

2026

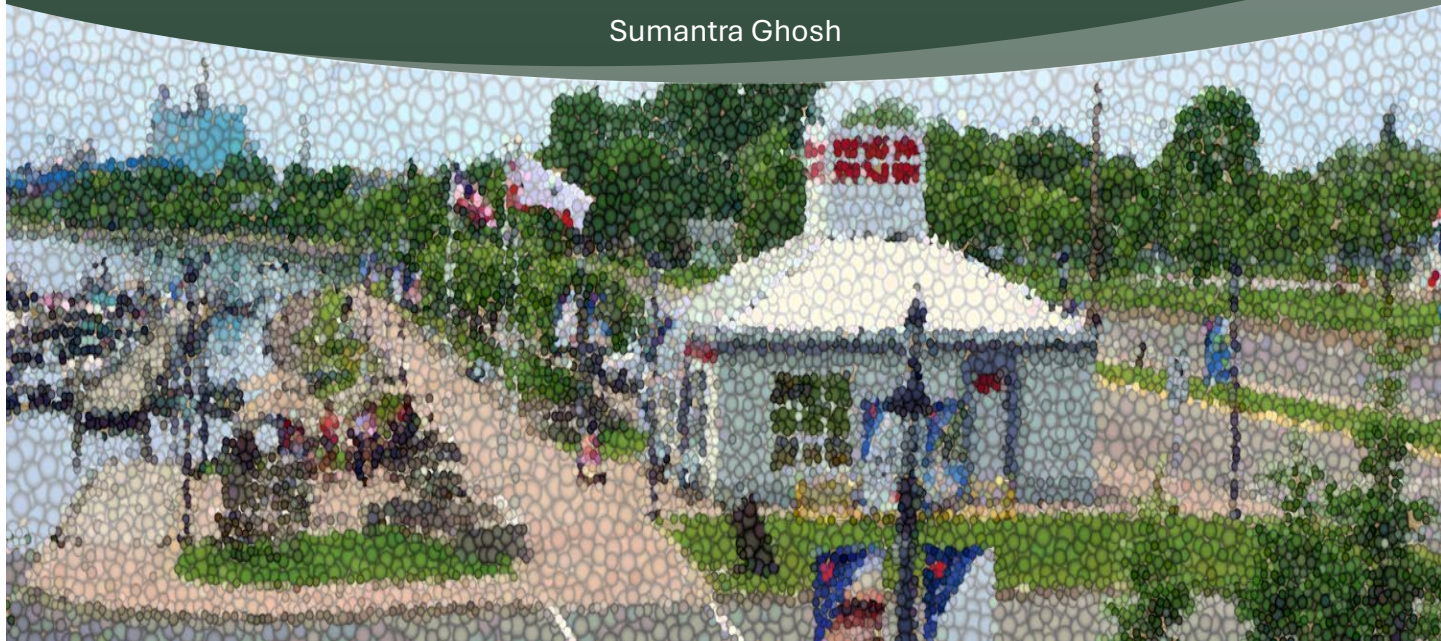


FORT FRANCES

Fort Frances Economic Development Report Q1 2026

February 2026

Sumantra Ghosh



Top Strategic Priorities

The following strategic priorities came from discussions relating to the Town's strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats. They have been organized by theme under Strategic Priority Areas that form part of the Strategic Plan. In some cases, they may be among the options available to Administration to act on the Strategic Priorities of the Town.

Quality of Life

1. Opportunities to enhance tourism through shared cultural and recreational activities (including with Indigenous communities). This may include:
 - Developing event spaces. Utilize the Market Square.
 - Expanding use of bass fishing competition tent to other events.
 - Planning town festivals and events. Create/update policies to support events in the public space.
2. Develop waterfront and attractions to draw interest from regional and cross border tourists.
3. Explore enhanced public safety measures, potentially cooperating with non-profit organizations, e.g., the Bear Clan.

Economic Growth

1. Position the Town to attract investment. This may include defining key economic advantages of the Town and region – e.g., natural resources, very low electric rates, rail connections, and tourism traffic.
2. Consider incentive programs to attract residential, commercial, and industrial development. This may include implementation of the former mill site conceptual plan, CIP connection, incentives to developers.
3. Attract retail and restaurant entrepreneurs. Contribute to downtown revitalization.

Partnerships

1. Work toward reconciliation through active collaboration with Indigenous groups and neighboring communities.
2. Support development of housing projects, seniors housing and entry level housing, modular homes.
3. Lobby the province to explore drug treatment program options.
4. Explore potential with provincial government, boards of education, Seven Generations College, Confederation College to create /expand trades programs to be delivered in Fort Frances.
5. Initiate a district foundation to raise funds and coordinate distribution of grant funding for community priorities and projects.

Municipal services & Infrastructure

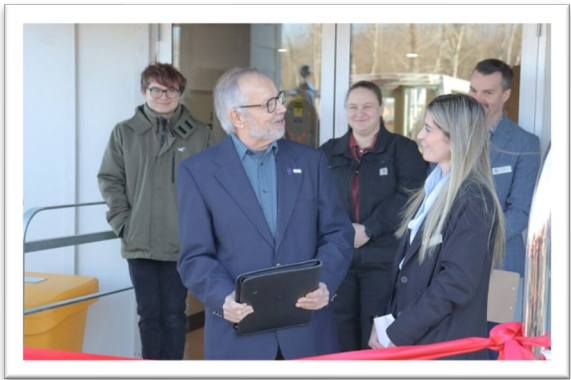
1. Service delivery level of service review.
2. Expand use of Asset Management systems, long-term sustainability plans, and other plans and methodologies.
3. Develop a public communication strategy to enhance open and transparent communication with residents.
4. The Town actively aims to be an organization that is supportive of its staff.
5. Use creative means to attract or acquire labour resources.
6. Work with ownership and stakeholders to support the renewal of the International Bridge.

2025 Key Economic Development Actions and Projects

2025 has been a year of many accomplishments and developments for the Town. The Town has strived to work in the best interest of the public in prioritizing the top strategic priorities. It is important to note that some projects cover one or more domains of the strategic priority. The following sections provide an overview of some of the major economic developments in the community over the past year.

Studio 6 Extended Stay Grand Opening

The November grand opening of the Studio 6 Extended Stay Fort Frances added an additional accommodation option to the Town. Owned by Mitaanjigamiing First Nation and developed by Rideout Bay Developments, the 70-room hotel is designed to support longer stays. The project reflects a strong partnership between Indigenous ownership and regional developers while adding modern lodging, meeting space, and tourism capacity to the local economy.



HOPE Transitional House Opening

The launch of the HOPE Transitional House in February 2025 was a vital step forward in addressing homelessness and safety in Fort Frances. With the help of the District of Rainy River Services Board, the new program provides a safe and supportive environment for individuals transitioning to stable housing.

The HOPE Transitional House offers six short-term accommodations with support to help residents gain the skills, resources, and stability needed to achieve independence. The program serves individuals who are 18 years of age or older, substance-free, and committed to engaging in structured programs.

New MRI services at Riverside Health Care Facility

With the help of provincial funding, Riverside Healthcare Facility announced future MRI scanning services in Fort Frances in July 2025. Prior to this development, residents had to travel over 350 kms to other towns/cities to get an MRI scan. The full funding package also includes the renovation of over 1400 sq ft of space to house the MRI machines. According to Joanne Ogden, an executive at the Riverside Health Care Facility, the project is expected to be fully operational by fall of 2026.

Legion Loop Skating Trail

The Town is proud to announce the newly built outdoor skating trail at Legion Park. The project aims to improve the quality of life among Fort Frances residents as well as attract tourists. It is an important addition to the existing recreational activities available at Fort Frances. The Town encourages its residents to try out the new trail this winter. The Legion Loop is located at Legion Park at the end of Lillie Avenue.



Ongoing Developments and Projects

Sale of Sunny Cove Summer Camp

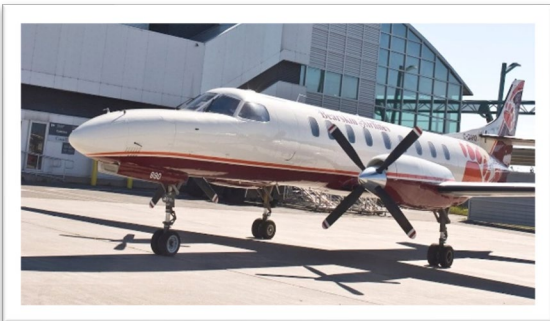


In reference to the resolution at the Dec 8th, 2025 Council meeting, it has been decided by Council that the Town would proceed with the sale of Sunny Cove Camps to Kiwanis Club.

The Town of Fort Frances and the Kiwanis Club are proposing the creation of an ad-hoc committee to oversee the marketing

and sale of the Sunny Cove property. The committee’s primary objective would be to sell the property to a third party willing to maintain the existing use covenant. Only if this proves unfeasible would the parties consider, by mutual agreement, releasing the covenant to facilitate a sale. The proposed process includes establishing a formal partnership or memorandum of understanding and recovering municipal costs associated with the sale.

Air Service Resumption



In response to Bearskin Airline’s 2024 decision to discontinue air service in Fort Frances, Kenora and Dryden, a regional effort is underway to source an alternate carrier. The Town of Fort Frances received the final presentation for the air service feasibility study in January with the conclusion that Fort Frances is in fact feasible for air service again.

Given the recommendations from the feasibility study done by InterVistas (consultants), the Town has initiated contact with potential air carriers and major business operations in the area.

Additional Residential Units and Erin Crescent Information Package

While the building and development rates have been slow in Fort Frances, the Town is working towards compiling new and concise by-law guides with vital information for homeowners and future homebuyers looking to add residential units.

Additionally, the information package for Erin Crescent will be re-compiled in the summer, as it is contingent on upcoming changes to be made to the Fort Frances Community Improvement Plan.

Currently 3 lots have been sold on the Erin Crescent development.



Microgrid

After review of outage data and information, it was determined that the reliability in the grid supply was not the driving force for local generation. The Fort France Power Corporation (FFPC) believes an upgrade of their substation is needed to support a microgrid style development. The Town has received funding to undertake a “biomass to energy” feasibility study in 2026 and is currently working with FFPC to support industrial power supply development, grid smartening, and substation upgrades. The microgrid will help generate, store and supply power during times of need such as power outages and environmental disasters as well as help connect to other power sources/projects in town without reliance on the electricity sourced from Southern Ontario.



Wanagekong-Biiwega'iganan Clean Energy Corporation (Highbury)

In co-operation with 10 area First Nations and Highbury Energy, the Wanagekong-Biiwega'iganan Clean Energy Corporation plans to build a biofuel refinery at the heart of Fort Frances. Currently, detailed design, site procurement and funding sourcing are all ongoing. However, lack of success in the capital portion of their grant funding and challenges in developable land options have slowed development. Despite these challenges, the Town is eyeing a 2027 build start. The Town planning and operations departments are starting to work on planning matters surrounding their proposed site. Once built, the facility would transform forestry waste, like bark, sawdust and other logging debris into products like low-carbon sustainable aviation fuel and renewable based diesel.

FirstLight: Solar and Battery Energy Storage Project

The Fort Frances Battery Energy Storage Project is a battery energy storage system (BESS) being developed by FirstLight. The project will have a capacity of up to 50 MWac with a discharge duration of 8 hours. According to FirstLight, Fort Frances was determined to be the most cost-efficient site across all sites in Ontario. Applications for both the solar and battery storage components have been submitted to the Ontario Independent Electricity System Operator (IESO). A decision is anticipated for April 2026.

Immigration related Labour Shortage

As per the BIA and a short survey (done by the Economic Development Officer), the Town has faced some labour shortage issues over the past few years. With the cessation and changes in several immigration programs in recent times, Fort France's labour market has been affected immensely. The RNIP program was discontinued in 2024 while the newly redesigned OINP program enforces strict thresholds and criteria. Over the past



year, the Mayor's office along with the Rainy River Member of Parliament have been in talks with the Prime Minister for a united solution which will assist the recruitment of temporary foreign workers in the community. While this is an important step towards a thriving labour market in the future, it is important to note the uncertainty, complexity and extended time horizons needed for this kind of development as approval is subject to decision making at the provincial and federal level.

Upcoming Future Developments

Commercial & Residential Development, Telecommunication Leasing

The Town has been receiving some interest in both residential and commercial properties across different areas in Town. Although these are just potentials and in very early stages of negotiations, it can act as an indicator that the Town is moving forward in the right direction of growing the community and being investment friendly. It is important to note that these developments not only help enrich the community but also add additional revenue streams which enable further future developments.

Shevlin Woodyard

The development of the Shevlin Woodyard is well underway. Currently, the project is awaiting environmental clearance which has been broken into multiple segments to expedite the process. The Town expects to receive the clearance for the northwest (multi-residential) and south (commercial) portions within the next 3-4 months, while the clearance for the northeast portion is anticipated to take 14 months.

The plan of subdivision and linear infrastructure design is also well underway with servicing, grading and lot plans anticipated to trickle in over the next 12 months. Development staging, funding planning and applications continue to be ongoing.

Border Signage Project

The Town along with the support of the Business Improvement Area (BIA) and the Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) Committee, is planning to erect new “Fort Frances” signs on the borders of the town. Currently the project is in its initial design and consultation phase. This will not only serve as a photo opportunity for residents and tourists but also help drive traffic across the international border with the United States.

Community Improvement Plan Modernization

The Town of Fort Frances is beginning to seek consultants to assist with modernizing the Community Improvement Plan. The purpose of this modernization is to identify current needs of the citizens, businesses, and industries within the community, and to develop a framework of incentives that will help promote development and projects to enhance our economic dependability. By offering assistance and guiding community growth, the Town hopes to create resiliency in employment, commerce, and well-being.

Sector Hubs Employment Program

The Sector Hubs project is a partnership between Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) and Opus Group, working with municipalities and Ontario Works to pilot an employer-led workforce model. It aims to close the gap between persistent job vacancies and unemployed or underemployed Ontarians by replacing fragmented, supply-driven training with coordinated pathways designed around employer demand.

The pilot, facilitated by the Rainy River DSSAB, will focus on sectors with critical shortages such as health care, construction, advanced manufacturing, food processing, trades, mining, and forestry. The project starts with employer hiring commitments and co-designed recruitment, training, and placement, supported by Ontario Works and guided by employer leadership tables.

In Year One, the project will serve 75 participants and target at least 85% employment within three months. Participating parties anticipate the launch of this program in July 2026. The Town is currently in talks with the involved parties, for participation in this program.

Increasing our Industrial Land Base

In relation to having more serviced industrial land available in the future, the Town is currently looking to onboard a consultant through a request for proposal (RFP). The RFP is tendering for services around infrastructure and subdivision planning to unlock more available serviced industrial land within town. The project is currently in the planning stage with servicing expected to commence in subsequent years. To accelerate the project, the Town has re-allocated it in the 2026 budget instead of the 2027 budget.

Dividing and servicing these lands would promote further development in our industrial park, and in turn, see initial revenue from the sale of these lands, increased tax revenue due to private ownership and higher assessment value, and further build resiliency in our local economy. Specifically, we are looking at completing these plans for the parcel bordered by Sixth Street West, Eight Street West, Webster Avenue and Wright Avenue.

Internal Consultations

Marcel Michaels, *Chief Administrative Officer*

Travis Rob, *Operations and Facilities Manager*

John Burrows, *Chief Building Official*