

Forest Downtown Revitalization Project Summary Reporting 2022

Downtown Revitalization

The Sarnia-Lambton Economic Partnership along with leading community members from the Town of Forest and Municipality of Lambton Shores have gathered into a committee to explore the challenges and opportunities for their unique downtowns.

This project aims to strengthen the entrepreneurship ecosystem to attract businesses to the downtowns as well as help existing local businesses thrive. This also involves creating enjoyable public streets and spaces, and as a result providing employment and living opportunities. These beginning phases will consist of updating the community's business inventories, conducting surveys of the residents, business owners, and customers of the downtown, and hosting community engagement events.

The Committee

Leena Bourne, Downtown Revitalization Coordinator, Sarnia-Lambton Economic Partnership

Lynn Van Haaren, Member, Forest BIA

Jose Van Haastert, Secretary/Treasurer, Forest Collective

Morgan Hutton, Business Owner, My Fit Room

Ruth Illman, Service Club Member, Kiwanis Club

Michelle Lines, Business Manager, Libro Credit Union

David McLean, Volunteer, Forest Museum

Alan McKenzie, Business Owner, McKenzie & Henderson Ltd.

Tanya McKinlay, Educator, Kinnwood Central School

Catherine Minielly, Committee Member, Communities in Bloom

Chris Ravell, Business Owner, Ravell Insurance

Brianne Roder, Chair, Forest Collective

The Vision

Special Events:

Attracting Visitors to Forest through special events will increase the economic welfare of our businesses and make the community a better place to work, live, and grow. This project will aim to bring more reoccurring special events to the area.

Community Engagement and Collaboration:

Building on the assets Forrest already exhibits, the Downtown Revitalization project will aim to engage the community to build a sense of pride.

Beautification:

Maintaining the appearance of Forest's business area is a high priority. The committee will aim to attract new visitors by creating a welcoming and cheerful environment throughout the entire business district.

Census of Forest

Population (as of 2021):	2,429
Households (as of 2021):	1,085
Median Income (as of 2020):	\$72,000

First Language French (as of 2021):	35 respondents
First Language a non-official language (as of 2021):	130 respondents
Indigenous Identity (as of 2021):	115 respondents

Forest Business Mix Analysis

The Downtown Revitalization project completed a business mix analysis of Forest’s business district, to better understand our economy. This was done by first updating the entire business directory found here:

<https://www.sarnialambton.on.ca/business>

Business Types in the Downtown	Number of Businesses	Percent in Downtown
Retail	27	19.80%
Service	66	48.50%
Public Service	18	13.20%
Restaurants and Entertainment Purchase	15	11.20%
Vacant	10	7.30%
	136	100%

Business Owner Survey

- 45 surveys were completed, which is 37.5% of all businesses in Forest (approximately 120 businesses in total)
- Most Businesses are looking to expand OR downsize OR retire
- Majority of survey respondents own their own space
- Those that don’t own their space are not interested in purchasing
- Majority are considering improvement projects to their space
- Busiest times in downtown Forest are Monday – Wednesday
- This information suggests major change to the downtown within the next 2-5 years

Resident Survey

- 459 surveys were completed, which is 38% of the population of Forest. The minimum sample size is 291.
- Residents purchase most of their goods in Forest but find they must travel to find a lot of necessities.
- Parking, the look/feel of the downtown, and products/services are reasonable and convenient, according to Forest residents.
- When asked where to find community information, 21% of respondents answered “Facebook”.
- Residents note that the variety of goods and services need improvement.

Market Trade Analysis

Downtown Market Analysis provides communities with information about local market conditions and opportunities so that they can develop effective strategies for community revitalization. Determining the size and demographic characteristics of a community’s trade area is a critical component of the analysis. This trade area analysis provides information about local consumer demand and demographic characteristics. This information can be used to:

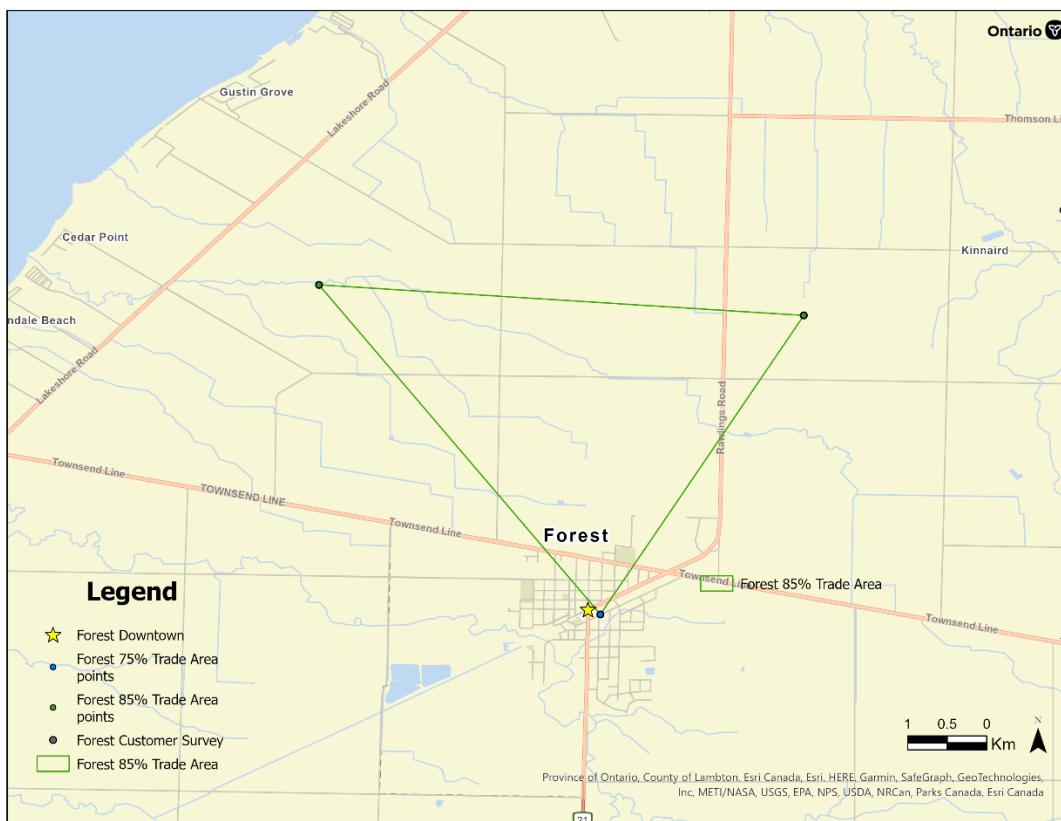
- Learn the characteristics and buying habits of consumers in the trade area,
- Determine the most appropriate consumer groups to target; and,
- Enable assessment of the types of businesses, merchandise sold, and services offered.

A trade area is the geographic area in which the majority of customers for the business district reside. Once the size of the trade area is determined, the number of potential customers that may patronize businesses in the district can be estimated. Knowing the trade area also sets the geographic parameters for obtaining demographic and lifestyle information. This information provides insights into the people who live in the trade area and enables the assessment of

consumer demand for local products and services. A trade area's size and shape can be influenced by many different factors, including:

- The size or attractiveness of the supply point
- The number, location and relative attractiveness of competing stores
- Accessibility to the store (in terms of ease of travel to the store against physical and man-made barriers that impede access)
- The relative geographical distribution of persons with a profile which is known to be predisposed to patronize this type of market

Furthermore, both the size and shape of trade areas are greatly influenced by the distance customers are willing to travel.



Given a retail market of a particular population size the natural question is what types of establishments can it support. While several factors contribute to the

vitality of the local retail market, the most fundamental factor is the relative size of the market in terms of potential customers.

The Market Threshold Analysis provides information on the types of businesses that exist in your trade area and the theoretical ability for the trade area to support that type of business.

Strengths of a Threshold Analysis:

- This is a resource which can be used to help identify potential business opportunities.
- Market threshold estimates may help an entrepreneur think through the market potential of his or her business idea.
- Market threshold analysis helps frame the basic marketing question: can a community of a given size support a particular type of establishment?

Limitations of a Threshold Analysis:

- The number of businesses does not account for size.
- The analysis is focused on the demographics of the trade area, not the downtown. Further, the number of businesses in the community takes into account all businesses in the community, not just the downtown.

Population	Forest's Trade Area
2016 Census	721
2021 Population estimate	733
Land Area, km ²	330.57

Persons per km ²	35.9
Dwellings per km ²	27.66

Population Projections	Forest's Trade Area	Lambton Shores Region	Ontario
Total Population			
2016 Census*	721	10,817	13,875,394
2021 estimated	733	11,036	14,889,127
2024 projected	734	11,107	15,516,022
2026 projected	738	11,191	15,991,843
2031 projected	746	11,361	17,211,219

First Impressions Community Exchange

A group of like-minded individuals from a neighbouring community spent a day in downtown Forest. The following information was gathered about their first impressions of the downtown.

5 Positive Features Downtown:

- Historic facades
- Lots of nature for a downtown
- Great parks and facilities for families with kids
- Really friendly and helpful citizens
- The downtown had everything one would need. Very little need to go elsewhere for supplies or food.

Three potential opportunities for downtown Forest:

- Clothing retail store

- Unique shops that would bring visitors to the area – ex. a craft store that also teaches skills such as painting.
- More partnerships downtown between local businesses, particularly the big box stores and the small businesses

Five biggest challenges facing downtown Forest:

- Historic buildings are challenging and expensive to make accessible
- Forest is located generally near two other towns and businesses, and it might be difficult to keep Forest citizens in Forest for their own shopping
- It is difficult to set Forest apart among so many other towns in the county
- The volume of vacant spaces makes the downtown look quiet
- Small business owners feel the bigger box stores will be too much competition and detract from the historic town feel

Community Engagement Sessions

22 participants interested in the Forest community's success were involved in a strategic planning workshop facilitated by Bryan Boyle. Participants represented a broad spectrum of backgrounds, including businesses service clubs, educations, financial institutions, and sports organizations.

The workshop's purpose was to solicit valuable input from key stakeholders to ensure that the Forest business community remains strong and vibrant.

Areas of focus for improvement include:

- Strengthening infrastructure
- Providing incentives for businesses
- Utilize and facilitate financial grant opportunities
- Cut the red tape
- Encourage and support community events
- Enhance communication
- Develop innovative approaches

Celebrating Small Business in Downtown Forest Event

The Sarnia-Lambton Economic Partnership hosted a small business week event in downtown Forest on October 20th, 2022, in partnership with the Lambton-Kent District School Board (LKDSB). The event celebrated small businesses and focused on bringing people to the downtown. Hosting this event during Small Business Week, the Economic Partnership worked with the LKDSDB to teach youth about entrepreneurship and small business.

This downtown event promoted supporting entrepreneurs and showing the community how much work goes into running a small business. The Economic Partnership wants to celebrate the important members of the community during Small Business Week and create buzz around entrepreneurship and new business creation.

Youth from surrounding schools visited small businesses in Forest's Downtown during the event hours. Each small business focused on teaching and mentoring through storytelling, and to highlight the business owner's unique stories. Profiles of each of the business owners were created as an aid to facilitate education.

As a pilot year for this event, it was concluded to be a success. The business owner profiles that were created as a learning aid were extremely helpful to both the students and their group leaders. In addition, having a stop/start point at the Kiwanis Kineto Theater served all involved well.

Forest BIA Website

Our data suggests the need for more accessible community information. The Downtown Revitalization project is utilizing the services of CR Creative to make large-scale updates to the Forest BIA website.

The website will include a number of esthetic and functional improvements. The WordPress based website will include the setup and design of approx. Six (6) unique pages) including various plugins and forms.

Home

- This page will have an eye-catching design that will introduce users to the company in a dynamic and engaging way. There will be a full-screen rotating image banner, using stock photos or images provided. A welcome message will be included on the home page showing what Forest has to offer. Basic contact information will be included within the footer throughout all pages of the website.

History

- This page will be utilized to tell the story of the company, who you are and, what you do.

Events

- This page will include events happening within the BIA and community. The events will be displayed in a user friendly and easy to update way

Mural Walk

- This page will include a photo and write up for each of the artist featured on the Mural Walk

Business Directory

- The Business Directory will include a logo and basic contact information for each of the businesses within the BIA. The businesses will be categorized by industry and will populate on a map. The map will display a different icon for each business and landmarks

Contact Us

- This section will contain detailed contact information and will include an online contact form for inquiries.

The Downtown Forest Parkette Redesign Plans

The Downtown Revitalization project has enlisted the services of Plural Designs to create a redesign plan, timeline, and design concept.

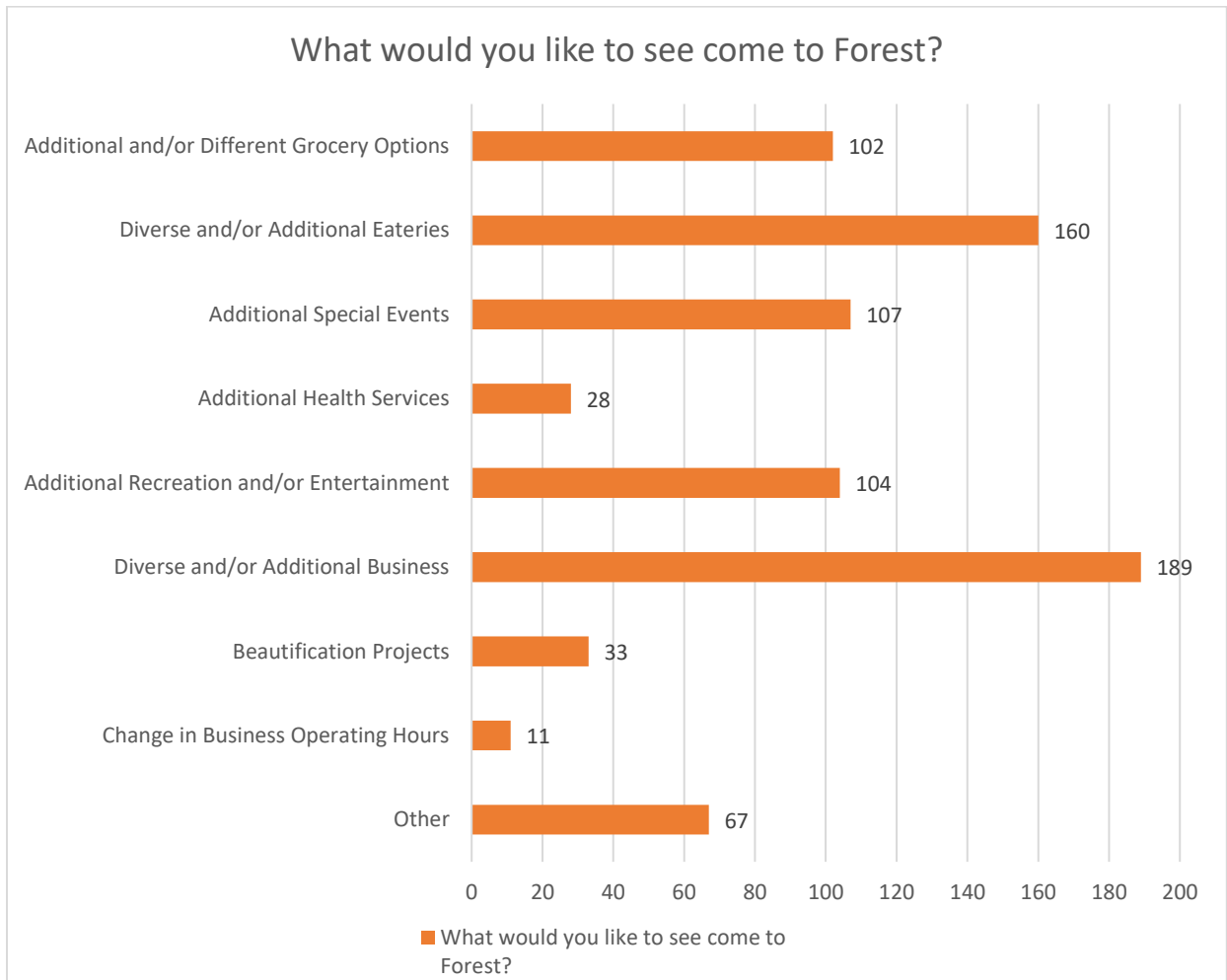
This process is completed through:

1. Community stakeholder meetings to review the content, delivery, goals, outcomes and expectations.
2. Review current/available information characterizing park site (i.e., land use mapping, context, heritage, legacy, use/circulation, etc.).
3. Site Visit: to examine site and photo- document existing conditions
4. Prepare base mapping to support concept development
5. Prepare inventory & analysis drawings to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities
6. Prepare three (3) preliminary concepts
7. Prepare three (3) budget estimates
8. Confirm Budget, and find best course to begin work on site

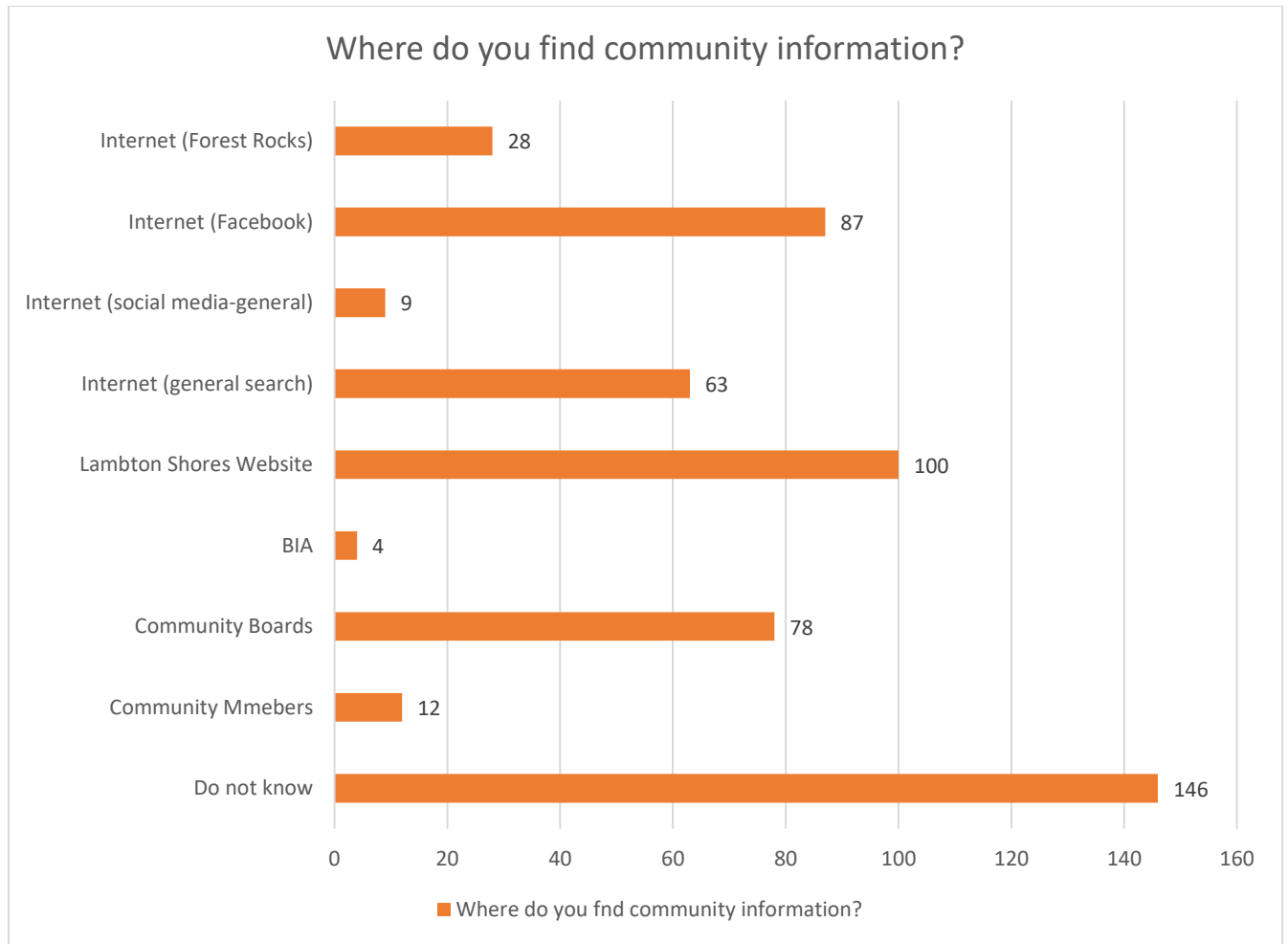
The Parkette Redesign is an ongoing process, with the community in mind. As the community needs changes, our plans will try to adapt and change as well.

Comments from Survey Respondents

The Following data was taken from the Forest resident survey and the Forest business owner survey



The following data was taken from the Forest Resident survey



Conclusive Data Points from the Project

Better Promotion and Marketing of Small Businesses

- Community engagement session, FICE, resident survey, business owner survey

Fill Storefront Vacancies

- Community engagement session, FICE, resident survey, business owner survey

More Business Variety

- Resident survey, FICE, community engagement session

Accessibility Improvements

- Community engagement session, resident survey, FICE

Sidewalks, Traffic Control, and Directional Signage Updates

- Resident Survey, FICE

Keep Residents Shopping in the Downtown

- Resident survey

Community Information Made More Accessible

- Resident survey

Assistance for Currently Planned Business Improvement Projects

- Business owner survey

Projections of Businesses Exiting in 2-5 Years

- Business owner survey

Appendices

Resident Survey Report

First Impressions Community Exchange

Community Engagement Session

Celebrating Small Business in Downtown

Forest Event Summary

Business Owner Survey Report

Market Data Analysis

Business Mix Analysis

Downtown Forest Parkette Designs

For more information and appendices, please email reception@sarnialambton.on.ca