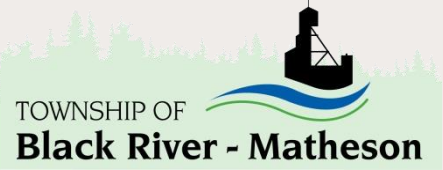


A Community Economic Development Strategic Plan



**For the
Township of Black River-Matheson**

September 2013

Submitted by



The Township of Black River-Matheson
Community Economic Development Strategic Plan

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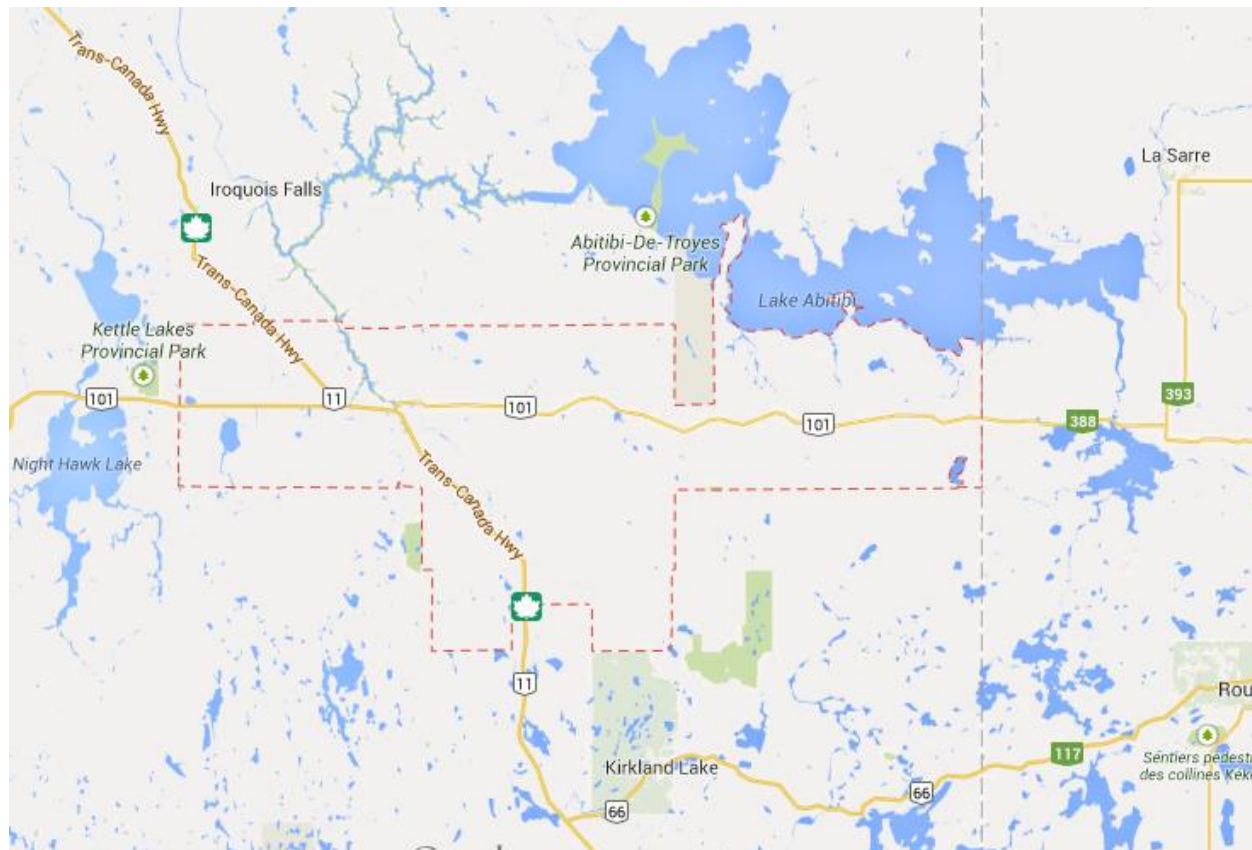


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1 Introduction

The Township of Black River-Matheson is developing a new Community Economic Development Strategic Plan, with the goal of exploring opportunities to grow a stronger economy, bolster financial sustainability, create a more cohesive community and drive an improved quality of life. This planning exercise comes at an important time as the local mining sector is poised to provide even greater employment and opportunities for the community. An effective roadmap, properly communicated and executed, will ensure that these community and economic development opportunities are seized.



Source: McSweeney and Associates, Google Maps 2013

The current population of Black River-Matheson is approximately 2,400 residents and boasts a workforce of over 1,200. This fully-serviced community is located in the Cochrane District. Strategically located along highways 11 and 101, the community is easily accessible via Kirkland Lake or Timmins. In addition to its geographic advantages, Black River-Matheson is a nature lover's paradise. With over 150 lakes and rivers, the more than 300,000 acres provide beautiful sandy beaches, excellent fishing, boating, hiking, and camping activities.

In terms of economic strengths, the township's key sectors include traditional industries such as agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting as well as mining and oil and gas extraction, in addition to industries such as utilities and health care and social assistance.

Currently, BRM is at an exciting crossroads. Regarding strategic development, the community is very aware of the economic and community-building opportunities currently presented. Greater collaboration and communication is vital if the municipality is going to overcome obstacles and take full advantage of these possibilities that lay ahead.

This Community Economic Development Strategic Plan is a 5 year road map that provides Black River-Matheson with very specific strategic directions and actions required to solidify and strengthen the overall community of Black River-Matheson while deliver a stronger local economic development product. In the end, this Plan has been crafted to enable Black River-Matheson and to allow the community leaders the opportunity to begin building a more cohesive and cooperative community.

As the policy framework, this Strategy will lay out the actions required for Black River-Matheson to become a more cohesive community supported by a more sustainable economy. Once the Strategy is approved by the Township Council, an Implementation Plan will be prepared. The Implementation Plan will be an internal document to be used by the Township in preparing their annual work plans and will identify who will be responsible to lead and support specific actions, the estimated amount of investment required to implement the action, the performance measures as well as the timeline for delivery.

2 Strategic Action Plan Summary

The following Actions highlight the top strategic priorities for Black River-Matheson.



**TOWNSHIP OF
Black River - Matheson**

Community Economic Development Strategic Plan:

Year 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hire CAO, and Community Economic Development Officer• Develop an asset management plan and a long-term financial plan
Year 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop and implement a comprehensive communications and community engagement strategy/policy/action plan• Undertake and implement a housing needs study
Year 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build a Black River-Matheson youth engagement action plan• Undertake the development of a business case for the development of industrial/employment land
Year 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop an event or festival aimed at celebrating Black River-Matheson• Undertake and provide ongoing funding for a Community Improvement Plan for downtown Black River-Matheson
Year 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participate in a “Communities in Bloom” competition• Create a marketing and branding plan to be used in all economic development and investment attraction outreach

3 Statistical Overview

The following statistical overview has been prepared to provide a snapshot of the current situation of the community of Black River-Matheson. More detailed data and analysis can be found in the Situation Analysis.

As commonly seen in smaller Ontario communities, Black River-Matheson has shown a slight and steady decline in their population over the past several years. While the township has an older population than the provincial average, the age segments of the youth population (under 19) are on par with the province or, in some cases, slightly higher. This can be an opportunity for Black River-Matheson. Estimates indicate that residents of Black River-Matheson were slightly less likely to move than the provincial average in the one-year time frame and they are much less likely to move than the provincial average in the 5-year time frame, which indicates a stable local population. This could be a resource to be tapped into as these residents are likely invested in the area.

Black River-Matheson has a strong mix of industries by occupation with an exceptionally high percentage of its labour force in the Mining and Oil and Gas extraction industry. The median income in Black River-Matheson is comparable with Ontario, while the average income is lower. The average value of dwellings in Black River-Matheson is much lower than the Ontario average.

Please note that every effort has been made to use the most current data available. There are three major sources of information for this document:

- The 2006 Census from Statistics Canada;
- The 2011 Census from Statistics Canada; and
- Superdemographics 2012 from Manifold Data Mining Inc.

There are certain pieces of data that were collected in the 2006 Census that were either not collected in the 2011 Census or the information was not released. Superdemographics 2012 are statistical projections that use the Census data as their point of reference. Wherever possible, the most recent data was used.

The Township of Black River-Matheson

Geographic:

Black River-Matheson is a township in the Cochrane District of the Canadian province of Ontario.

Ontario



Total provincial population:
13,324,854

Municipality of
Black River-Matheson



44% of
residents
commute out of
BRM



Total municipal
population: 2,431



31% of
workers
commute into
BRM

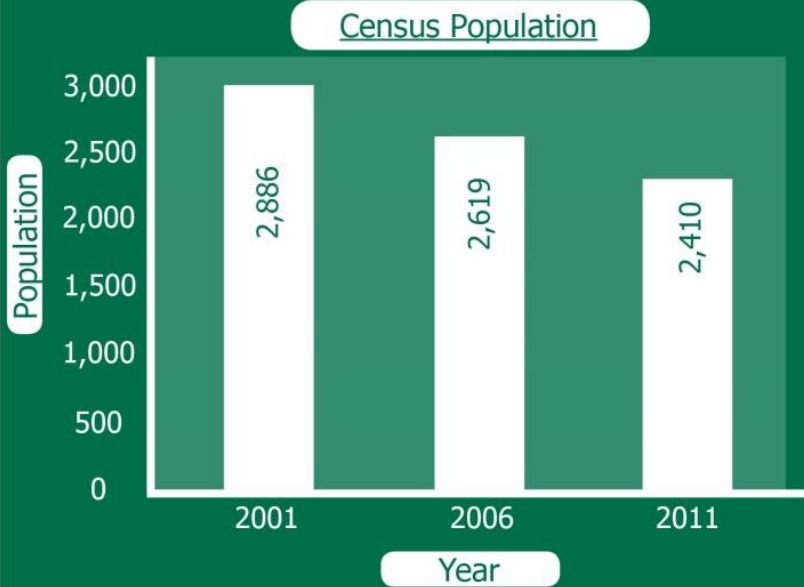


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inspiring economic sustainability

Demographic:

BRM has an older population than the province. Residents of the BRM are less likely to have moved within the last year or the last five years than the province.



-16.5%

48 Median Age

Ontario median age is 40

Average value of dwelling
\$96,610



Provincial average is \$426,787



Residents that had moved within the previous year



Residents that had moved within the previous 5 years

50%



50%



Population by Gender



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inspiring economic sustainability

Labour Force:



The largest field of study for post-secondary qualifications was in Architecture, engineering, and related technologies. The participation and employment rates in BRM were lower than in Ontario and had decline from 2006. Unemployment had increased since 2006.



Key Sectors by Industry



Key Sectors by Occupation



4 SWOT Analysis

A great amount of effort, research and analyses has been undertaken in Black River-Matheson over the past several years in an attempt to provide detailed information on the community's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT analysis). This section was prepared using various sources of information and provides an updated SWOT analysis for the community of Black River-Matheson.

Several sources of information were used to compile the SWOT including:

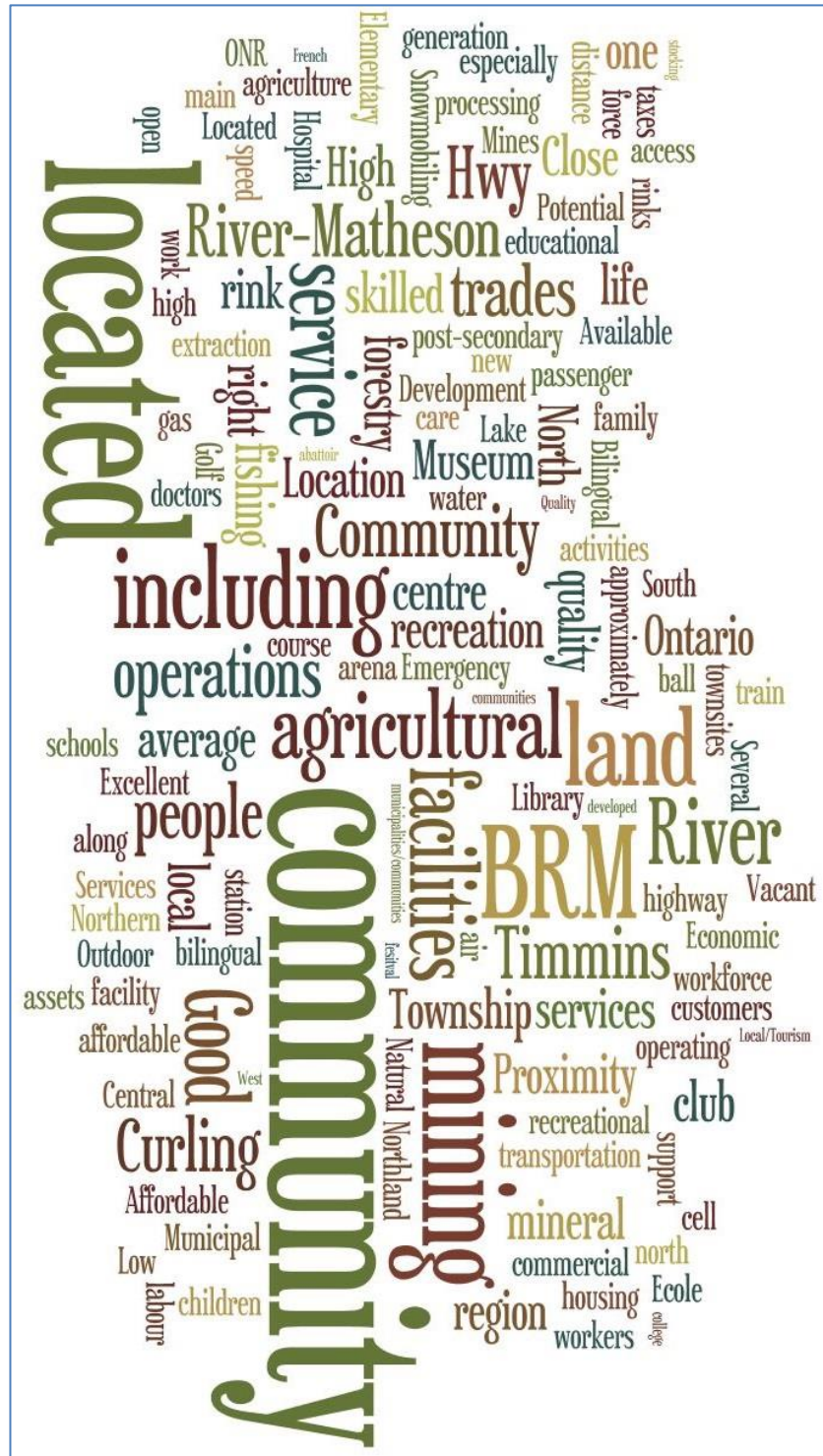
- Examining information gathered for the development of the 2005 Strategic Plan
- The 2007 Operational Review
- The Target Market and Needs/Gap Analyses
- Open Houses held in Black River-Matheson in May 2013
- A Focus Group with Black River-Matheson's business community
- Personal Interviews.

To demonstrate in a more visual context the priorities of the SWOT, *Wordles™* have been prepared. In a *Wordle™*, those words or ideas that have been mentioned the most during the review and analysis are portrayed as the largest words in the graphic illustration. As such, the more often a word has been mentioned, the larger the word will appear in the *Wordles™*.

For a more thorough illustration of the information and comments collected through the SWOT process, Appendix A has been added to the Strategy and contains all the information compiled to date pertaining to the SWOT analysis for Black River-Matheson.

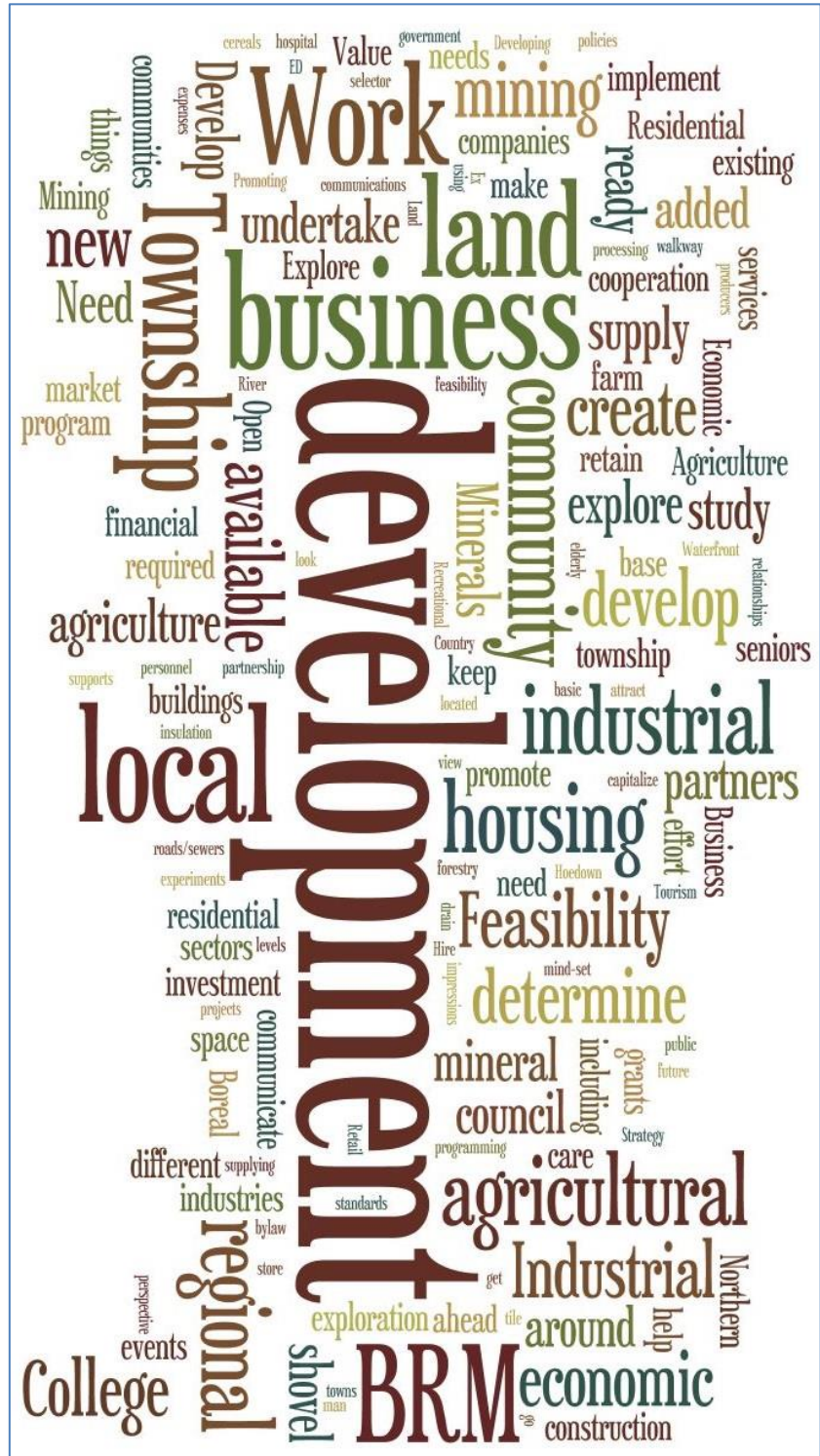
4.1 Strengths

- **People who call BRM home**
- Located at the intersection of the trans-Canada Highway 11 and Highway 101
- Close proximity to Timmins and the Quebec border
- Very active mining sector
- Strong in agriculture
- Great community facilities
- Young families call BRM home
- Skilled and non-skilled labour force
- Affordable community to live (low taxes)
- Low housing costs
- High speed internet and access to fibre
- Hospital
- Nursing home/long-term care facility
- Elementary schools



4.3 Opportunities

- Communicate with and engage the community of Black River-Matheson
- Bridge historical community barriers and build a cohesive Black River-Matheson
- Provide services and activities for Black River-Matheson's youth and residents
- Understand and plan for Black River-Matheson's community infrastructure needs
- Plan for the development of additional housing in Black River-Matheson
- Create new locations for business start-ups, relocations and expansions
- Work to transform Black River-Matheson into a visually attractive community
- Continue working with regional organizations such as North East Community Network (NeCN) and the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities (FONOM) to bring investment to Northern Ontario



5 Vision

The following Vision has been prepared to demonstrate where Black River-Matheson will need to focus their efforts in order to ensure positive sustainable community economic development growth.

Moving forward, it will be imperative that Black River-Matheson's community leaders focus on positive two-way communication and active community engagement with the aim of uniting the community of Black River-Matheson.

Through effective and active communication in combination with positive community building efforts, Black River-Matheson will be a strong, vibrant and united community.

Residents will be engaged in making their community a better place to live and businesses will be provided with the opportunity and the environment to grow and thrive.



6 Community Economic Development Strategic Plan

The Black River-Matheson Strategic Plan has been carefully prepared with a focused approach aimed at providing the community the actions and strategic directions necessary to begin process of building a stronger cohesive community and sustainable local economy. The intention is to stay focused on ten priority actions over the next five years, but if the top ten priority actions are completed, or if there is additional capacity, there are additional actions for the Township of Black River-Matheson to consider.

6.1 Year 1

1. Currently the Township of Black River-Matheson is supported by a staffing complement that is tasked with providing municipal services required to support the day-to-day activities of the community. Moving forward, it is imperative that the Township hire additional and appropriate to implement the Community Strategic Plan. These staff requirements include (in order of priority):
 - Chief Administrative Officer
 - Community Economic Development Officer.

In addition, hiring the above positions will assist the Township to fulfill their future staffing needs and support their succession planning efforts, as securing a talented workforce in Northern Ontario is, and will, continue to become more challenging.

2. Building off of the information and recommendations provided in the 2007 Operational Review, develop an asset management plan and a long-term financial plan. This is becoming a requirement of the Province if and when the community requests infrastructure partnership funding. As such, these plans become vital strategic documents moving forward.

6.2 Year 2

3. Currently Black River-Matheson is a community divided. To bring the community together, develop and implement a comprehensive communications and community engagement strategy/policy/action plan to begin the journey of uniting and creating the community known as Black River-Matheson. This is an on-going action, as 2-way communication needs to be fostered. Include outreach and active engagement of both residential and business community and include at a minimum all residents (permanent and seasonal), local businesses, First Nation, tourists, schools, churches and local social groups.

4. Building off the Cochrane District Social Services Administration Board (CDSSAB) 10 Year Housing Plan undertake and implement a housing needs study to determine the current and projected demand for housing (including housing types) required in Black River-Matheson. Work with regional partners (i.e. NeCN) to undertake a housing/residential development supply chain study to determine the regional needs, gaps and opportunities. Create the business case to outline current housing supply, existing and anticipated demand, as well as BRM's capacity to provide additional housing lots/units and the most appropriate location for additional housing.

6.3 Year 3

5. The youth in Black River-Matheson are the future of the community. To ensure Black River-Matheson remains a place that is attractive to youth and young families, partner with the Public and Separate School Boards (French and English) to build a Black River-Matheson youth engagement action plan. The aim of the Strategy is to engage the youth of Black River-Matheson and to determine what types of activities they enjoy, to identify the gaps in services and activities available to them, and to discover meaningful approaches to fulfilling those gaps. Outcomes may result in the re-introduction of services and programming at the BRM Community Complex and other municipally owned recreation facilities.
6. Continuing with the work completed in the Black River-Matheson: Target Market, Needs Gap and Investment Readiness Assessment and Training report. Undertake the development of a business case to provide the rationale, and to determine the best and most strategic location, for the development of industrial/employment land in Black River-Matheson. The business case should include:
 - Supply and demand analysis of existing local and regional industrial land;
 - Analysis to identify the most ideal strategic location of any new industrial land;
 - Outline of the activities that must be completed to develop any new industrial land;
 - Cost estimates and estimated cash flow requirements for new land development;
 - Required actions to address any regulatory approvals; and
 - Recommendations for servicing options and/or phasing.

6.4 Year 4

7. Partner with local service clubs and the BRM business community to develop an event or festival aimed at celebrating Black River-Matheson. The goal is to bring the entire community together in a festive atmosphere and to meet each other in a social environment.
8. Continue investing in Downtown Black River-Matheson by undertaking and providing ongoing funding for a Community Improvement Plan for downtown Black River-Matheson. Provide funding for the redevelopment incentives permitted under the Planning Act and Municipal Act. Work with the Chamber of Commerce and downtown businesses to promote the CIP and encourage property owners to take advantage of the program.

6.5 Year 5

9. Participate in a “Communities in Bloom” competition. The desired approach is get the community to work together to make Black River-Matheson a more beautiful community. If the “Communities in Bloom” competition does not have the desired effect of cleaning up and beautifying both public and private properties within BRM, the Property Standards Bylaw will need to be more strongly enforced. Implement and enforce stricter property standards to clean up some of the former Town Sites in an effort to make Black River-Matheson more attractive to potential residents and investors.

10. Create a marketing and branding plan to be used in all economic development and investment attraction outreach. Develop the marketing tools to be used to reach target audiences, and to prioritize the development of marketing collateral. This will include:
 - The development and promotion of a new Black River-Matheson brand;
 - Marketing products such as new Black River-Matheson logo, municipal signage, quick facts, and target sector investment sheets;
 - Working with the Chamber of Commerce to promote and expand the marketing capacity of local businesses;
 - Implementing and marketing home-based business policies; and
 - Updating the Black River-Matheson website with 2011 StatsCanada data and 2012/2013 projections – continually up-date with the most up-to-date stats, data and projections.

6.6 Other Relevant Actions

After the top 10 action items have been completed, or if there is additional capacity to undertake additional initiatives, other relevant actions to be undertaken include:

Community Development:

- Begin re-programming of community facilities with activities aimed at all age segments within Black River-Matheson;
- Undertake a strategic review of the Black River-Matheson Official Plan to determine the most strategic locations for additional residential and industrial development; and
- Work to develop a local farmers and crafters market in downtown Black River-Matheson.

Residential and Economic Development:

- Partner with College Boreal and Northern College to create a satellite campus in BRM that supports the home building and construction trades, including facilities for hands on demonstration projects.

Economic Development and Investment Readiness:

- Implement an on-going business retention and expansion visitation program to encourage outreach to all businesses with Black River-Matheson.
- Create a specific economic development marketing and branding plan to be used in all economic development and investment attraction outreach. Develop the marketing tools to be used to reach target audiences, and to prioritize the development of marketing collateral.
- Present important information and documents such as the quick facts, industrial area marketing materials, sector information sheets, etc. on the municipal website.
- Continue to work with regional partners such as Northeast Community Network (NeCN) to further promote and develop regional agriculture.
- Continue to work with regional partners and local investors to explore all opportunities to activate the existing mineral processing facility.
- Partner with local mining operations (including those in the operation and exploration stages) to undertake a local mining opportunities study to determine what support industries would be feasible in BRM.
- Prepare a Site Selector/Investment Proposal template.
- Continue to update the Black River-Matheson industrial land inventory.

Appendix A

The information contained in this Appendix outlines and provides detailed responses to the SWOT Analyses that were undertaken as a part of the Black River-Matheson Community Economic Development Strategic Plan development process.

Business Community Focus Group – May 6, 2013

Strengths

- Central to all municipalities/communities (good for distribution)
- Location attracts/diversification of activities
- Good skilled trades/all trades
- 4 townsites/communities
- Low taxes
- Bilingual
- Railway
- Two close airports
- Affordable housing/costs
- Customer loyalty
- Businesses are passed down from generation to generation
- Small town personal touch/know your customers and your customers know you
- High speed broadband/infrastructure available to do business in BRM
- Infrastructure/fibre backbone all along the main corridor
- Hospital/doctors
- Elementary schools/high school in Iroquois Falls

Weaknesses

- Small community – businesses may not have the volume/head offices looking for higher numbers
- High speed internet is spotty (fibre optic is not an option outside of the main community)
- Lack of housing/lack of population
- Council needs to be more flexible and push some of the process
- Retail leakage/selection is sometimes an issue
- Creative advertising
- Employee loyalty
- Attitudes/failure breeds success – sometimes Canadians frown upon failure and do not give the entrepreneur a 2nd chance

Opportunities

- Communications/training opportunities
- Mentorship programs (look to retired business man)
- Business grants & financial incentives – communicate to the business community

- More outreach to better relationships with major industries/employers
- An ambassador program
- Update from the mining companies
- Improved communication for the entire community
- Value added agricultural opportunities
- Residential development
- Broadband coverage
- New community look/brand
- First impressions exercise
- Hotel/motel
 - Business travel
 - Recreational events
 - Social events
- Tourism opportunities
 - Sawmill in Ramore
 - Waterfront development/cottages/resorts
- Serviced industrial land
- Develop a business perspective in the township

Highest Priority Issues

- Housing (more diverse housing types)
 - Things to do in the community
- Access to specialty professional goods
- More availability of everyday stuff
 - Professional services
 - Retail
- Commercial/industrial properties
 - Locations to do business
- Labour force profile
- Grocery store in Val Gagne
- ONR passenger service (passenger/dining/car service)

Open House Ramore - May 7, 2013

Greatest Community & Economic Strengths

- Close to Timmins
- Close knit community where people are friendly and help each other
- Hwy 11 & 101 Hub – train/bus
- Where “people are the root of the community”
- Lots of open land
- Lava Mountain – commercial & recreation property to be developed
- Knights of Columbus sausages

Greatest Community & Economic Weaknesses

- Too much regulations
- No land or buildings to start a business
- High speed internet only available in the townsites – nothing in the rural areas
- Too many derelict buildings in the townsites – make the townsites less inviting
- Have the rec assets/facilities but no one to run the programs – rely too much on volunteers
- Lack of motels, etc.
- Bring more recreational for the children and adults as well
- Too much focus on Matheson – like the crematorium
- Lack of foresight for outside hamlet development
- Retaining the younger generation; the overall population is an aging one

Greatest Community & Economic Opportunities

- Demolish old rundown buildings to make lots available for new buildings
- Need more recreational programming
- Need more seniors housing
- Make sure we keep our hospital open
- Need to make the investment in roads/sewers to attract more residential development – need to take a risk
- We would really like our grocery store
- A paved walkway all around the town with benches to rest along the way
- Can we get grants for seniors to help with the expenses of insulating their homes – changing windows, doors, roofs...insulation
- Ethanol plant using sugar beets (available farm land)

Industries and Businesses in 5-10 Years

- Mining
- Agriculture
- Residential development
- Need gas station
- Mennonite community
 - Farmers markets

- Handmade furniture
- Wild wines (blueberries, etc.)
- Ethanol – value-added agri-business
- Motel – accommodations

Barriers to Success

- Many vacant lots that could be ‘given’ to people that want to build homes (on condition) – in return BRM would collect the taxes for many years.
- Planning board has too many restrictions
- (Matheson) Tech/Pro – high cost to install water line. Had to be prepaid. Took 6 weeks.
- Planning – limit of 3 severances must be removed to encourage further development of land(s) (or increase to at least 5)
- Lack of grain storage, etc. for local farmers
- Not enough cooperation between the townsites

How can BRM overcome the Barriers to Success?

- By not shutting out all the small towns around it
- And not saying no to things that would be considered fun for the community! Like the Country Hoedown
- Move beyond the post-amalgamation mind-set (thinking of the good for the whole township)
- Municipality should keep advertising for outside business and manufacturing industry
- The municipality could help upkeep the public halls. The communities pay insurance and heating.

What are BRM’s Highest Priority Community Issues?

- We need to keep and improve our hospital – find and fix the problems
- Keep our volunteer firemen in Ramore
- Encourage seniors to move here in Ramore by building newer and bigger senior apartments
- There has always been friction between the towns – there probably always will be unless some magician can make it go away

Matheson Open House - May 6, 2013

Strengths

- Great Location
- The people living/working here
- Volunteers work hard
- Mines
- Centralized for many mining contractors
- Available agricultural land
- Central location for the north (Hwy 11 & 101)
- Potential agricultural growth (great soil)
- Safe and secure community – especially for children
- Potential to expand
- Be willing to open up closed roads for agricultural purposes and available for building & agriculture. We are centrally located for access to other northern communities

Weaknesses

- Not many businesses
- People travelling to other communities to work
- Not enough housing
- Need more senior housing
- Lack of housing
- Lack of housing for young and senior population
- Lack of creative thought re agricultural secondary industry (value added)
- Lack of municipal support towards volunteer groups
- Need more economic diversification (gold mining is only good for 10-15 years)
- Status of hospital –will we lose it?
 - That will kill us
 - People won't move here without one
 - Need assurances from levels of government
- Lack of council to address our roads system
- Township roads in town deplorable

Economic Opportunities

- Mines and supplying companies
- Farming x2
- Land available for agricultural development
- Black River and lakes
- Low tax base
- To develop more tourism and cottaging opportunities
- Lots of land available for housing, farming

Industries and Businesses in 5-10 Years

- Tech pro
- More agriculture
- Value added agriculture – cereals, wines, liquors, etc.
- Cottage lot development
- More agriculture development – need \$\$\$ for farm development – clearing, plowing, tile drain, market development, new crop experiments
- Mining supply warehouses – we are in the centre
- Retail business to supply basic wants
- Since we are centrally located could become terminals for forestry, trucking

Barriers to Success

- Council's willingness to give a little on some issues
- More housing
- Welcoming new ideas into town and not being afraid to forge ahead
- Spending budget in better places
- Taking no action
- Taking no risks
- Lack of funding
- Housing
- Rail transportation/lack of entrepreneurs in value-added areas
- Volunteer base getting smaller
- Housing development
- Agriculture planning – crops, distribution, seed sources
- Infrastructure
 - Replace old
 - Maintain old and new
 - New for town expansion (e.g. sewage & water)
- Shrinking \$ from prov. & fed. Gov't for infrastructure
- Less negative community spirit

How can BRM overcome the Barriers to Success?

- Younger council to go ahead and see a different view of things
- Promoting what we have
- Going ahead with different ideas
- Regulations
- The word 'no'
- A flexible council
- Open to diversification of types of business
- Open to new business
- Council cooperation, not infighting
- Encourage value added product development
- Ex council not helping
- Volunteer base

- Hire CEO or ED personnel

What are BRM's Highest Priority Community Issues?

- Housing x3
- Local employment
- Infrastructure repairs x3
- Roads terrible
- Need hotel rooms
- Provide a connected system of accessible info and funding to all businesses
- Failure to recognize and act on its prime location
- Transparent/open council

Black River-Matheson Needs/Gap Analysis

The two main areas that have emerged as existing economic development gaps within Black River-Matheson are:

Municipal Infrastructure

Lack of or limited, municipal infrastructure including:

- No current supply of shovel ready industrial land.
- Very limited supply of available industrial buildings.
- Very limited housing stock in terms of availability and diversity.
- No shovel ready residential building lots.
- Property standards not being enforced.
- Unrealistically low housing prices (due to poor housing quality) in BRM are making the marketing of new home construction difficult.
- Respective downtowns/main streets are looking old and tired.
- No high school will limit the number of families willing to relocate or stay in BRM.

Investment Readiness and Attraction

Gaps with respect to Investment Readiness and Investment Attraction:

- Limited number of community assets needed to attract and fulfill needs of investment opportunities (i.e. land, buildings, etc.) – refers to Gap #1 above.
- Planning or strategic development gaps including:
 - Housing Demand Analysis
 - Community Strategy
 - Economic Development Website
 - Economic Strategy
 - Quick Facts Brochure
 - A Templated Response to be used for replying to investment inquiries
 - Phase 2 of the Industrial Minerals Feasibility Study
 - Supply and Demand Study for Industrial Land
 - A Marketing Strategy required to showcase the area's competitive advantages.
- BRM Council and Administration may not completely appreciate the benefits and urgency of collaborating both locally and regionally.

Target Market Study - SWOT Analysis

Key Strengths

Overall Community Strengths:

- Fully serviced community
- Strategically located on the Trans-Canada highway within a short driving distance to Timmins, Cochrane and Kirkland Lake
- Located along the Ontario/Quebec border
- By air, Black River-Matheson (BRM) is approximately equal distance from North Bay, Sault Saint Marie, and Sudbury
- Services an immediate population of about 2,620 people
- Approximately 40% of BRM residents are bilingual (English and French)
- Two doctors (General Practitioners) who operate in the community are still accepting patients
- Good full service hospital (Bingham Memorial Hospital) including an attached nursing home component
- Numerous recreational and community amenities including:
 - Curling rink
 - Black River Golf and Country Club
 - Arena and recreational centre (with a new gym)
 - Several outdoor community rinks
 - Fishing (both summer and ice fishing)
 - Two boat launches (Black River and Gauthier Lake)
 - Excellent playground facilities
 - Two public libraries
 - Museum including cultural events and activities
 - Snowmobiling
 - Ball diamonds (it is rumoured that BRM has one of the best ball parks in the north)
- The Township is well protected by:
 - Ontario Provincial Police (OPP), with a station located in Matheson
 - Municipal fire protection services with four stations located throughout various BRM townsites
 - Black River - Matheson Ambulance Emergency
- Black River-Matheson has an extremely affordable real estate (resale) market with the average dwelling price approximately \$90,000 (can also be viewed as a weakness)
- Three elementary schools including:
 - Ecole Ste. Therese located in Ramore
 - Joseph H. Kennedy Public School located in Matheson
- Some post-secondary education facilities and programs available in both Timmins and South Porcupine
- Good family living (high quality of life)

Economic Development Infrastructure:

- Direct access to Ontario Northland rail network connecting to the North, South and West
- Excellent truck transportation
- Township is investing in economic development initiatives and investment readiness (including a new website)
- Available bilingual workforce
- Labour force has strength in skilled trades
- Highest concentration of post-secondary study is in Architecture, engineering and related technologies at just under 30% (this is above the provincial average)
- Located within a region that has several active and prospective mining operations (Brigus Gold and St. Andrew's Goldfields)
- Active mining operations right within municipal boundaries (and some located right within townsites)
- Vacant mineral processing facility (mill) located right on the Ontario Northland main line
- Through traffic provides highway commercial, retail and tourism opportunities
- The Township has high speed internet service and cell phone coverage
- Availability of a skilled workforce, including a significant number of workers qualified to work in a variety of trades
- Lower than average levels of income (indicates an affordable cost of local labour)
- From a regional perspective, hydro rates appear to be competitive
- Natural gas is available

Target Industrial Sector Specific:

- Close proximity (both locally and regionally) to mining and forestry resources
- BRM is located within a healthy sustainable agricultural zone
- Has one of the only vacant mineral processing facilities in the region
- Geographically located within a region that has current activity in and potential for additional mineral exploration and extraction
- Large tracts of land zoned RU which accommodates agriculture as a primary use (unsure of the class of agricultural land or if the land is actively being farmed)
- An abattoir is currently operating in Black River-Matheson
- Some local private sector expertise and businesses to support mining industry
- Influx of workers to support mining operations will further increase demand for local housing
- BRM possesses strengths in the resident labour force in the following sectors:
 - Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting
 - Mining and oil and gas extraction
 - Health care and social assistance

Key Weaknesses

Overall Community Weaknesses:

- Youth outmigration from Black River-Matheson
- No local high schools
- Population aged 45 and older is becoming the largest age segment

- Perceived image of a secluded northern industrial mill town – also perception of high levels of poverty in some of the townsites
- Historically low taxes and housing prices have led to some townsites having issues with excessively poor housing quality
- Taxes have been steadily increasing
- Limited to no available good quality housing stock
- Limited community signage (other than the road signs identifying each townsite, did not see any overarching branding for BRM)
- Limited types of housing to accommodate the various housing needs (i.e. transient workers, seniors, elderly, etc.)
- No new housing construction
- Downtown/main street sectors of townsites appear to be in severe decline
- Limited retail sectors (stores, restaurants and accommodations looked tired or run down)
- Some townsites are very run down
- Limited to no property standards enforcement
- Overall, Black River-Matheson does not appear to be a very cohesive community (i.e. its five distinct townsites operate and function independently)
- Negative image portrayed through current Wikipedia entry
- Limited municipal staffing resources

Economic Development Infrastructure:

- Migration of skilled workers and young families out of Black River-Matheson
- Lower than average participation rate (57%) and lower than average employment rate (51.8%) – Provincial average is about 10% higher for both rates
- Some people may feel a “culture of entitlement” – as illustrated by low participation rates
- Large mining projects are currently taking large numbers of workers out of the local labour force
- Does not appear to be much investment/involvement in regional initiatives (i.e. Phase 1 - Industrial Minerals Feasibility Study)
- Limited or no existing shovel ready industrial land or vacant facilities (see IRA proposal)
- BRM’s image of a depressed community detracts from its various industrial and economic development opportunities
- Cost of electricity is very expensive compared to other Provinces and competing regions
- Does not appear to be a high degree of local entrepreneurial spirit
- There appears to be a lack of professionals living and/or working in BRM

Target Industrial Sector Specific:

- Local mining operations have already commenced and are sourcing their supplies and supports from outside of BRM – will be hard to break into the existing supply chain provided in Timmins, Kirkland Lake and Cochrane

- Opportunities for partnerships and investments pertaining to developing mining support industries may be perceived as limited due to the volatility and limited life span of mining operations, lack of local entrepreneurial capacity, and limited business skills
- Work force appears to be available, but currently there are large numbers of workers coming into BRM to fill existing employment opportunities
- Existing residential housing resale market is so low (de-valued) that it would appear that there is no business case for new housing construction – does not appear to be economically feasible
- Limited number of local land developers or housing contractors
- No proven demand for local agricultural products or a rationale for an increase in current agricultural production
- Limited to no agricultural processing infrastructure
- The local workforce attributed to the agricultural sector is declining – may find it difficult to attract investors and workers to this sector

Key Opportunities

Economic Development Infrastructure:

- The Township to create and develop some shovel ready industrial land
- The Township to explore partnership opportunities with private sector investors to create some office/professional space as well as industrial space in and around Matheson
- Explore and create regional economic development partnerships to market, promote, develop and retain BRM's industrial sectors
- Work more closely with First Nations communities: there is always room for more cooperation and collaboration aimed at securing economic development opportunities
- Work more closely with the existing business community to determine if there are areas where the Township could be more supportive
- The Township to collaborate with regional partners in an effort to explore further opportunities in the mining and mineral extraction sectors (i.e. Phase 2 of the Industrial Minerals Feasibility Study, or regional agricultural opportunities and feasibility study)
- Work with Northern College, College Boreal and local industries to implement a local BRM apprentice or placement program in an effort to develop and retain local skilled labour
- Township to implement and enforce property standards
- Strengthen BRM's capacity to provide health care, elderly care, social services and educational services
- Township to elevate their economic development activities by:
 - Developing an economic development website
 - Revising BRM's Wikipedia entry
 - Completing a site selector response template
 - Develop an Economic Strategy
 - Develop a marketing and communications plan

Target Industrial Sectors:

- Mining and mineral exploration
 - Explore all opportunities to activate the existing mineral processing facility
 - Participate in Phase 2 of the Industrial Minerals Feasibility Study
 - Work with local mining operations (including those in the operation and exploration stages) to undertake a local mining opportunities studies to determine what support industries would be feasible in BRM
 - Invest in developing some shovel ready industrial land in order to be ready to capitalize on any local investment or expansion opportunities
- Residential Housing Developments
 - Undertake a housing needs study to determine actual and future demand and housing types required in BRM
 - Lobby/work with senior levels of government to secure the financial assistance required to offset the development and servicing costs of creating shovel residential land – thus making new housing construction more affordable
 - Work with regional partners to undertake a housing/residential development supply chain study to determine needs, gaps and opportunities
 - Partner with College Boreal and Northern College to create a satellite campus in BRM that supports the home building and construction trades, including facilities for hands-on demonstration projects
- Agriculture
 - Work with regional partners to undertake an Agriculture Feasibility and Opportunities Study (similar to the scope of the Industrial Minerals Feasibility Study)
 - Work with local agricultural producers to explore opportunities to promote and communicate the benefits of buying local agricultural products
 - Ensure prime agricultural land is protected through adequate Official Plan policies and zoning bylaw restrictions

Threats or Constraints

- BRM may not be able to move quickly enough to capitalize on the opportunities presented within their three target markets
- If BRM's population keeps declining, schools and local health services may be closed or reduced – if there are no schools or reduced health care services, there will be further decline in the local population
- BRM's current image (as demonstrated on Wikipedia and through the poor condition of some of the townsites) will eliminate an investor's desire to pursue opportunities in BRM
- The weakening of current market conditions or the decline in the value of precious metals could force the shutdown of existing mining operations and exploration
- An aging population, coupled with a reduction in the resident workforce, could constrain BRM's ability to retain industries or attract new investment
- A lack of desire from BRM to think and work regionally will limit BRM's ability to sustain or grow current industrial sectors
- A lack of money and desire to implement ideas and infrastructure would constrain BRM's potential

- Lack of cooperation (funding) from all levels of government will constrain economic opportunities
- Not many young people are returning to BRM after post-secondary education – will require young people to add dynamism and to provide energy for positive community change and growth
- A lack of interest, motivation or understanding on the part of BRM’s Mayor, Council and Township Administration will result in limited or no economic growth
- World markets may ultimately dictate the success of two of BRM’s target sector industries (value of precious metals and agricultural products)
- Parents giving up on BRM and urging their children to move out of the community for education and other employment opportunities
- Escalating cost of hydro-electric power
- Escalating cost of rail transportation
- Escalating gas and energy prices
- High Canadian dollar (\$)

2005 Township of Black River-Matheson Strategic Plan

Strengths

- Low taxes
- Lakes, trails, nature
- High quality of life – fishing, hunting, air quality
- Size of community
- Affordable housing
- Location on Highway 11
- ONR passenger train service
- Proximity to mining and forestry operations
- Services available
- Safety
- Good community to raise a family
- Good cell service
- Hospital
- Doctors
- Seniors' accommodations
- Pharmacy
- Elementary schools
- Museum
- Community halls
- Outdoor recreation facilities
- Golf course
- Curling rink

Assets

- Clean and safe
- Natural attractions
- Volunteerism
- Outdoor recreation facilities
 - Five community centres/halls
 - Four skating rinks and one arena
 - Several ball fields
 - Black River-Matheson golf course
 - Curling rink
- Quality of life assets
 - Library in Matheson
 - Library in Ramore – also operates as a children youth centre
 - Canoe club in Matheson
 - Northern touring festival
 - Annual western festival
 - Black River waterfront
 - Snowmobiling

- Curling club
 - Horse club
 - Fish stocking
- Healthcare
 - Hospital/seniors' residence
 - Emergency facility
 - 20 long-term care beds
 - Advanced technology
 - Two doctors, a dentist and physiotherapist
 - A range of medical services and equipment
 - MICS
 - Proximity to Timmins, Iroquois Falls and Cochrane for complementary medical services
- Local/Tourism Attractions
- Prospects for Economic Development
- Transportation
 - Advantageously situated on Hwy 11 and Hwy 101
 - ONR passenger train station
 - Bus service
 - Black River
 - Two chartered transportation companies
 - Airstrip (not operational)
- Human Resources
 - Bilingual community
 - High educational attainment in the area of trades and college diplomas
- Education
 - Proximity of Northern College and other educational institutions
 - Primary schools in Ramore, Matheson and Val Gagne
 - Early years program operating from the library in Matheson
 - Community learning centre
 - Contact North
- Physical Assets
 - Base facilities at Ramore
 - Five water plants
 - Community arena
 - Community Centres/Halls
 - Municipal buildings
 - Existing water and sewer infrastructure
 - Thelma Mines Museum
 - Bridges
 - Vacant land
- The foregoing assets are extensive especially in light of the small size of the community.

Weaknesses

- Pessimistic attitude in the community
- Poor customer service orientation
- Weak entrepreneurial spirit
- No community branding
- Communities are confrontation and competitive
- Little incentive to buy locally
- Road network is large and expensive to maintain
- Bridges are aging
- Difficult to maintain infrastructure
- Government regulations pertaining to:
 - Water
 - Sewer
 - Employee burden (cost of benefits)
 - Safety and compliance regulations
 - Construction safety inspections
 - Home-based business
- Difficult to justify maintaining a business with employees
- Snow removal
- Unemployment (lack of employment opportunities)
- Spread out community
- Lack of communication, organization and leadership (teamwork)
- Distance from markets
- Lack of high school in area
- Diminishing forestry and mining
- Declining agriculture
- Lack of recreation/community activities
- Youth out-migration
- Lack of support for local businesses
- No public transportation throughout the community
- Small town mentality
- Lack of marketing