

## Focus group summary

Six focus groups were conducted in August and September in Tatlock, Lanark Village, Middleville, McDonald's Corners, White Lake, and Robertson Lake. In total, 105 people participated. The sessions followed a SWOT format and participants were asked:

- What is your vision for the Township?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Township?
- If you could tell Council to focus on three priorities, what would they be?

Below are highlights.

Note: key themes are underlined in each session

### Group 1 (Tatlock)

#### Vision

1. Effective coverage by 1<sup>st</sup> responders and a local fire dept that serves all residents
2. Sound and transparent financial management of Township resources
3. Comprehensive, equitable and effective road maintenance
4. Efficient delivery of Municipal Services
5. Connectivity for everyone
6. Reasonable taxes

#### Strengths

1. Fire Dept crucial
2. New administrative staff
3. Garbage and hazardous waste
4. Road maintenance and snow removal (although varies)
5. Library
6. Grants

#### Weaknesses

1. Road improvements
2. Firehall #4 life extension
3. Economic development and growth
4. Equitable services across region
5. Transparent financial management and municipal decision-making

#### Priorities

1. Equal distribution of services and resources across region
2. Economic development and growth (BRE)
3. Fire services (#4)
4. Road maintenance
5. Connectivity (cell, wifi)

## Group 2 (Lanark Village)

### Vision and aspirations for the future

1. Sound fin mgmt. of Township resources
2. Economic vitality: growth and revitalization of village
3. Population is growing and we have attracted young families
4. Emergency preparedness
5. Property standards & bylaws enforced
6. Efficient delivery of Municipal Services
7. Environmental sustainability

### Strengths

- Excellent road service
- Grant writing, funding activities
- Garbage, hazardous waste & reuse
- Implementing some long term plans such as fire & waste mgmt.
- Library services
- Present council gets things done

### Weaknesses

1. Economic Development
2. Financial mgmt. & planning
3. Resident communications
4. Emergency preparedness
5. Water & sewer in Town

### Priorities

1. Growth and Economic development
2. Financial mgmt. & long term planning
3. Maintain current infrastructure
4. Resident communications and outreach

## **Group 3 (Mcdonald's Corners)**

### **Vision**

1. We have protected our ecosystems and agricultural lands
2. Aging in place needs have been addressed in our community
3. Village water issue resolved and Village is thriving
4. Economic growth with thriving new businesses and jobs
5. Tourism is flourishing

### **Strengths of the Municipality**

1. Roads
2. Community centres
3. Cultural events and festivals
4. Fire safety

### **Weaknesses**

1. Support for seniors
2. Community-building across Township
3. Better information sharing with public including website
4. Youth engagement & outreach
5. Trust in Council

### **Priorities**

1. Protect environment and ecosystem
  2. Stick to the OP
  3. Lanark Village water
  4. Municipality needs to listen to public
  5. Community-building across region (not so isolated)
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## **Group 4 (Middleville)**

### **Vision**

1. Township consults with and listens to residents and the community is engaged in municipal processes
2. Sound financial management in place with a strong budgetary framework
3. Stable property taxes
4. Thriving and sustainable economy
5. Trust in leadership is restored

### **Strengths**

- ✓ Roads
- ✓ Public consultations (do more)
- ✓ New staff friendly
- ✓ Library services
- ✓ Fire services
- ✓ Waste management

### **Weaknesses**

1. Governance and Council protocol
2. Continuation of community involvement & consultation
3. Economic development
4. Lack of transparency & accountability
5. Long term financial planning

### **Priorities**

1. Fiscal planning
2. Good governance: transparency, accountability, training
3. Environmental sustainability
4. Community outreach and communications
5. Economic development

## **Group 5 (Robertson Lake)**

### **Vision**

1. Better fiscal management, reduce the debt
2. Excellent roads
3. Strong & engaged staff stickin' around
4. Excellent fire & emergency services especially in north
5. Resilient Township: prepared for emergencies, threats, risks

### **Strengths**

- ✓ Waste management
- ✓ Road maintenance
- ✓ Recreation & sporting facilities
- ✓ Attracted health centre, drug store
- ✓ Current staff moving in right direction
- ✓ Community centres

### **Weaknesses**

1. Problems with Council transparency and decision-making
2. Environmental protection
3. Better use of community halls
4. More resident engagement
5. Equitable services across the region
6. Support for seniors

### **Priorities**

1. Resiliency planning & environmental sustainability
2. Roads
3. Council transparency
4. Financial management.
5. Economic Dev
6. < Taxes!!!

## Group 6 (White Lake)

### Vision

1. Sound financial management and timely budgeting, \$\$ not wasted
2. Better emergency preparedness and risk assessment
3. Better roads in Darling White Lake area
4. Fair & equitable treatment of all wards
5. Economic development & growth

### Strengths

- ✓ Good winter road maintenance
- ✓ Support volunteer initiatives (halls, sports centres, etc.)
- ✓ Access to Arnprior library
- ✓ Waste management improved

### Weaknesses

1. Road maintenance
2. Financial management & stewardship
3. Emergency services
4. Environmental stewardship (protect lakes, rivers, forest)
5. Too much focus on Lanark Village
6. Governance training, adherence to code of conduct

### Priorities

1. Financial mgmt.
2. Asset management plan
3. Safety, emergency preparedness, and services
4. Road maintenance
5. Econ development & tourism

## **Online Survey Results (23 responses collected)**

Below is a summary of the key themes for each question.

### **Q1 - What is your vision of success for the Township?**

#### **1. Financial Management & Taxes**

- Strong desire for sound, transparent, and responsible financial management.
- Calls for stable taxes, limiting increases to inflation, and reducing the burden on residents.
- Emphasis on equitable spending across all areas and maximizing grants.
- Concern that taxes are too high compared to neighbouring municipalities, risking affordability for seniors and long-term residents.

#### **2. Equitable Services & Infrastructure**

- Demand for fair distribution of services across the township (e.g., North Highlands vs. South).
- Priority areas: roads, fire/medical emergency response, cell service, and property standards enforcement.
- Calls for basic, reliable, and affordable services that meet community needs.

#### **3. Community Well-Being & Inclusivity**

- Vision of a township that takes care of its people and fosters vibrant, inclusive communities.
- Access to local businesses, seniors' support, and municipal services is seen as essential.
- Desire for social gathering spaces and activities to strengthen community connections.

#### **4. Rural & Environmental Preservation**

- Strong commitment to preserving the rural lifestyle and avoiding over-urbanization.
- Concerns about lot severances impacting natural heritage.
- Calls for ecologically sound development and protection of farmland and natural resources.
- Requests for review of livestock bylaws to support sustainable small-scale farming.

#### **5. Economic Development & Revenue Diversification**

- Need to develop a solid commercial tax base to reduce reliance on residential taxpayers.
- Support for local entrepreneurs, tourism, heritage promotion, and business growth.

- Encouragement of new revenue streams to fund services while keeping taxes reasonable.

## **6. Transparency, Governance**

- Expectation of clear, transparent decision-making with financial details made available online.
- Concern about “seat-of-the-pants” planning; demand for a long-term strategic plan.
- Residents want regular, two-way communication with Council and progress updates.
- References to previous strategic goals (“The Highlands We Want in 2020”) and desire for follow-through.

## **Q2 - What is the Township doing well currently?**

### **1. Core Services & Infrastructure**

- Strong focus on road maintenance, snow removal, winter plowing, and waste management.
- Recognition of the reuse centre and upgraded waste site as positive.
- Mixed reviews on effectiveness: some see roads and highways maintained with success, while others find services limited or inadequate.

### **2. Community Facilities & Support**

- Appreciation for community halls, sports, arts, and recreation support.
- Recognition of Highlands North Network (HNN) and community centres as valued services.

### **3. Municipal Staffing & Capacity**

- Recent senior staff appointments are noted as improving management.
- Some see staff as competent, approachable, and trying to improve.

### **4. Communication & Transparency**

- Improvement noted in resident communication over the past 6 months.

### **5. Service Gaps & Limitations**

- Some feel that the Township is “doing the best they can with what they have,” but impact is not strongly felt.

### **6. Financial & Administrative Management**

- Recognition of efforts to catch up on taxes after a zero-percent increase.
- Value placed on basic administrative functions like timely tax billing.

### **Q3 - What can we do better? What are the 2-3 areas where the Township could improve?**

#### **1. Infrastructure & Core Services**

- Strong focus on roads and snow removal (Snye Rd, Peneshula Rd, California Rd, Warden's Rd, etc.).
- Calls for better 911 emergency response and keeping firehalls open (Tatlock, Darling).
- Concerns about waste management access and control.
- Need for affordable transportation options for those without cars.

#### **2. Financial Management & Accountability**

- Calls for stable and equitable taxation; Darling White Lake noted as under-serviced relative to tax contribution.
- Requests for fiscal restraint, control of spending, and transparent budgets.
- Suggestions for multi-year financial planning (5–10 year plans).
- Frustration with “off-the-cuff” decisions and demand for clear disclosure of reserves, budgets, and utility accounts.

#### **3. Community Well-Being & Engagement**

- Desire for better communication and consultation with residents (e.g., Hopetown shooting range permits).
- Requests for more inclusive, respectful Council communication.
- Concern that not all residents have internet, so mail notices are still needed.
- Emphasis on community centers (Robertson Lake, Middleville) needing upgrades and being essential gathering spaces.

#### **4. Rural & Environmental Preservation**

- Calls for protection of rural character, settlement areas, and ecology.
- Concerns about aggregate & gravel extraction impacts.
- Desire to support small-scale agriculture and allow livestock on properties under 5 acres, updating zoning bylaws to reflect hobby-farm realities.
- Interest in supporting artists, musicians, and celebrating heritage/ecology as part of community identity.

#### **5. Economic Development & Revenue Growth**

- Support for local business development and heritage/tourism promotion.
- Interest in attracting and retaining businesses to expand the tax base.
- Calls for “best-of-breed” service standards and growing revenue beyond cottage taxes.
- Arena costs flagged as unsustainable: suggestion to close or transfer it.

#### **6. Governance, Staffing & Property Standards**

- Repeated concerns about staff retention and the need for adequate pay to keep good staff.

- Desire for a shift from blame/punishment culture to inclusive, communicative leadership.
- Need for property standards enforcement to deal with unsightly properties and waste site misuse.
- Ongoing concerns about enforcement (roads, disrepair, speeding on Elphin Maberly Rd).

#### **Q4 - What new opportunities are there for the Township? i.e. what are we currently not doing that we should consider?**

##### **1. Economic Development & Growth**

- Attract young professionals (teachers, health workers, entrepreneurs) to balance an aging population.
- Promote local businesses, agriculture, and food production by reducing barriers.
- Support tourism but broaden economic base beyond it, with real economic development planning.
- Calls for residential development (not just single houses) to grow population and tax base.
- Land inventory for housing and development needed.
- Long-term focus on actively growing the revenue base over 20–30 years.

##### **2. Financial Management & Taxation**

- Requests for a long-term financial plan to guide service delivery and asset management.
- Calls to hold the line on spending, review all major expenses, and practice fiscal restraint.
- Debate over taxes: some call for higher taxes to fund services (e.g., paved roads), others stress keeping taxes low and living within means.
- Interest in better communication about tax costs (e.g., publishing how much roads cost).
- Emphasis on appropriate use of reserves and modernization of financial approaches.

##### **3. Infrastructure, Utilities & Core Services**

- Potable water in Lanark Village flagged as a critical barrier to growth.
- Suggestions to pursue public water and sanitary services (e.g., like South Frontenac).
- Interest in natural gas expansion.
- Ongoing concerns about roads, speed control in villages, and garbage sites (Tatlock depot).
- Calls for property standards enforcement to maintain neighborhood appeal.
- Some want evacuation centres and stronger planning for emergencies.

##### **4. Community Engagement & Governance**

- Calls for listening to residents and respecting constituent voices.
- Suggestions to consult volunteers, committees, and local talent for problem-solving.
- Frustration with Council not listening and being dismissive of repeated public concerns.
- Desire for transparent, proactive communication (not aggressive or off-putting).

## **5. Environment, Climate & Sustainability**

- Calls to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and report transparently.
- Support for climate change preparation (heat events, wildfire risks).
- Concerns about lake protection (invasive species, boating impacts).
- General expectation that growth should be sustainable and environmentally sound.

## **6. Staffing, Capacity & Organizational Modernization**

- Calls for building a solid, reliable staff group.
- Recognition that capacity and retention are essential for long-term planning.
- Desire for modernization of Township operations, spending approaches, and equipment.
- Emphasis on steady leadership over short-term reactive measures.

## **Q5 - If you could tell Council to focus on three priorities in the next four years, what would they be?**

### **1. Economic Development & Growth**

- Attract and retain young families, professionals, farmers, and small businesses.
- Calls for a comprehensive Economic Development Plan to diversify the tax base, support entrepreneurs, and brand Lanark Highlands as an ecological gem.
- Balance rural charm with support for tourism, agriculture, and local artists/musicians.
- Encourage new business opportunities while preserving small-town character.

### **2. Financial Management & Taxation**

- Need for a long-term financial plan with prudent fiscal management.
- Mixed views on taxes: some push for lower taxes, others want reasonable increases to fund services.
- Strong focus on transparency, asset management, and respect for ratepayer contributions.
- Calls to review large budget line items, reduce waste, and ensure funds go to resident priorities.

### **3. Infrastructure & Core Services**

- Roads (especially in Darling White Lake area, California Road) remain top priority.

- Keep firehalls open (Tatlock emphasized).
- 911 response times, cell service, and road safety are major concerns.
- Calls for upgrading community centers as hubs.
- Requests to repair or replace road equipment and ensure proper waste site management.

#### **4. Rural Character & Environmental Stewardship**

- Protect rural areas from over-development; stop 3-lot severances.
- Promote environmental care, climate action, and lake protection.
- Limit aggregate extraction proposals (Highland Line flagged).
- Preserve rural zoning identity while supporting agricultural uses.

#### **5. Governance, Transparency & Community Engagement**

- Frustration with “urban-style” regulations — calls to scrap or simplify property standards by-law.
- Calls for better community consultation: engage all residents, not just vocal groups; hold meetings at accessible times; visit communities directly.
- Desire for clear communication, transparency, and respectful listening from Council.
- Emphasis on accountability in financial and service decisions.

#### **6. Staffing, Capacity & Organizational Stability**

- Repeated concerns about staff retention and continuity.
- Importance of retaining institutional knowledge while modernizing operations.
- Expectation that staff provide enforcement (e.g., property standards) and professional, transparent service.
- Desire for ethical leadership, honest communication, and accountability.

### **Q6 - What other suggestions, advice, concerns do you have for the Township as we develop our plan for the next five years?**

#### **1. Environmental Stewardship & Rural Identity**

- Protect wetlands, lakes, and rivers from industrial development.
- Keep the Township’s rural character and farming/gardening knowledge alive.
- Preserve history and community connections to the land for future generations.
- Avoid urban-style controls, focusing instead on rural identity “by choice.”

#### **2. Fire & Emergency Services**

- Strong concerns with the Fire Master Plan, particularly the closure of White Lake and Tatlock fire halls.
- Perception of inequity in fire response times (45 minutes north vs. 8–14 minutes south).
- Insurance premiums are increasing significantly due to longer response times.
- Requests to re-examine fire services for fairness, affordability, and equitable coverage across all areas.
- Broader issues flagged with 911 response times and medical emergencies.

### **3. Financial Management & Taxes**

- Calls to create and follow a lifecycle asset management plan.
- Pressure to keep taxes lower than neighbouring municipalities while maintaining fairness.
- Complaints that taxes nearly doubled in 8 years without better services.
- Push for back-to-basics spending, avoiding costly projects (arena, big new buildings).
- Demand for long-term financial planning (25–50 year outlooks, not just 5-year steps).

### **4. Governance, Transparency & Community Engagement**

- Strong calls for better communication, transparency, and respect for residents' concerns.
- Council urged to listen to constituents instead of ignoring petitions and public feedback.
- Requests for less defensive leadership, more humility, and recognition of reasoned critique.
- Suggestions for training Council in problem-solving and consensus-building.
- Frustration over “urban regulations” (property standards) being adopted without local fit.

### **5. Equity & Fairness Across the Township**

- Concerns that northern areas (e.g., White Lake, Darling) are treated as the “Golden Goose for taxation” but receive fewer services.
- Residents want balanced service delivery across all regions, not just the village.
- Calls for recognition that LH has a small tax base and limited growth capacity, meaning no room for large-scale spending projects.

### **6. Roads, Safety & Property Standards**

- Repeated concerns about road safety and speeding (Elphin Maberly Road).
- Desire for basic but effective road and fleet maintenance plans.
- Mixed feedback on property standards enforcement – some want stronger enforcement to protect property values, others see it as unnecessary urban overreach.
- General call for safety-focused, simple, and effective local governance.

## **Lanark Highlands – Community Priorities Synthesis (2025 Strategic Plan Input)**

1. Financial Management, Taxes & Accountability
2. Infrastructure, Roads & Core Services
3. Equity of Services Across the Township
4. Rural Character, Environment & Land Use
5. Economic Development & Growth
6. Governance, Transparency & Community Engagement
7. Staffing, Organizational Capacity & Service Culture

### **Cross-Cutting Messages**

- Residents want a “do the basics well” approach – roads, emergency services, waste management, snow removal.
- Keep taxes fair, services reliable, and decisions transparent.
- Rural character and fairness across regions are defining values.
- Growth is welcome, but it must be managed, sustainable, and rooted in local priorities.