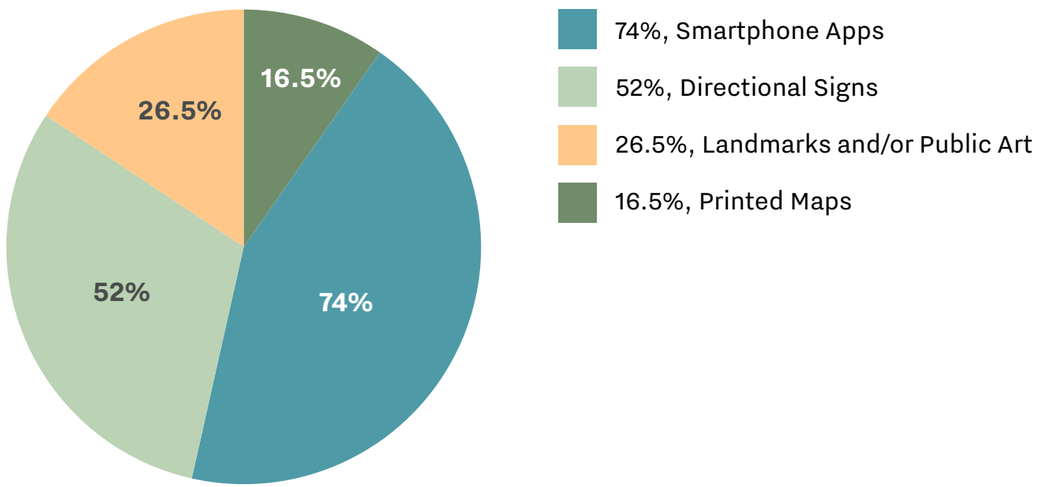
02 Lakes & Waterways: Especially the Trent–Severn Waterway as the real heart. Water historically and physically connects communities across the municipality.

03 Fenelon Falls and Bobcaygeon as Cultural and Visual Hearts: Cited as better representing the character and image of Kawartha Lakes, due to their locks, historic downtowns, and strong small-town waterfront identity.

A significant number of respondents rejected the idea of a single heart, describing the City of Kawartha Lakes as a collection of distinct communities, each with its own centre, identity, and importance.

Online Survey Results

8. When you're visiting a new place (outside of the City of Kawartha Lakes), what helps you find your destination?



9. Have you experienced any challenges getting around the City of Kawartha Lakes due to accessibility, language, or physical barriers?

This was an open ended question. Common themes identified include:

01 Missing Street & Road Identification: Frequent absence of street names, road numbers, and intersection signage.

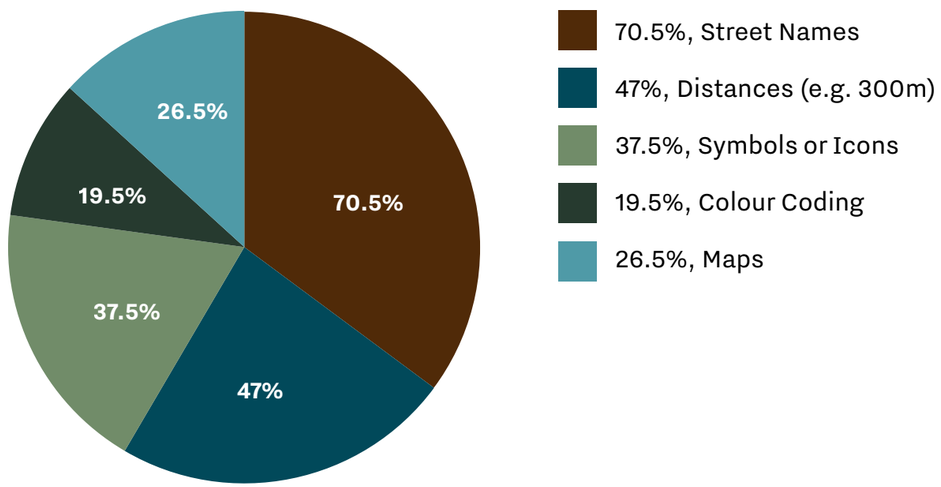
02 Inconsistent Signage Systems: A mix of outdated, faded, and mismatched sign styles from former municipalities contributes to confusion and a lack of a clear, unified municipal identity.

03 Gateway & Highway Wayfinding:Limited directional and gateway signage from major highways (401, 407, 7, 35, 36).

04 Destination & Amenity Wayfinding: Insufficient signage to public buildings, trails, landmarks, recreational sites, and downtowns leads to reliance on digital navigation and difficulty for newcomers and visitors.

Themes that were also mentioned, but appeared less consistently, included accessibility barriers, winter maintenance challenges, limited public transportation options, and broader infrastructure and traffic safety concerns.

10. Which features on a directional sign are most helpful? (Select all that apply)



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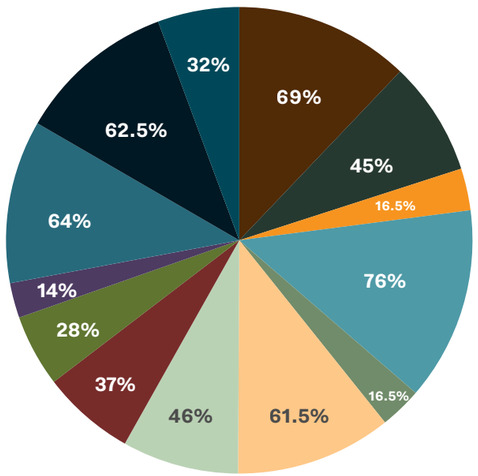
Online Survey Results

11. When visiting a new city, what types of places or amenities are important for you to find easily? (Check all that apply)



- 76%, General Parking
- 69%, Public Washrooms
- 64%, Parks or Green Spaces
- 62.5%, Trails or Walking paths
- 61.5%, Downtown or Main Street Area
- 46%, Local Businesses or Shops
- 45%, Visitor Information centre
- 37%, Civic Facilities
- 32%, Playgrounds or Family Areas
- 28%, Drinking Water or Water Fountains
- 16.5%, Accessible Parking
- 16.5%, Public Transit Stops or Stations
- 14%, Bike Racks or Bike Parking

12. What are your top three parks in the City of Kawartha Lakes that you think everyone should visit?

This was an open ended question. The following Parks were mentioned:

- Balsam Lake Provincial Park
- Balyduff
- Bobcaygeon Beach Park
- Carden Alvar Bird Sanctuary
- Coboconk Lions Park
- Doubes Trestle Bridge
- Emily Provincial Park
- Fern Corner, Emily Tract
- Garnet Graham Park
- Harvey Curry Park
- Head Lake Beach
- Hickory Beach
- Ken Reid Conservation Area
- Kirkfield Liftlocks
- Legion Park
- Lindsay Exhibition
- Lindsay Memorial Park
- Lion Riverview Park
- Lloyd Kelly Parkette
- Logie Park
- Long Beach
- Mayor James Flynn Park
- Mill at Little Bob River
- Nayoro Park
- Old Mill Park
- QE2 Wilderness Provincial Park
- Rivera Park
- Victoria Park
- Victoria Park Lindsay
- Wilson Fields

13. What are your top three trails or walking paths in the City of Kawartha Lakes that you would recommend to others? (Open ended question)

This was an open ended question. The following were the most mentioned:

- Ballyduff Trails
- Beaver River Trail
- Bobcaygeon River / Waterfront Trail
- Cameron Ranch Trail (Carden)
- Carden Alvar Park Trails
- Dewy Island Trail
- Doube's Trestle Bridge (Trail Feature)
- Dunsford Nature Trail
- Emily Tract Trail
- Fenelon Falls Trail System
- Fleming College Arboretum Trail
- Ganaraska Trail
- Kawartha Rail Trail/ Victoria Rail Trail
- Ken Reid Conservation Area Trails
- Kris Starr Memorial Trail
- Legacy Trail (Lindsay)
- Rotary Trail (Scugog River / Lindsay)
- Scugog River Trail
- Somerville Forest Tract Trails
- Trans Canada Trail

14. What are three places, landmarks, or local areas in the City of Kawartha Lakes that you think are worth visiting? (Open ended question)

This was an open ended question. The following were the top 10 mentioned:

- Kirkfield Lift Lock
- Fenelon Falls (Falls, Gorge & Locks)
- Downtown Lindsay (Kent Street & Riverfront)
- Bobcaygeon (Downtown, Locks & Beach Park)
- Kawartha Settlers' Village
- Kawartha Dairy
- Victoria Rail Trail
- Balsam Lake / Balsam Lake Provincial Park
- Academy Theatre / Flato Academy Theatre

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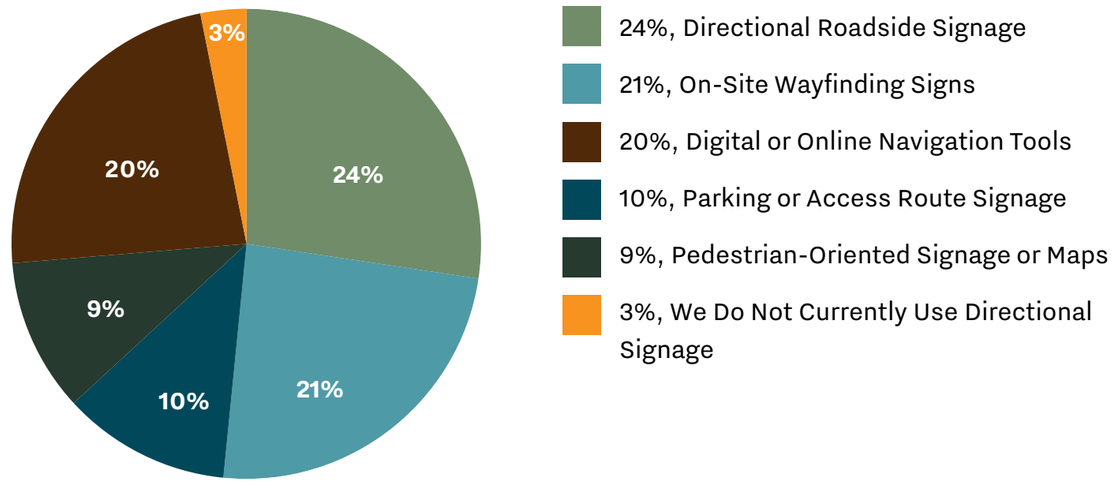
Online Survey Results

15. What places or amenities in the City of Kawartha Lakes do you visit most often? (Open ended question)

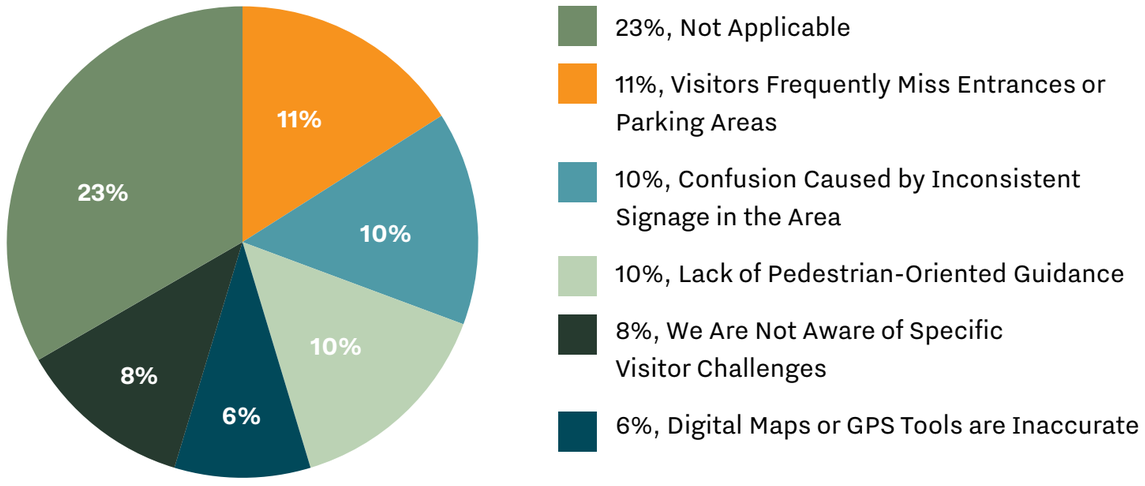
This was an open ended question. The following were the top 10 mentioned:

- Downtown Lindsay (Kent Street, shopping, dining, services)
- Grocery stores & everyday shopping (including malls and big box stores)
- Restaurants, cafés & coffee shops
- Rail Trails (Victoria Rail Trail / Trans Canada Trail)
- Fenelon Falls (downtown, locks, parks, beach)
- Bobcaygeon (downtown, shops, locks, parks)
- Ken Reid Conservation Area
- Parks & Green Spaces (including Garnet Graham Park, Logie Park, Memorial Park)
- Libraries & Civic Facilities (libraries, City Hall, community centres)

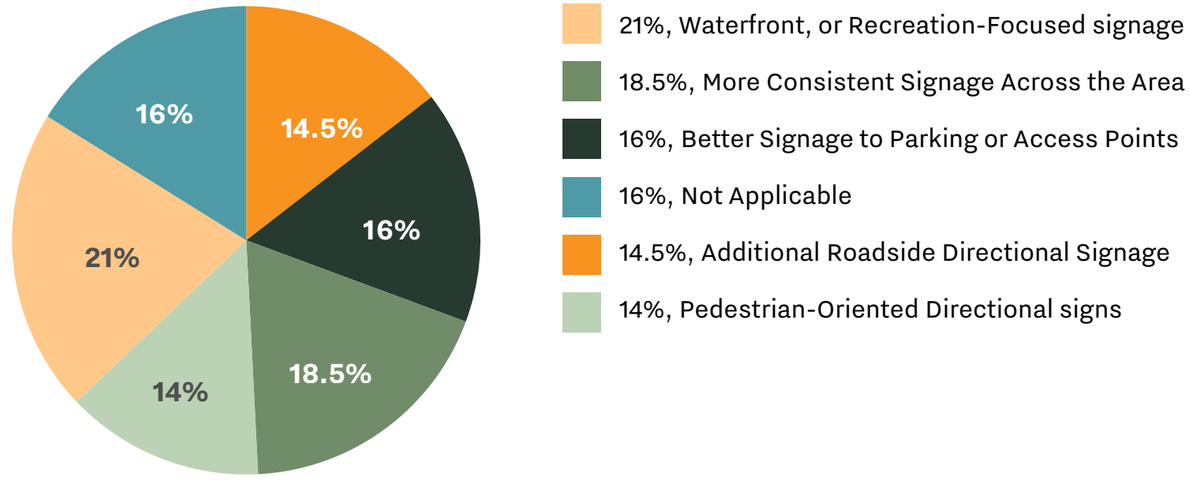
16. How do you currently use directional signage to help visitors find your business, attraction, or facility? (Select all that apply)



17. What challenges do visitors experience when trying to locate your business or facility? (Select all that apply)



18. What types of directional signage improvements would be most helpful in supporting your business, attraction, or facility? (Select all that apply)



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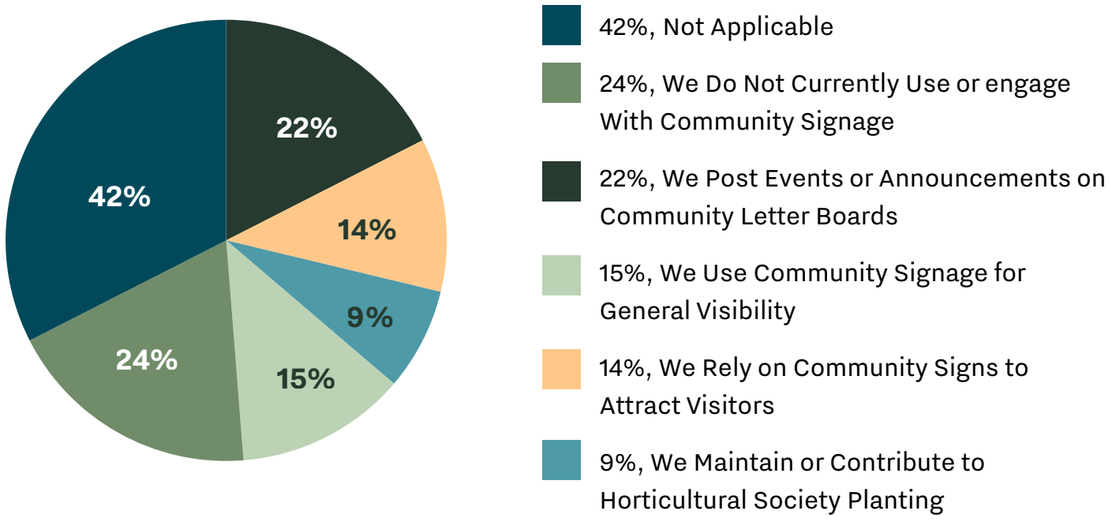
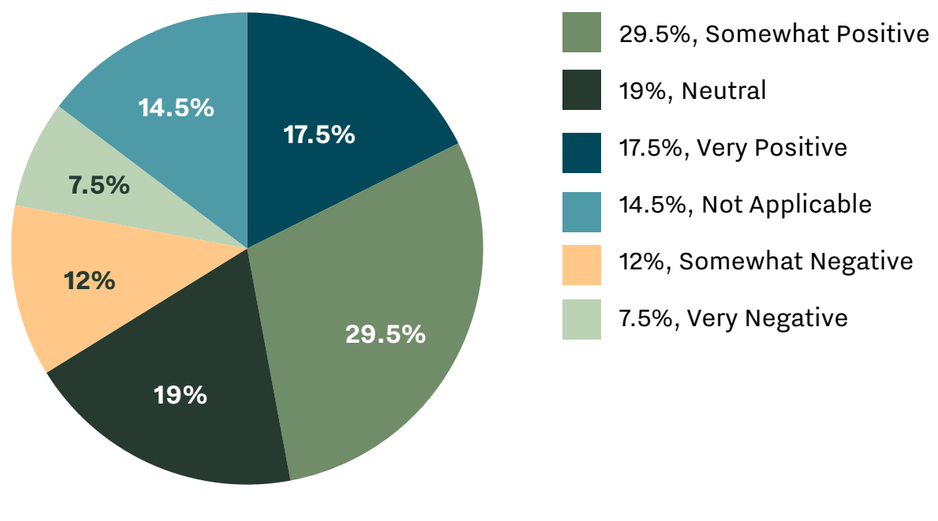
Online Survey Results

19. How do you currently use or engage with community signage in your area (e.g., community letter boards, horticultural society plantings/maintenance)?



20. How would you describe your overall impression of community letter boards and horticultural society elements in your area?



21. Additional Comments

Overall, responses show a generally positive but mixed perception of the effectiveness of signage:

- Positive views dominate: Nearly half of respondents view signage positively, with somewhat positive being the most common sentiment and a solid share describing it as very positive. This suggests signage is broadly helpful, but there is clear room for improvement.
- Neutral responses are significant: About one-fifth of respondents feel neutral, indicating that signage may not strongly impact their experience or that its effectiveness varies by location.
- Negative feedback is present but limited: A smaller portion of respondents report somewhat or very negative experiences, pointing to issues such as poor maintenance or lack of effectiveness, though these concerns are not widespread.
- Not applicable responses are notable: A meaningful share selected not applicable, suggesting that some respondents do not interact with or notice the signage enough to form an opinion.

In summary, signage is generally seen as beneficial, but improvements in quality, consistency, and maintenance could help shift more neutral or mildly negative perceptions into positive ones.

Section 4 Sign Audit

Municipal Entrance/Exit Signs

The City of Kawartha Lakes gateway signs are relatively underwhelming and lack visual prominence. In comparison to the community gateway signs, the city gateway signs are easy to miss. Largely due to MTO guidelines, these signs follow a strict post and panel design. Locating these further away from the road may open opportunities to adjust the design and create more prominence.



(a photo of a City of Kawartha Lakes gateway sign)



(a photo of a City of Kawartha Lakes gateway sign)



(a photo of a City of Kawartha Lakes gateway sign)

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Community Entrance Signs

Community entrance signs vary in design, but have overarching themes in shape, colour, and the use of serif fonts. Some communities utilize their signs to announce coming events. None of the signs utilize lighting or reflective material making them extremely difficult to see in low lighting. Many of these signs have other signs tacked on from varying business' as well as fire hazard signs put up by the local fire department. In some cases the community entrance signs are combined with the service club signs.



(a photo of an Omemee community entrance sign)



(a photo of an Omemee bulletin board sign)



(a photo of an Omemee community entrance sign)



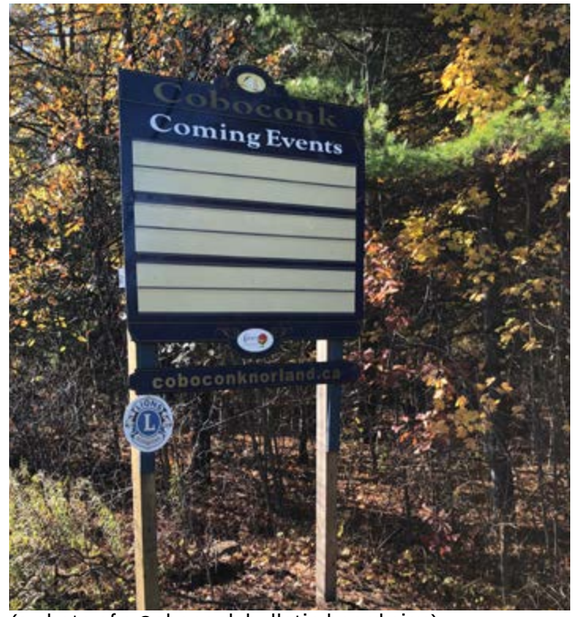
(a photo of a Janetville bulletin board sign)



(a photo of a Pontypool bulletin board sign)



(a photo of a Fenelon Falls community entrance sign)



(a photo of a Coboconk bulletin board sign)

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(a photo of a Bethany community entrance sign)



(a photo of a Bethany community entrance sign)



(a photo of a Bobcaygeon community entrance sign)



(a photo of a Bobcaygeon community entrance sign)



(a photo of a Kinmount bulletin board sign)



(a photo of a Kinmount community entrance sign)



(a photo of a Norland bulletin board sign)

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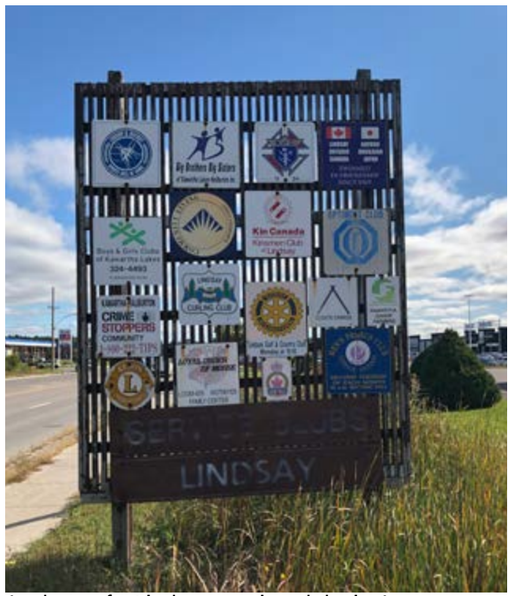
Service Club Signs

Service club signs are found throughout the City of Kawartha Lakes, frequently located on or near community entrance signs. Many of these signs have been in place for decades and are considered part of the community's history, with which residents feel a strong sense of connection.

However, the size of the service club logos and text is often too small to be legible in their typical roadside context. When combined with the large number of clubs displayed, the signs become difficult to read and visually cluttered.

Similar to community entrance signs, service club signs are often maintained by community members, placing a significant maintenance burden on the public and, in some cases, leading to disrepair.



(a photo of a Lindsay service club sign)



(a photo of an Omemee service club sign)



(a photo of a Coboconk service club sign)



(a photo of a Fenelon Falls service club sign)



(a photo of a broken community entrance sign with a service club sign)



(a photo of a Woodville service club sign)

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Vehicular Directional

Vehicular directional signs are far and few throughout the City of Kawartha Lakes. Any vehicular directional signs that have been implemented are ad-hoc and do not follow a uniform design aesthetic. In some scenarios, like Fenelon Falls, pedestrian directional signs are serving a dual purpose of vehicular directional signs, adding confusion.

It appears that there are multiple vehicular directional programs happening simultaneously, Kawartha Choice business', tourism attractions, and the Arts & Heritage Trail.



(a photo of the Fenelon Falls Museum directional sign)



(a photo of a post with miscellaneous directional signs)



(a photo of a Kawartha Choice directional sign)



(a photo of a Fenelon Falls directional sign)



(a photo of an Omemee Circle Centre directional sign)



(a photo of a walking trail directional sign)



(a photo of a Bethany Park directional sign)



(a photo of a post in Fenelon Falls with miscellaneous directional signs)



(a photo of a carved stone in Fenelon Falls with directional information)

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Parking

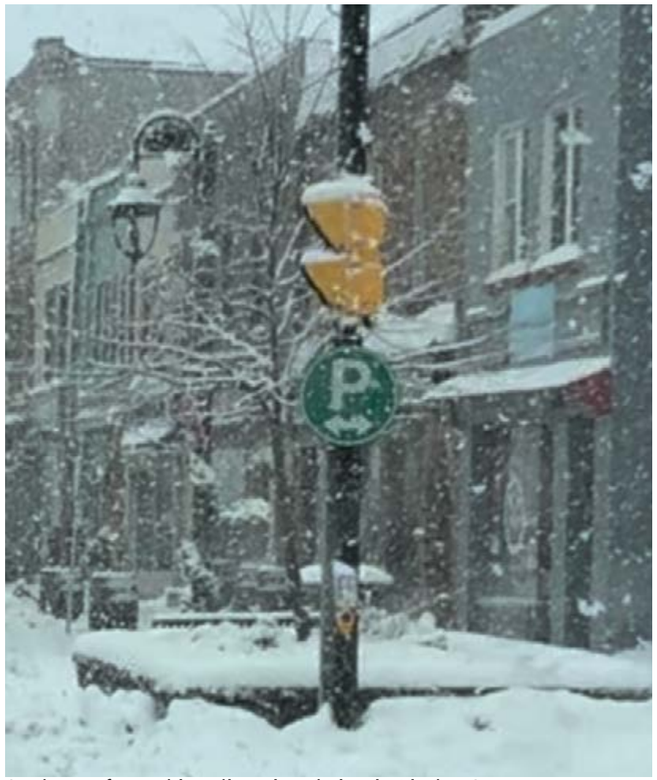
Parking signs are distributed consistently throughout the city, indicating a broader need for improved parking wayfinding and informational signage. Due to their small size, these signs lack visual prominence and are often ineffective.



(a photo of a parking directional sign in Fenelon Falls)



(a photo of a parking directional sign in Bobcaygeon)


(a photo of a parking directional sign in Lindsay)

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Pedestrian Directional

Pedestrian directional signage is most prevalent in Fenelon Falls and Bobcaygeon, with limited instances in Bethany and Lindsay. Existing pedestrian wayfinding initiatives are community-led, indicating a strong desire for a more unified and consistent system. In Fenelon Falls, pedestrian directions often rely on repurposed vehicular street signs and a mix of design styles, making the overall program difficult to follow.



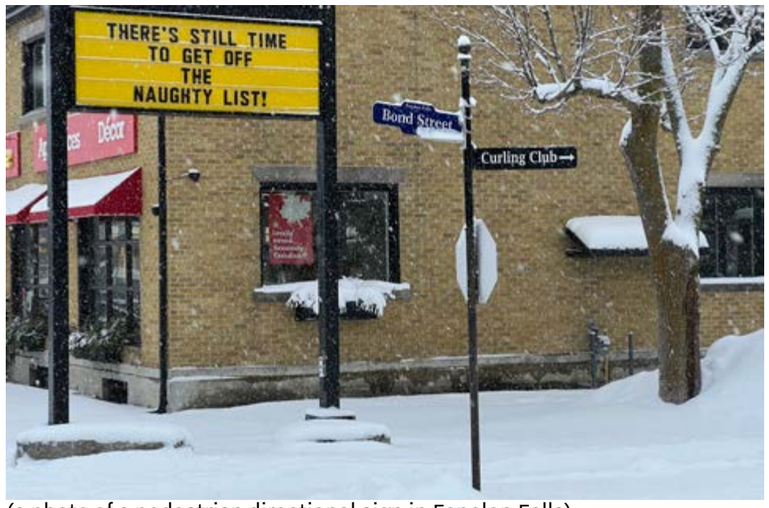
(a photo of a pedestrian directional sign in Fenelon Falls)



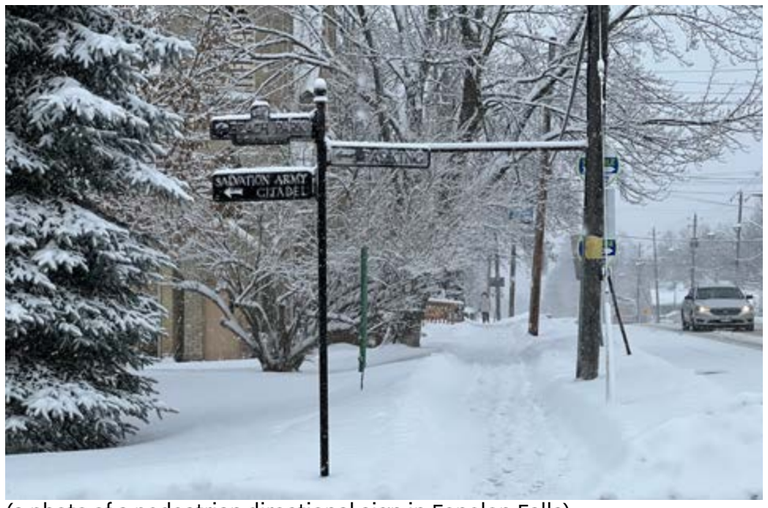
(a photo of a pedestrian directional sign in Lindsay)



(a photo of a pedestrian directional sign in Fenelon Falls)



(a photo of a pedestrian directional sign in Fenelon Falls)



(a photo of a pedestrian directional sign in Fenelon Falls)



(a photo of a pedestrian directional sign in Bethany)

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Additional Observations

There is a clear need for pedestrian directional signs within the downtown cores and main strips through each community. Many intersections lack directional information and it is easy to by-pass shops and business'.

Architecturally, the communities within the City of Kawartha Lakes share a common character, defined by Victorian and Edwardian commercial architecture, complemented by cottage-style forms that extend from surrounding residential areas.

The architecture and landscape of the City of Kawartha Lakes express a heritage shaped by water-based settlement and industry, rural and agricultural traditions, and small-town civic life.



(a photo of Kent St W and William St N in Lindsay)


(a photo of Lindsay town hall)



(a photo of Fenelon Falls Tourist Info Centre)


(a photo of Hwy 7A and Jakeman St)


(a photo of shops along Bolton st in Bobcaygeon)


(a photo of Lindsay Public Library)


(a photo of Francis St W and Colborne St in Fenelon Falls)


(a series of photos of architectural features in Lindsay)


(a photo of the Bobcaygeon Inn)

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Section 5 Reference Documents

Economic Development Strategy

The strongest and most explicit link is under Strategic Priority 4: Invest in Places of Economic and Cultural Activity.
Objective 4.1, calls to...
“Develop a municipal signage and wayfinding strategy.”
The Economic Development Strategy establishes signage and wayfinding not as a design add-on, but as a strategic economic development action endorsed by the City. The strategy:

- Authorizes the development of a municipal signage and wayfinding strategy
- Frames signage as economic infrastructure, not just visual design
- Links wayfinding to placemaking, downtown revitalization, tourism, and branding
- Provides policy-level justification for funding, coordination, and long-term implementation

The document frames signage and wayfinding as tools to support:

1. Placemaking and quality of place
The strategy defines placemaking as creating environments where people want to live, work, and visit, especially across downtowns, villages, waterfronts, and cultural areas

- Making places legible and navigatable
- Reinforcing local identity across multiple communities
- Helping residents and visitors understand they are part of a larger “community of communities”

2. Downtown vitality and economic activity
Downtowns are described as “the heart and soul of the community” and key economic and cultural hubs
Effective signage and wayfinding:

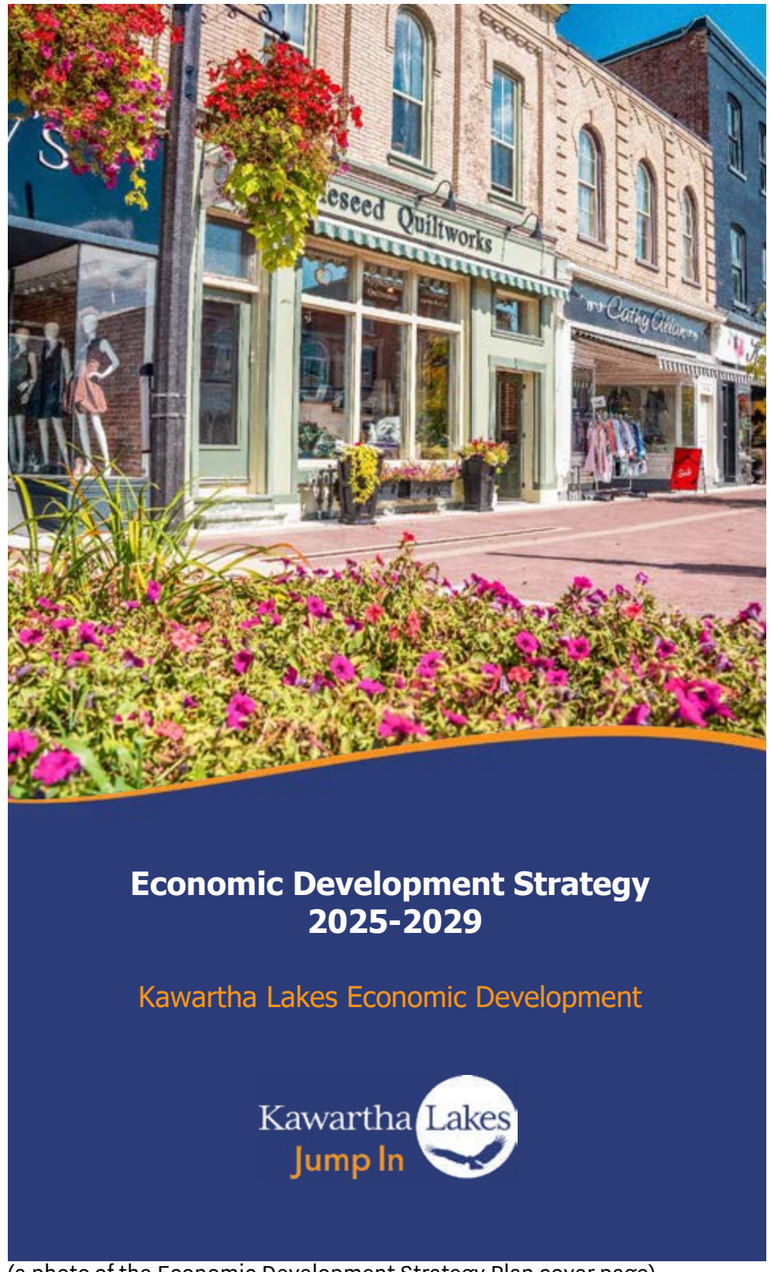
- Draws visitors into downtowns
- Helps people find main streets, parking, trails, cultural venues, and waterfronts
- Encourages longer stays and more spending

3. Tourism and destination management
The strategy identifies tourism and destination management as a core economic development function

- Wayfinding supports tourism by:
    - Improving first impressions
    - Reducing visitor confusion across a large, dispersed municipality
    - Making attractions, trails, and experiences easier to discover

4. Brand identity and cohesion
A recurring challenge identified in the document is the lack of a unified municipal identity, with communities identifying more with individual towns than with the City of Kawartha Lakes as a whole.
A coordinated signage and wayfinding system:

- Visually reinforces the City of Kawartha Lakes brand
- Connects distinct towns while respecting local character
- Makes the municipality feel intentional and “investment-ready”



(a photo of the Economic Development Strategy Plan cover page)

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Active Transportation Master Plan

The ATMP includes a dedicated section titled “Signage and Wayfinding”, which states that wayfinding and signage are key design considerations for both existing and future active transportation routes. The ATMP focuses on cycling, walking and mobility devices. While cycling is not a part of this scope of work, the below remains applicable.
The document makes it clear that:

- Regulatory signage alone is not sufficient
- It must be supplemented by local wayfinding signage so users understand:
- Which routes are endorsed by the City
- How to use the infrastructure
- How different users should interact safely

1. Wayfinding is framed as critical to safety, comfort, and user experience

The ATMP explains that well-designed wayfinding:

- Helps people navigate unfamiliar environments
- Improves safety for pedestrians and cyclists
- Reduces confusion and the likelihood of getting lost
- Encourages people to explore and use active transportation modes

This is especially important in Kawartha Lakes due to:

- Its large geographic area
- A high number of visitors and tourists who may not be familiar with local routes

2. The plan explicitly calls for a cohesive signage and wayfinding strategy

The ATMP notes that while some informal signage exists (particularly on tourism cycling routes), it is inconsistent and recommends a more cohesive, coordinated approach going forward.
It also warns against “sign pollution,” emphasizing that signage should be:

- Strategic
- Clear
- Non-duplicative

3. Clear design principles for wayfinding are provided

The document outlines best-practice principles that should guide signage and wayfinding design, including:

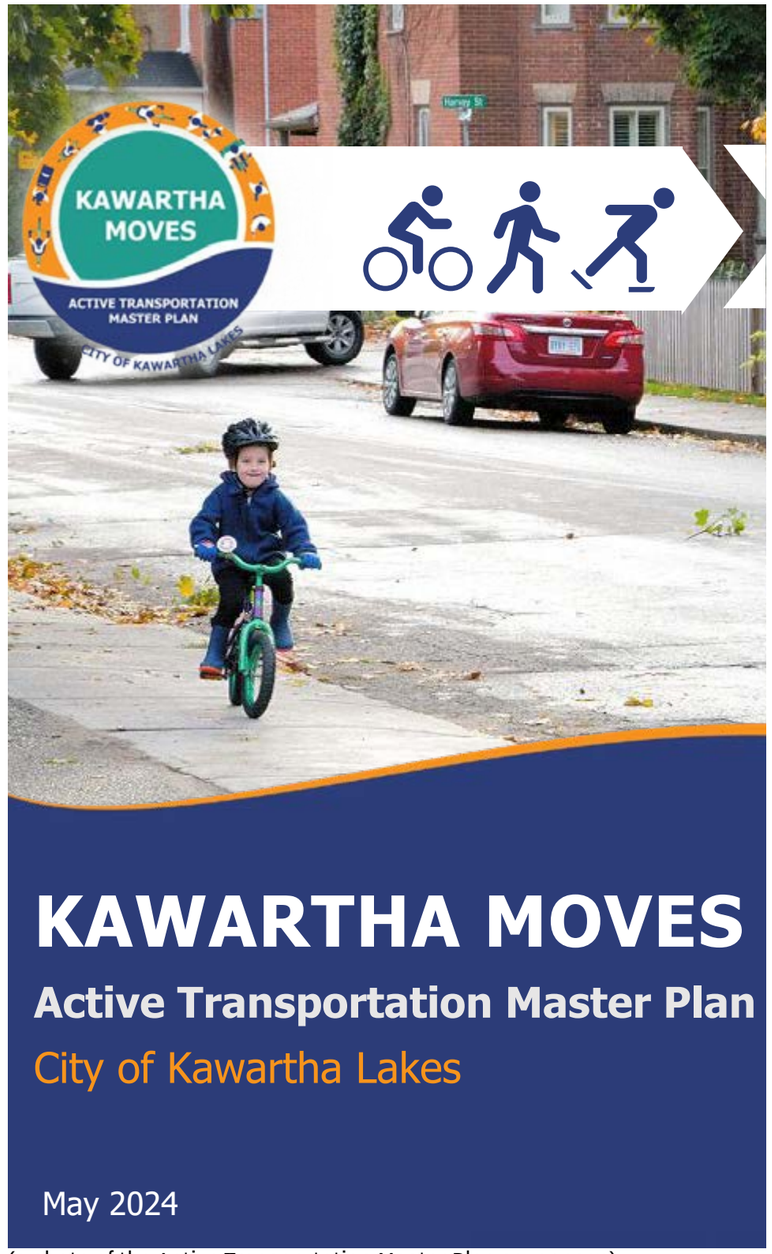
- Clear and concise messaging
- Consistent branding and graphic elements
- Placement at key decision points
- Clear information hierarchy
- Sensitivity to local context and municipal character

These principles align closely with contemporary wayfinding and placemaking practices.

4. Signage supports accessibility and inclusivity

The plan also links signage and wayfinding to:

- Accessibility under AODA
- Helping users clearly understand where and how to use facilities
- Creating an inclusive environment for people of all ages and abilities



(a photo of the Active Transportation Master Plan cover page)

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Information and Communications Accessibility Design Standards

Although the Information and Communications Accessibility Design Standards (ICADS) are not a signage manual, they set mandatory accessibility, clarity, and branding requirements that directly govern how signage and wayfinding information must be designed and communicated.

1. Signage and wayfinding are forms of "information and communication"

The ICADS states that the standards are mandatory for all municipal communications and public-facing materials Signage and wayfinding fall within this scope because they:

- Convey information
- Provide directions and instructions
- Support public access to services, places, and infrastructure

2. Plain language requirements directly affect wayfinding content

The Plain Language Guidelines require that information:

- Avoid jargon
- Use simple, short sentences
- Be understandable at a 7th–8th grade reading level
- Clearly define acronyms on first use

3. Accessibility requirements apply to maps and wayfinding graphics

The document includes specific guidance for complex images, explicitly naming maps as examples It requires that:

- Maps showing points of interest include accessible alternatives
- Text-based descriptions or tables accompany complex spatial information
- Information be presented in multiple formats where full accessibility is not practicable

4. Typography, contrast, and layout standards inform sign legibility

ICADS sets minimum requirements for:

- Font types (Gotham or Tahoma)
- Minimum font sizes
- Colour contrast ratios
- Left-aligned, uncluttered layouts
- Avoidance of all-caps and decorative text

5. Icons and symbols must support—not replace—text

The Icons and Infographics sections state that icons:

- Are visual accompaniments
- Must not replace words
- Must follow corporate style and colour palettes



(a photo of the Facility Accessibility Design Standards cover page)

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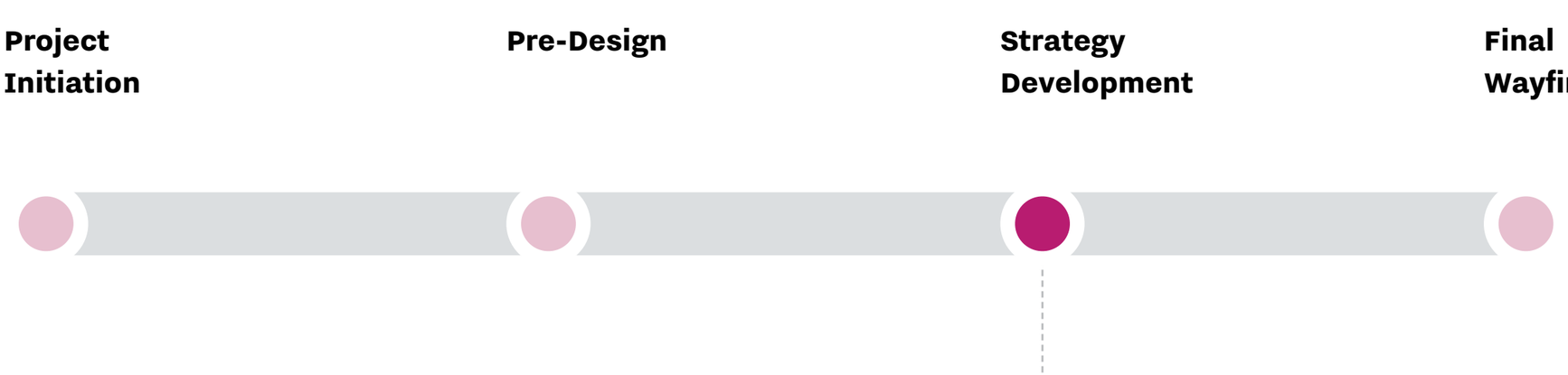
Next Steps



- Establish principles and recommendations
- Determine system of wayfinding elements
- Develop initial framework for identifying and prioritizing municipal & tourism-related assets
- Identify sign locations

Report Due: Feb 6th

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Cygnus

www.cygnus.group

Calgary
115-301, 14th Street NW
Calgary, AB T2N 2A1

403-371-2101

calgary@cygnus.group

Toronto
303-145 Front Street East
Toronto, ON M5A 1E3

416-728-3847

toronto@cygnus.group

Vancouver
606-318 Homer Street
Vancouver, BC V6B 2V2

604-261-3330

vancouver@cygnus.group

Victoria
202-1005 Broad Street
Victoria, BC V8W 2A1

778-265-9100

victoria@cygnus.group