



# Community Improvement Plan

## Bala & Port Carling



December, 2021  
Chapter 6 revised March, 2025

# 4 Overall Framework

This chapter provides a description of the overall framework of recommendations for Bala and Port Carling with the maps on the following page that locate the key components of each plan as described below.

## Framework for Bala

- Three anchor parks provide recreation destinations: Windsor, Jaspen and Muskoka Lakes Sports Park.
- A series of “Muskoka Moments” provide resting stops, some of which are in parks, each with signage, seating and enhanced landscape with native trees and shrubs.
- A signed and defined sidewalk/path provides a clear and safe route through Bala.
- Docking provides space for boaters to tie up, reducing the demand for parking. New docking and boardwalk suggested to connect businesses on Bala Falls Road.
- Railway bridges are used for gateway signage.
- Highways 169 and 38 are enhanced with defined pedestrian route, landscape and signage.
- Two locations are suggested as possibilities for long-term intensification: the Bala Legion and Bala Bay Inn.
- Several locations are suggested for possible pop-up retail to activate locations along Highway 169.
- Windsor Park provides an option to mark the southern gateway to Bala.

### Assets to Leverage

- Bala Falls
- Two areas where commercial/retail uses are concentrated
- Parks that anchor the Urban Centre and act as gateways to Bala
- Existing on-street and off-street parking
- Location of community facilities in the Urban Centre
- Availability of on street and off street parking

### Challenges to consider

- Clarity of pedestrian routes
- Lack of facilities for cycling
- Need for more docking to reduce the demand for parking and enable better access by boaters
- Lack of landscape planting

## Framework for Port Carling

- Two anchor parks provide recreation destinations: Hanna Park and James Bartleman Island Park.
- A series of “Muskoka Moments” provide resting stops along a walking route, each with signage, seating and enhanced landscape.
- A signed and defined pedestrian route provides a safe route.
- Docking provides space for boaters, reducing the demand for car parking.
- A connected dock and boardwalk is suggested between Turtle Jacks Restaurant and Dukes, north of Lock Street along the river and along James Bartleman Island.
- Additional docking is suggested by Foodland on Bruce Wilson Drive and West Street.
- Highway 118 is enhanced with defined pedestrian routes, landscape and signage. Locations are suggested as possibilities for long term redevelopment that could include a mix of residential and commercial uses.
- Several locations are suggested for possible pop-up retail to activate locations along Highway 118.

### Assets to Leverage

- Concentration of commercial and retail uses on Medora Street
- Parks that anchor the Urban Centre
- Public access to the water’s edge
- Large redevelopment sites
- Streets that could be re-conceived as pedestrian focused spaces
- Location of community facilities in the Urban Centre

### Challenges to Consider

- Plans for Highway 118
- Competing demands for space along Highway 118 for parking versus safe pedestrian routes
- Lack of facilities for cycling
- Lack of landscape planting

# Ten Ideas for Bala



**1 Anchor Parks**  
Three anchor parks provide destinations for recreation and visitors (see Public Park Guidelines).

- Windsor Park:**
- Augment existing boat docking, swimming and parking
  - Year round washrooms
  - Additional recreation facilities such as games tables and exercise stations
  - Map for orientation to Bala and its businesses and other attractions; gateway signage
  - Bike station/racks

- Jaspen Park:**
- Augment existing swimming, play facilities, parking, changeroom and picnic pavilion
  - Year round washrooms
  - Additional recreation facilities such as exercise stations and beach volleyball
  - Map for orientation to Bala and its businesses and other attractions
  - Bike station/racks

- Muskoka Lakes Sports Park:**
- Augment existing play facilities, skateboard park, parking, walking track and sports fields
  - Year round washrooms
  - Additional recreation facilities such as splash pad, games tables, pickle ball court, exercise stations, skating trail
  - Map for orientation to Bala and its businesses and other attractions
  - Bike station/racks

**2 Muskoka Moments** (see Public Park Guidelines). Muskoka Moments provide resting stops along the Historic Walk and other walking and cycling routes.

- Interpretive signage and map, locate “you are here”, nearby restaurants, cafes, interesting sites
- Seating and planting/landscape features
- Viewing plaforms

**3 Access**  
Clearly designed/defined/improved walking and cycling route that integrates the Bala Historic Walk.

- Crosswalks
- Maps to locate “you are here”
- Snowmobile bridge
- Boardwalk in Bala Bay
- Bike racks

**4 Docks**  
Docking to provide numerous locations in Bala for boat tie up to reduce the demand for parking.

- River Street
- Moon River Dock (off Portage)
- Township Dock
- Windsor Park
- Bala Falls Road
- Bala Bay Inn
- Weismiller Street

**5 Gateways**

- Signage/gateway graphic on the railway bridges
- Light up the Falls at Bala Falls Bridge

**6 Streetscape improvements on Highways 169 and District Road 38** (see Proposed Street Conditions)

- Defined/improved pedestrian route
- Defined cycling route & bike parking
- Landscape
- Signage
- Benches and waste receptacles
- Pedestrian lighting

**7 Intensification** (see Large Site Guidelines)

- Possible sites for infill/redevelopment to accommodate additional housing (including affordable housing):
  - Bala Legion for seniors housing
  - Bala Bay Inn (protecting/preserving original hotel)
  - Bala-Hy Motel site

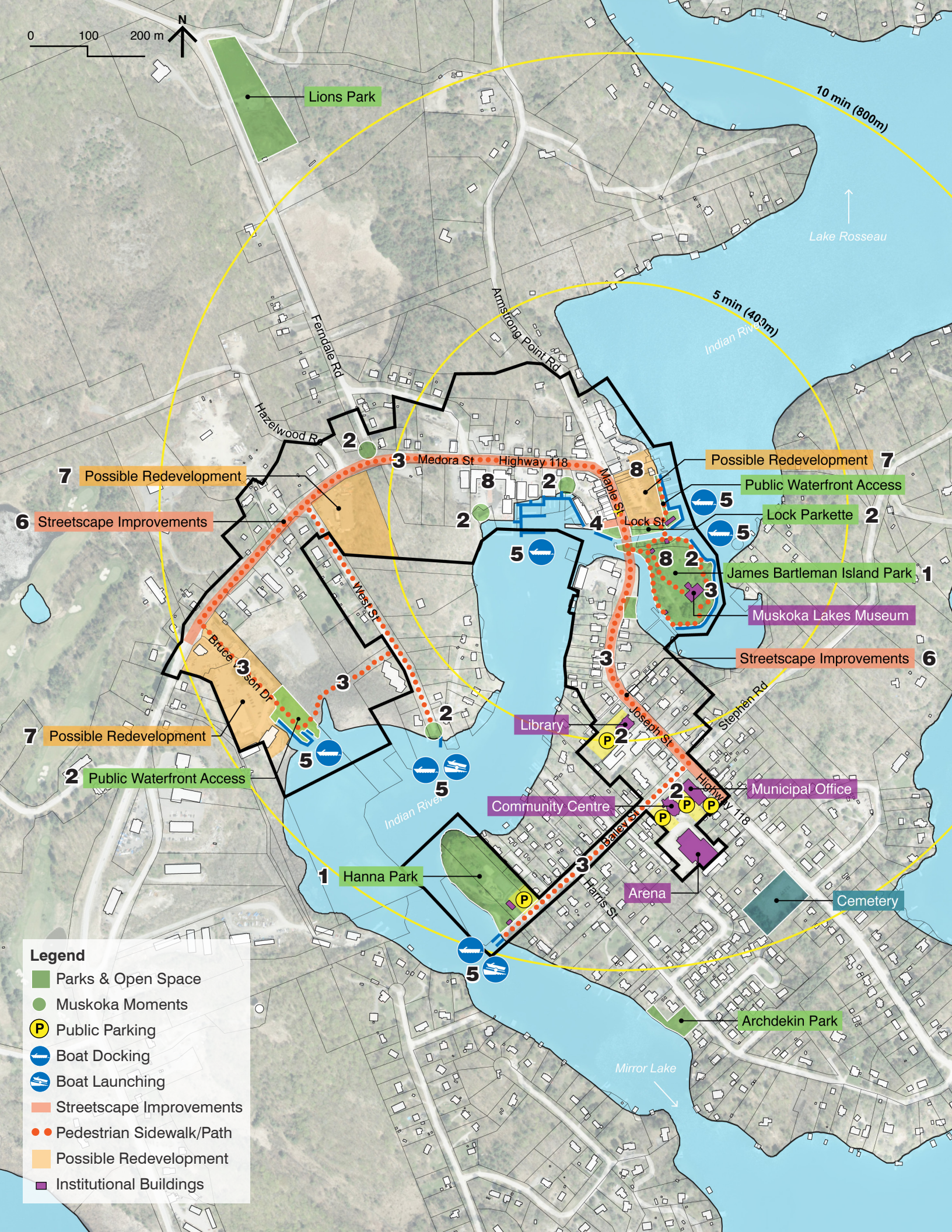
**8 Possible locations for pop-up retail**

**9 Wayfinding**

- Information signs, directional signs and kiosks

**10 Guidelines** (see Urban Design Guidelines)

- Design guidelines to provide direction for development/redevelopment on private property
- Design guidelines to provide direction for design of streets and public spaces to ensure a green framework for Bala



## Ten Ideas for Port Carling

- 1 Anchor Parks**  
Two anchor parks provide destinations for recreation and visitors (see Public Park Guidelines).

**Hanna Park:**

  - Augment existing boat docking, swimming, playground, skating trail and parking
  - Additional recreation facilities such as games tables and exercise stations
  - Year round washrooms
  - Map for orientation to Port Carling and its businesses and other attractions
  - Bike station/racks

**James Bartleman Island Park:**

  - Augment existing boat tie up and seating
  - Recreation facilities such as a playground, games tables and exercise stations
  - Pavilion
  - Year round washrooms
  - Map for orientation to Port Carling and its businesses and other attractions
- 2 Muskoka Moments**  
(see Public Park Guidelines)  
Provide a series of resting stops along heritage trail, and other walking and cycling routes.

  - Interpretive signage and map, locate “you are here”, nearby restaurants, cafes, interesting sites
  - Seating and planting/landscape features
  - Viewing platforms
- 3 Access**  
Clearly designed/defined/improved walking and cycling route.

  - Crosswalks
  - Maps to locate “you are here”
  - Bike racks
  - Boardwalk
- 4 Pedestrian space** (see Public Park Guidelines). Summer pedestrian-only space on James Bartleman Way in front of the mural and on Lock Street

  - Patios, seating
  - Planting/landscape features
- 5 Docks**  
Docking to provide numerous locations in Port Carling for boat tie up to reduce the demand for parking.

  - Hanna Park
  - James Bartleman Island Park
  - Port Carling bay
  - West Street
  - Bruce Wilson Drive
- 6 Streetscape improvements on Highway 118** (see Proposed Street Conditions)

  - Define/improve pedestrian route
  - Define cycling route
  - Landscape
  - Signage
  - Benches and waste receptacles
  - Pedestrian lighting
- 7 Intensification** (see Large Site Guidelines)

  - Possible sites for infill/redevelopment to accommodate additional housing (including affordable housing) and commercial uses:
    - Foodland
    - Port Carling core
    - West Street at Highway 118
- 8 Possible locations for pop-up retail**
- 9 Wayfinding**

  - Signage, logo, walking distance to locate public parking and key amenities
- 10 Guidelines** (see Urban Design Guidelines)

  - Design guidelines to provide direction to development/redevelopment on private property
  - Design guidelines to provide direction to design of streets and public spaces to ensure a green framework for Port Carling

## Parking Strategy

Parking is always the first item to come up in any conversation about an urban area. There is never enough parking and there's never enough in the "right" location. Finding the correct balance of parking is the challenge as choices are required in determining the best allocation of the limited space for pedestrians, landscape planting and cars. The Project for Public Spaces is a central hub of global place-making connecting people to ideas and resources. For 40 years they have helped to transform places in 3000 communities in 47 countries. Project for Public Spaces says:

*"nobody goes to a place because it has parking" ; and*

*"the current obsession with parking is one of the biggest obstacles to achieving livable cities and towns"*

There are choices to be made in Port Carling and Bala as streets area improved in the coming years.

The Community Improvement Plan aims to put pedestrians first in the Urban Centres. The results of the online survey revealed that "safe walking routes" was one of the three top ranked considerations for both Bala and Port Carling. In Port Carling, having "lots of places to park" was also in the top three considerations.

There are a few days over the course of the year when parking is in high demand, particularly on some of the summer weekends. There is no question that parking supports business, particularly when most of the businesses operate in only a few months of the year. However, it is also important to also consider the role of safe pedestrian routes, public space for families and friends to meet and docks in supporting business as well.

The area within the Community Improvement Plan (CIP) area for Port Carling has a total of about 920 parking spaces in a combination of on street and off street parking, public and private spaces. The main off street parking is provided at Hanna Park, the Township office and Library. On street parking is distributed across the CIP area.

The area within the Community Improvement Plan Area for Bala has 540 parking spaces in a combination of on street and off street parking, public and private spaces. The main off street parking is provided in the Precambrian Shield lot, Portage lot, Jaspens Park and Muskoka Lakes Sports Park. Parking in both Urban Centres is within a 5-8 minute walk of the core areas.

The parking strategy is comprised of a number of initiatives:

- 1 Continue to provide on and off street parking distributed across the Urban Centres, with accessible parking spaces clearly marked.
- 2 Encourage shared parking in private off street parking areas and improve the design and layout of spaces to maximize parking.
- 3 Enhance wayfinding and signage to identify the direction to and location of public parking, the surrounding amenities and walking distance.
- 4 Provide well placed maps in the Urban Centres to identify the location of parking, nearby amenities and attractions and walking distances.
- 5 Provide maps showing parking available in all businesses.
- 6 Provide information to explain a priority given to pedestrians, healthy active living and generally encouraging walking.
- 7 Enhance the supply of dock space to reduce the demand for car parking in the core areas.
- 8 Identify opportunities to secure public parking when redevelopment of larger parcels occurs by working in partnership with private developers and property owners.
- 9 Identify areas that could be used for temporary/event parking on the relatively few days when car parking is in high demand.
- 10 Continue to accept cash-in-lieu of parking, consolidate funds and provide parking when opportunities arise.
- 11 Enhance awareness of parking apps such as Rover that enable residents to rent out parking spaces on their driveways.

Finding the right balance will be critical to informing decisions on streetscape improvements, specifically whether to use the very limited space in the right-of-way to make space for cars, or pedestrians or to accommodate increased tree planting and landscape.



Mapping to locate parking

## Wayfinding & Signage

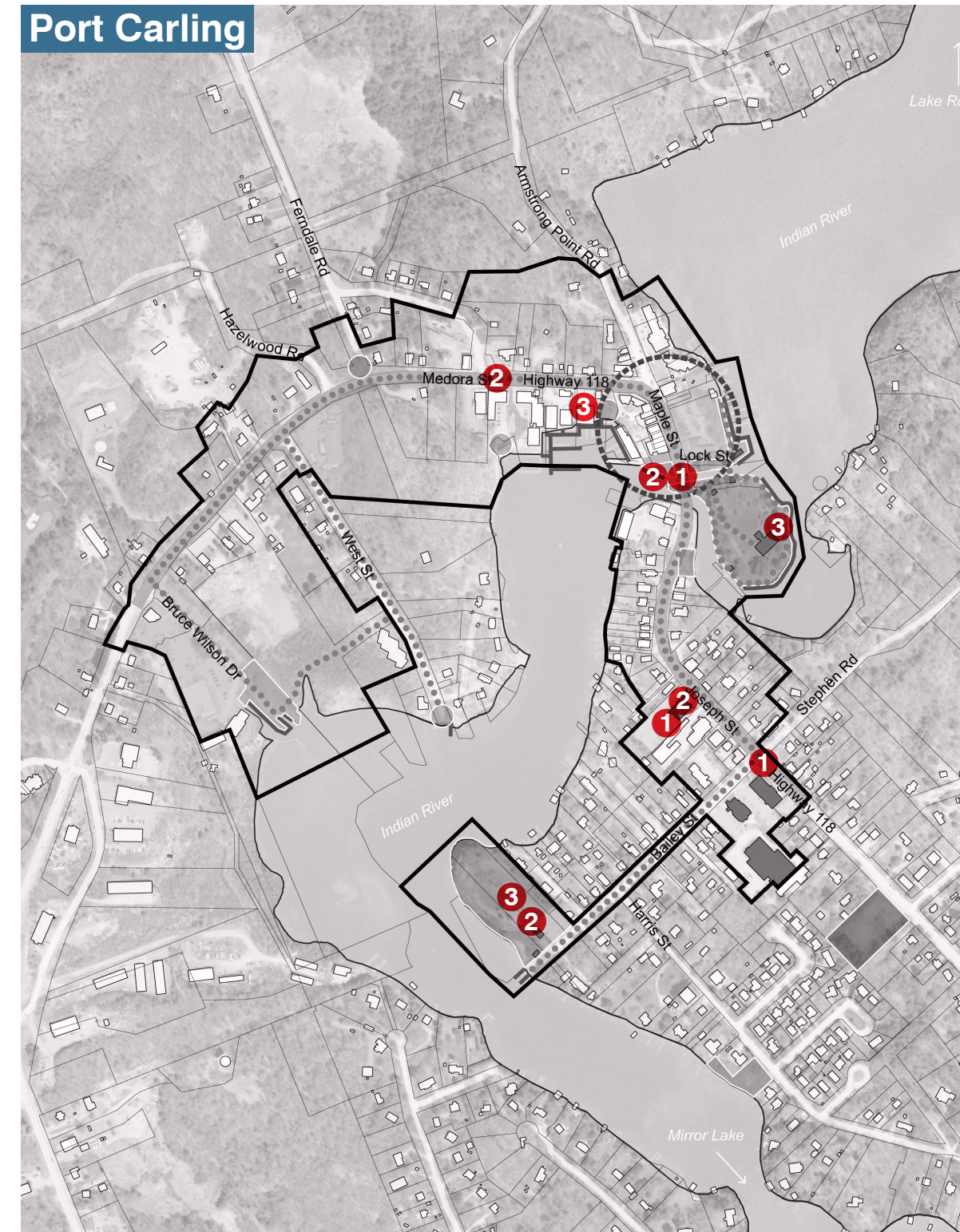
The Township has an established brand/wayfinding/signage program that clearly identifies the Urban Centres, key destinations, information/ mapping etc. Bala and Port Carling are both identified with community entry signs. Wayfinding and signage helps to orient people to key destinations (such as parks, core areas, historic sites), parking and amenities (such as washrooms) using maps, directional signs, identifier signs and interpretive panels. This is imperative to ensure enjoyable visitor experiences where people are comfortable to explore all that Bala and Port Carling have to offer walking, driving, boating or cycling. Wayfinding and signage also helps to reinforce the Muskoka brand.

The framework to guide the location and type of wayfinding and signage is based on an intent to:

- Support local business;
- Enhance awareness of key destinations; and,
- Facilitate clarity and ease of movement among key destinations.

The hierarchy of wayfinding includes

- 1** Consolidating the direction to multiple destinations in Directional Signs for motorists and pedestrians.
- 2** Providing a collection of information such as a map showing parking, key destinations and walking radius in an Information Kiosk or on a pedestal.
- 3** Providing information on historic, cultural or environmental features on Interpretive Signs at key destinations aligned with the heritage/ historic walks.
- 4** Identifying key destinations such as parks, public docks, municipal buildings in a Destination Sign.



Directional Sign



Example of Information Kiosk



Example Interpretive Sign



Information Pedestal



Information Pedestal



Destination Sign