

Louisbourg Visitor Experience Enhancement Strategy

What We Heard

April 2021 Update



Overview

What this is about

Parks Canada is looking to consolidate services and move the administration, welcoming, ticketing, and transportation functions into the community centre of Louisbourg. This consolidation of services presents an opportunity for the community. For far too long the community has been a thoroughfare for visitors on their way to the Fortress of Louisbourg. The first big move is to reestablish Louisbourg as a destination or place to be. The concept proposes a placemaking and collaborative approach to build an expanded and improved multi-experience site in the centre of the community. The proposed enhancements are aimed to create a point of arrival, or a collision point, where visitors are collected and dispersed throughout the community and to the Fortress of Louisbourg. This Strategy takes an interim, dispersed, and flexible approach to parking and infrastructure interventions that meets existing needs, is responsive to future development opportunities, and is flexible enough to accommodate multiple working-waterfront uses. Many of the proposed visitor services and amenities have been planned to also provide community benefits and an improved quality of life to ensure that investments in tourism are also investments in the community. The proposed plan is envisioned as a platform or foundation that will support and enable additional opportunities throughout the community of Louisbourg; moving beyond the centre to the surrounding areas.

A presentation with an overview of the project - as well as further details - can be found at:

<https://developns.ca/news/louisbourg-visitor-experience-project/>

What We Did

The community of Louisbourg has been working on plans to revitalize the waterfront and downtown for quite a number of years - with the earliest plans used as the foundation for this project being created around 2011. Develop Nova Scotia was invited to participate in these conversations in 2018 and, based on the direction we received from the community, has been working with Parks Canada, Synergy Louisbourg, Louisbourg Seafoods, CBRM, and Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design to develop a concept for a new cluster of experiences in the centre of Louisbourg for locals and visitors alike. This centre would also serve as the new ticketing and visitor arrival location for guests visiting the Fortress of Louisbourg. This concept was completed in 2020.

In January 2021, [Develop Nova Scotia](#) in conjunction with [Cape Breton Partnership](#), began a community-wide engagement process focused on introducing participants to the overall concept that has been developed. In addition to hearing overall impressions of the proposed concept, questions focused on how well this concept addresses the needs identified by the community. We were interested in learning if people feel the concept will create opportunities for Louisbourg and provide the platform needed to ensure the community capitalizes on these opportunities. Another key component that was explored was how each individual and/or organization felt this development could enhance existing assets and experiences throughout the community.

As should be expected, the engagement process was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Team had to avoid large public meetings and utilize other methods to engage the community. The general public was able to attend one of a series of bookable 10-person Open House sessions as well as an evening Zoom session. This digital open house provided the opportunity for people unable to attend in person as well as an additional opportunity for those who attended in-person to ask further questions or to provide additional feedback.

Results Summary

Throughout the community engagement for the Louisbourg Visitor Experience Enhancement Strategy, a variety of comments were received on numerous topics. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive and centred on the fact Louisbourg is currently seeing a lot of momentum and this project could play a significant role in the revitalization of the community. Responses consistently spoke to the need for this project to quickly move beyond a concept to begin implementation as the community has been working on this concept for many years.

The following themes emerged throughout the course of conversations within the community:

- **The Necessary First Step** - members of the community have identified a number of opportunities in Louisbourg and the surrounding area, and this project is seen as the important first step needed for any of these projects to succeed over the long-term. The majority of people commented that the concept's "big moves" of turning Louisbourg into a destination rather than a place to pass through, by developing a single location to collect locals and visitors before dispersing them throughout the community and to the fortress, is the necessary starting point for a successful project.
- **Increasing Visitors Length of Stay is Important** - whether in the community of Louisbourg itself, or in the wider CBRM region, the importance of increasing the length of stay for visitors to the area is a key priority. While the view that "two hours can become two days" is true, we were told to ensure any efforts were matched by marketing, from organizations such as Destination Cape Breton, to promote extending stays in advance of arrival since most visitors will have already made their travel plans prior to arriving in the community. We heard increasing length of stay should also be a goal for local visitation from Sydney/CBRM as many people believe Louisbourg could become the region's "Baddeck" and a place for locals to go for an evening/day/weekend by the water.
- **Ensure this Development Connects, Promotes, and Disperse People to Other, Existing Assets/Experiences** - there are a number of additional businesses, experiences, and potential opportunity sites around Louisbourg, and it is important to plan for how to disperse people to these additional locations after they have been "collected" in this single location. Many in the business community commented on working with them to identify and create ways to spread the

benefit seen from this collection point to businesses that won't be physically on the site. We were told being able to shuttle people to additional places besides the fortress could both spread the benefit wider and offer opportunities to increase length of stay in Louisbourg. The S&L Railway Museum was mentioned by a number of people as an experience that could be more closely tied to this project - for example, by identifying and developing the trail between the two locations. Community members also mentioned the need for further discussion on the railway tunnel - there are many ideas ranging from utilizing it as a feature (although, it was admitted the tunnel is structurally unsound and it may not be an ideal location for people to visit/use) to removing it and opening up the flow of shuttle traffic along the waterfront (Commercial Street). This could also open up additional lands that could be used for future parking requirements.

- **Ongoing Programming and Activation of Public Space** - We were very encouraged to hear from a number of people in the community that believe it is crucial to ensure that the site is properly activated and programmed in order to be successful. There was agreement this is an area where community groups could and should play the role of determining how the space should be used and how to create experiences throughout the year. Having a playground on-site was mentioned as was the potential for a stage. A lot of additional ideas for site interpretation were provided, such as the importance of this harbour in World War II, the 100th anniversary of the building of the lighthouse (2023), and that some survivors from the Titanic landed here. It was also mentioned that the Fisherman's Memorial Plaque could be relocated to the boardwalk/waterfront park. Interpretation ideas such as these could be further explored by the community in order to ensure the final design reflects these desired uses. The importance of evening events was also noted - many do exist but communicating this has been problematic traditionally.
- **Cruise + Marine Visitation** - The community expressed a desire to see increased cruise and marine visitation use on the site. The wharf within the project area has been identified by the municipality and community as being for recreational boaters and/or cruise visitation and we heard it would be wise to see the plan account for this potential and identify marine services on site - either in the initial phase or for future iterations. We were told having marine visitors use the wharf - or be tendered to the waterfront - rather than going directly to the fortress would be preferable and provide additional benefits for the community.
- **Ongoing Engagement + Role for Community** - There was a lot of interest in how the community will continue to be engaged throughout the process and the role for the community in communicating the importance of this project to potential funders. The question was asked of how the community can help ensure this project gets funded and moves forward. The discussion was around the fact an Advisory Group will be formed to help guide the design process. In addition to that, engagement on plans for community activation of the site will also be important. In addition, it was suggested we should try to reach out more directly to local fisherman for their input

- **Traffic Flow and Sense of Arrival** - While the concept proposes traffic slow-down measures to be implemented as vehicles approach the core of downtown, we were told it is important to consider these measures "sooner" for the sense of arrival to start as early as the S&L Railway Museum. People feel this would be better for the entire community and would promote the sense of arrival at your destination. While most people agreed slowing down traffic is important, we were cautioned to be careful not to significantly disrupt the flow of traffic for locals. If more people are visiting and parking in the centre of the community, there is a concern traffic could become a nuisance in peak season.
- **Parking** - While it is understood and appreciated that parking is of central importance for Parks Canada, we were told it is important to ensure short-term parking remains available within Louisbourg, especially near businesses. It was suggested that having a number of "15-minute" parking spots could help ensure these are not used by tourists. Parking for non-fortress uses of the site was also identified as being important to consider. (This has also been identified by Parks Canada as a need to come up with a parking plan that identifies dedicated Parks Canada parking so that it is very clear where people can and should park while visiting the fortress as compared to parking for local, community-based activities so as to reduce potential conflicts). The accessibility of the site is also incredibly important to the community both from a parking standpoint and from the ability to be able to experience the site.
- **Community Services** - A consistent comment received was the value of providing community benefit from such services as the local shuttle and open public space as well as having flexibility in how the site can be used at various times of the day and seasonally. The use of the shuttle for hop-on/hop-off local travel was seen as a significant benefit for the community as was the potential for these free shuttles to open up additional opportunities for experiences in the community, such as providing easy access to the Lighthouse trail. The waterfront park was identified numerous times as a location where the community could gather, reflect the area's heritage, and provide programming throughout the year. Having kiosks in this space was also mentioned as something to pursue as it would provide additional opportunities for local businesses and entrepreneurs. We were told the flexibility of being able to use parking spaces for additional uses during non-peak seasons would be very important. Some attendees were quite impressed by the proposed programming geared toward the local community that would be offered by Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design.
- **Long-Term Sustainability** - Some concerns were raised that once the site has been developed, will key partners leave the community to keep things working or will they continue to be invested in the success of the site. It was noted that Develop Nova Scotia intends to enter into a long-term agreement with the landowner to manage and operate the centre and will be responsible for ensuring a good mix of tenants on site. Parks Canada, Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design,

Cape Breton Partnership, and other key stakeholders are also committed to the long-term sustainability of this development. In addition, the community specifically called out the need for electrical vehicle charging stations and bicycle racks to be included as part of the design as we consider environmental sustainability within the community. A number of improvements have already been made to the former RV park, and it was mentioned the design should attempt to make use of as many of these elements as possible (e.g., sod and seating).

For more information, to provide additional comments or ask questions, and for ongoing updates, please contact:

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Project Website: <https://developns.ca/news/louisbourg-visitor-experience-project/>