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November 2023

Cinnamon Toast × Township of Hornepayne



Report of Findings

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Executive Summary

Surrounded by abundant lakes, rivers, and scenic natural landscapes, the Township of Hornepayne is a proverbial outdoor playground located in the geographic centre of Ontario.

With a close-knit community of approximately 1,000 residents, the “Home of the Three Bears” is a peaceful municipality, offering exceptional work opportunities and a high quality of life.

Hornepayne has long been a hidden gem in Ontario, with boundless potential for investment, growth, and development. With its current branding no longer reflecting the municipality’s desired future outlook, Hornepayne is embarking on a journey with Cinnamon Toast (CT) to reinvent itself with an all-new brand identity.

This report details our methodology, explores stakeholder input and key findings, and analyzes emerging themes from our research which form the foundation of our strategic recommendations for the forthcoming rebrand. These recommendations are grounded in community-informed data collected during stakeholder engagement activities, with the overarching goal of fostering community buy-in and a deepened sense of pride in the resulting brand.



Methodology

CT used a semi-structured engagement approach to allow for open conversations and more flexibility in how stakeholders were engaged.

To uncover defined and measurable pieces of information, quantitative data was collected via the digital survey, while qualitative data was collected via interviews and a focus group to generate a bank of subjective sentiments related to this project and its goals. You will note that in the sections below, qualitative data is parsed out via thematic analysis — that is, the process by which data is analyzed to identify core themes and topical patterns. This approach allows us to “get to” the core drivers of Hornepayne’s target audiences and their various views, experiences, perceptions, and values.

How engagement was conducted

- × **Digital survey:**
58 participants
- × **Focus group:**
3 participants
- × **One-on-one interviews:**
7 participants

Stakeholder

Stakeholder Overview

Throughout this project's various stakeholder engagement activities, the following groups were consulted:

DIGITAL SURVEY	FOCUS GROUP	INTERVIEWS
× Residents × Tourists/visitors × Business owners	× Residents	× Council members & municipal staff × Developers/investors × Residents

To ensure a diverse array of perspectives were captured, the digital survey link was circulated to hand-selected participants (chosen by Hornepayne Economic Development Officer Stacey Rendell) and later posted on the Municipal website. Nineteen community members were invited to participate in Focus Groups, and one-on-one interviews were used to gain perspectives from municipal staff/councilors and investors/developers.

Survey Results

Q1. When asked which scenario best describes their relationship with the Township of Hornepayne, participants said:

- × I live and work in the Township of Hornepayne (**50%**)
- × I live in the Township of Hornepayne (**31%**)
- × None of the above – I am a tourist/frequent visitor (**10%**)
- × I live in and own a business in the Township of Hornepayne (**7%**)
- × I work in the Township of Hornepayne (**2%**)

Q2. When asked what they most value about the Township of Hornepayne, participants most frequently indicated:

- × Recreational and/or outdoor activities (**58%**)
- × Scenery (**48%**)
- × Community events (**45%**)
- × History and heritage (**31%**)
- × Lower cost of living (**28%**)
- × Economic opportunities and incentives (**16%**)
- × Agriculture (**12%**)

Q3. When asked to choose three words that best describe Hornepayne's personality, participants most frequently indicated:

- × Friendly (**67%**)
- × Family-oriented (**48%**)
- × Peaceful (**47%**)
- × Caring (**43%**)

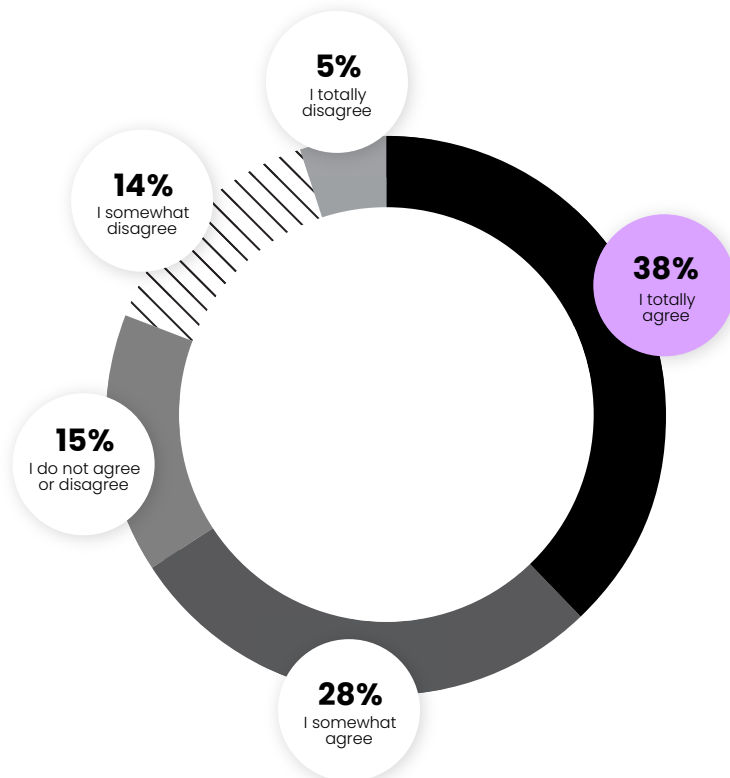
Note: Participants also frequently mentioned Unique, Hard-working, and Traditional.

Q4. When asked to choose three words that best describe Hornepayne's values, participants most frequently indicated:

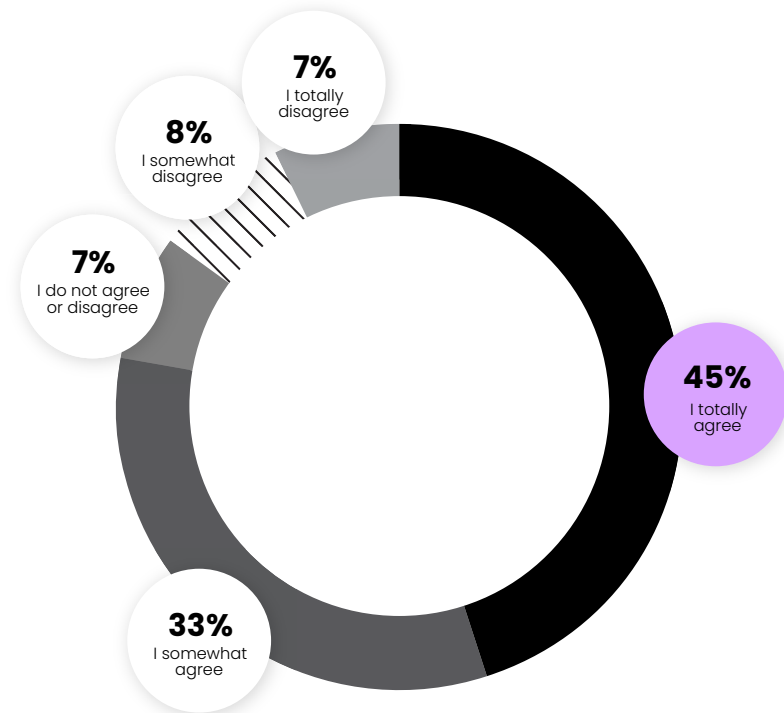
- × Community Support (**45%**)
- × Community Engagement (**40%**)
- × Safety (**33%**)
- × Resilience (**33%**)

Note: [×]Participants also frequently mentioned Generosity and Cooperation.

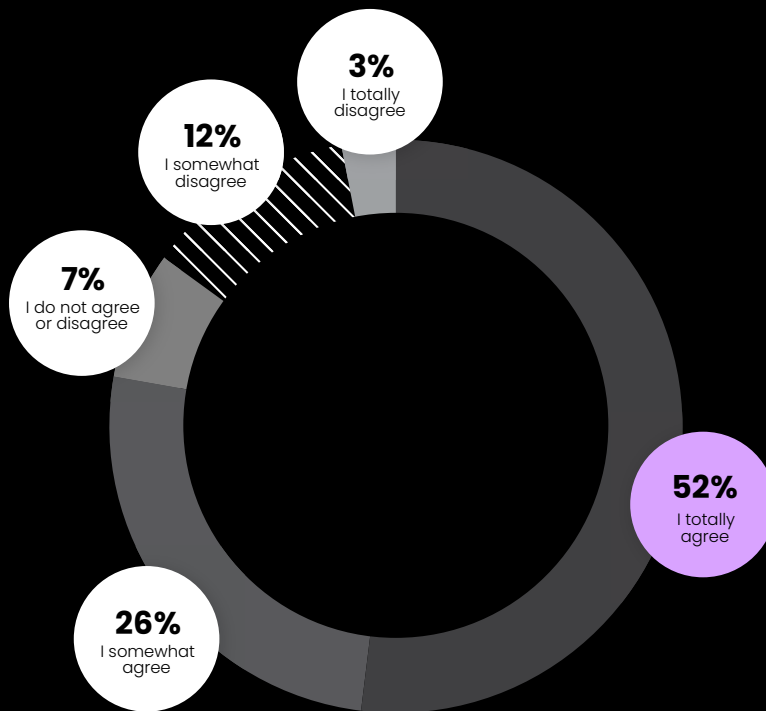
Q5. Participants were asked to select an answer that best describes their response to the following statement: "The tagline 'Home of the Three Bears' holds great significance to our community." They said:



Q6. Participants were asked to select an answer that best describes their response to the following statement: "It is meaningful that Hornepayne is the geographic centre of Ontario." They said:



Q7. Participants were asked to select an answer that best describes their response to the following statement: “Hornepayne is a small community with a big heart.” They said:



Q8. Given the fact that a rebrand represents a significant investment to achieve substantial returns, participants were asked to place – in order of priority – who the target audiences for the rebrand should be. The average of responses placed the order of priority as follows:

1. Potential Residents (Aging Families and Senior Citizens)
2. Tourists and Visitors
3. Investors and Developers
4. Current Residents
5. New Businesses
6. Potential Residents (Youth and Families)

Q9. When asked to select all visual references that they believe genuinely reflect the community, participants most frequently indicated:

- × Natural landscapes and scenery (**71%**)
- × Geographical position – Centre of Ontario (**64%**)
- × Local railway industry (**57%**)
- × Regional forestry industry (**43%**)

Identified Concerns and Priorities

Based upon the data collected via the digital survey, interviews, and workshops, the following concerns and priorities emerged from stakeholders:

With its main industries being very well established (rail, lumber, and the cogeneration plant) **the need for economic diversification is a common concern.** When one of Hornepayne's top industries suffers, it is significantly felt in the community.

The town is very connected, and there is a sense that everybody knows each other. This is a wonderful attribute and strength; however, oftentimes for newcomers this creates an **invisible barrier to integrating into the community.** People who have lived in Hornepayne for a long time feel comfortable with who they already know, and there are not many community events or activities that provide newcomers with opportunities to engage.

Geographically positioned between highways 11 and 17, Hornepayne is isolated from any larger suburban areas. It is difficult to get in and out during winter, and surrounding the town are large expanses of forest, **making it a remote and often secluded-feeling Northern Ontario town.**

Given Hornepayne's large **First Nations** population, there is perhaps **a need to consult more specifically with this community** and gather their input on how this rebrand should be approached. Members of this community were included within our interview sessions (and potentially within the Digital Survey as well – this demographic data was not captured specifically). However, during interviews, a potential gap in engagement efforts with the Hornepayne First Nations population was flagged.

Pride-of-place is perceived to be lacking among some residents. This lack of pride has potentially trickled into the attitudes of community members, causing buildings to fall into disrepair, garbage to mount, and disheveled properties to become increasingly common. This sense of neglect is a pain-point for community members who truly love their town and wish to see it as they feel it has been in the past: beautiful and flourishing.

Hornepayne has a sprawling layout which does not make it a very walkable community. This doesn't seem to be a top concern – ATVs are often seen running through town, and due to its small population, there are no commute times at all.

Themes and Patterns

Based upon the data collected via the digital survey, interviews, and workshops, as well as the concerns and priorities that emerged as a result, the following themes and patterns have been identified:

THEME #1: IMMERSED IN NATURE'S EMBRACE

Beautiful natural surroundings

– surrounded by lakes, forests, and the nearby Provincial Park, the opportunity to be out in nature is seen as the town's biggest asset

The natural beauty that sets the backdrop of Hornepayne, including its numerous lakes, lush forests, and proximity to a Provincial Park, offers residents and visitors a profound connection to nature. Community members boast the **tranquil natural setting**, from the pristine bush trails to the breathtaking starry skies. The **peacefulness** and **deep silence** experienced in nature is often stated as the reason people who live here stay, and that those who visit fall in love. The ability to walk to work amidst such natural beauty is a source of local pride, and residents embrace the opportunity for outdoor experience all year round.

Adventure and outdoor enjoyment

– refers to outdoor recreational activities that are enjoyed by all community members

Activities such as hunting, fishing, hiking, swimming and snowmobiling are frequently enjoyed by all townspeople. With the natural setting of Hornepayne, these activities aren't merely enjoyable pass-times for residents; rather, **it's at the foundation of who Hornepayne is**. Community members will meet up for trail rides, families will hunt and fish together, visitors are readily welcomed into the fun. Adventure and outdoor recreational activities act as a **unifying commonality that builds community** and connection within Hornepayne.

THEME #2: STRENGTH IN COMMUNITY

Community support

– refers to the helpful and selfless ethic shown and felt by the people of Hornepayne

No individuals' need in Hornepayne goes unnoticed or unmet. The idea that everyone is looking out for each other and is there to support one another creates a **sense of unity and togetherness**. The geographical remoteness can foster a sense of isolation, prompting community members to come together in solidarity. This shared understanding reinforces the idea that everyone is united in their challenges and that no one has to confront difficulties alone.

Safety

– refers to the deep sense of security felt within the community

Residents often express the deep sense of trust and reliability in the community, highlighting that Hornepayne is a place where everyone looks out for each other. Parents appreciate the freedom their children have to play outdoors without constant supervision, a testament to the strong sense of safety and the **shared commitment to keeping the community secure**.

Familiar and connected

– refers to the relationships and recognition among all residents due to the small population

Tight-knit, familiar, and connected are all words frequently used by residents to describe this unique aspect of life in Hornepayne due to its small population and distance from other suburban centres. Many families in town have been there for generations. Children grow up knowing who everybody is. Life-long relationships with neighbours from the aforementioned foundation of trust and security enjoyed by parents with young children. The concept that "everyone knows everyone" combined with residents' the heart for care and support of one another create **community in its truest sense**, and **form bonds more akin to family** among residents.

THEME #3: CULTIVATING PROSPERITY AND GROWTH

Stability and reliability

refers to secure economic conditions and availability of amenities that allow residents to thrive

A low cost of living combined with a high median income creates a unique socio-economic environment. Residents enjoy security in their careers. Despite the elevated economic status of many families in town, there is never an air of superiority or competition that creates friction among residents – rather, those with abundance use their resources to contribute to the wellbeing of those with less. Amenities in Hornepayne such as **the hospital and the top-notch education system are a source of pride** among residents and further contribute to the overall stability and reliability that defines Hornepayne as a thriving community.

Our children are our future

– refers to the fact that its youth are seen as the heartbeat of the community

With a **supportive and high-quality local school system**, many children see lifelong success whether or not they stay in Hornepayne. The idea that no child should be left behind or excluded is a common value, and efforts are made to ensure that opportunities to be involved are available to all children in town. Care for the next generation is seen as the unifying heartbeat of Hornepayne.

Hopefulness

– refers to the town's growing potential for new economic activity, and the sense of momentum and positivity this is creating

The town is **ready for what's next**, and feels a sense of anticipation of the growth to come. With the return of a hotel in 2024 and strategies to diversify housing, there is opportunity for new types of businesses to take root. Existing industry brings stability to the economy and provides a foothold for future investment. An occasional longing is felt for “the good old days,” bolstered by frustration at the decline of past businesses – yet **momentum is building**, and the perspective is actually that Hornepayne will surpass their past in new ways and that the best is yet to come. Underlying values of resilience and hard-work underpin the hopeful outlook towards Hornepayne's future.

Symbols and Imagery

Throughout our engagement efforts, discussions surrounding common visual associations to Hornepayne uncovered important sentiments which will be used to guide our recommendations. The following visuals were touched upon:

The Three Bears

THEME #3:

A nod to the identified themes of **hopefulness and growth** and **care for the younger generation** were associated with the three bears

A total of 66% of survey respondents either somewhat or totally agree with the tagline 'Home of the Three Bears' holding great significance to the community. Qualitative research generally supports this sentiment, yet some neutral or opposing views were shared.

- × **Sentiments in favour** of the bears include that they are seen as an integral part of the community, and a symbol which has united the town for many years. Bears are a common feature of Northern Ontario wildlife, something which visitors and residents alike have come to associate with Hornepayne and the north. Many other businesses and services in Hornepayne have adopted the bears into their imagery.
- × **Sentiments against** the bears include feedback that they don't represent who Hornepayne is in terms of the people that make up the town. General feelings of neutrality were expressed, and in some cases, an outright desire to move away from this imagery was stated given it seems nobody in the town seems to remember the origin story of the statue. Bears are a common symbol of Northern Ontario in general, and they may not be a unique or differentiating aspect of Hornepayne.

Rail

THEME #2:

The railway industry in Hornepayne can be associated with the identified theme of **connection** – both the fact that the community is all familiar and connected with one another, and connection to the rest of Ontario. It also nods to themes of **stability and reliability**, as it contributes to providing a secure economic foundation for the town.

As the key defining historical trait of Hornepayne, association with the rail industry can't be overlooked – and though it's not **who** Hornepayne is, the **Township would not exist without it**. With 31% of survey participants noting History and Heritage as one of their key values, and 57% of respondents stating that the local railway industry genuinely reflects the community, this visual representation of Hornepayne should be carefully considered.

- × **Sentiments in favour** of rail include the fact that it is responsible for much of the economic stability felt by Hornepayne. As a connecting centrepiece between Winnipeg and Toronto, and with 19+ trains that run through the town each day, the railyard features as a focal point of the town. Residents feel that this can either be disregarded or embraced, but to embrace it acknowledges its historical importance to the town.
- × **Sentiments against** the use of rail include the sense among some residents that too much focus is placed on Hornepayne's industry. Rail is certainly part of their past but it shouldn't be their defining feature.

Symbols

The Geographic Centre of Ontario

Survey respondents strongly indicated (64%) that they believe that the visual reference of being the geographical Centre of Ontario genuinely reflects the community. Discussions revealed that this association is a common area of pride among residents. The feeling isn't that Hornepayne is "in the middle of nowhere," simply that they're in the **middle**, and that this distinctive feature of the town is something that helps differentiate them in a positive and memorable way.

Natural landscapes and scenery

A full 71% of survey respondents believe that natural landscapes and scenery genuinely represent Hornepayne. This is supported by the fact that 47% of participants also indicated "peaceful" as one of the words that best describes Hornepayne's personality. These findings were echoed during qualitative research; a common theme that clearly emerged was the call to highlight Hornepayne's **beautiful natural surroundings**, and that this love of nature is at the core of who they are.

Adventure and outdoor enjoyment go hand-in-hand with the natural setting. With 58% of survey respondents stating that they value recreational and outdoor activities most about life in Hornepayne, and images of activities such as fishing, snowmobiling, and more resonating strongly with focus group participants, it is clear that there are many visual associations connected not only to its scenic nature, but also to the outdoor playground that this provides.

Symbols

Stakeholder Feedback

“I really enjoy living here. I like the familiarity. I like that it’s affordable. I like that I can send my kids to school and know that they’re okay. If I need something, someone will always be there for me to help. Some people miss the anonymity of a city, but I like that everyone is so familiar and everyone looks out for each other.”

— Resident

“Opportunities to be in nature is by far Hornepayne’s biggest asset. It’s spectacular there.”

— Developer/Investor

“There is talk of ‘the good old days,’ but the perspective is actually that we’ll surpass this in a new way, and that the best days are yet to come.”

— Mayor Fort

Feedback

“I’d describe the current state of Hornepayne as ‘ready.’ We’re ready for what’s going to happen, for whatever is coming next – we just need the ideas, the investors, the shakers, the visionaries.”

— Resident

“The bears are part of the community. They are built into our memories, and everyone still relates to them.”

— Resident

“When you look at our map – you can fight it or embrace it. We are literally built around the rail yard and the rail, and we can’t get around this.”

— Mayor Fort

Opportunities and Recommendations

Armed with an understanding of priorities and themes identified during the engagement process, recommendations are outlined in order to bring the new brand identity to life using this information as our guiding framework.

A Connection to Nature

In presenting Hornepayne to the world, showcasing the stunning natural landscape and the community's enjoyment of the land will be essential in conveying the town's unique personality and its intimate relationship with the outdoors. Seen as a uniting commonality among all residents, and also as one of its key strengths and opportunities, this natural beauty and the opportunity for adventure that it provides should be leveraged.

Uncover the Heart of Hornepayne

With many potential options of symbols and imagery to leverage that closely represent who Hornepayne is, it is necessary to dive deeper into the meanings beneath these representations. While the bears are a common favourite of the community, they also represent growth and the nurturing of future generations. Rail is not only an important historical emblem, but also a nod to connection. CT recommends carefully considering these symbols and images, and representing them either abstractly or concretely in a way that also considers the underlying themes that have been uncovered.

Embrace the Legacy, Envision the Future

Armed with a historical connection to the past due to rail and lumber, and with an appreciation for the economic stability this has provided for Hornepayne, moving forward into the future with a tone of hopefulness and anticipation is required. CT recommends a brand identity that connects both past and present, and which will help guide the townspeople with a unified voice as they enter into the next stages of economic growth and development.

Unified in Who We Are

Broad themes and more specific values were very consistent throughout all levels of engagement. CT recommends incorporating messaging into the Brand Framework that Hornepayne is friendly, peaceful, caring, and family-oriented. Clear themes of connectedness and the importance of a tight-knit community resounded. Hopefulness for future growth and the readiness felt by townspeople to step forward into what is to come should be infused into the brand story.

Recommend

Additional Observations & Topics of Interest

Though not currently within scope of the rebranding initiative, the Township of Hornepayne should consider a future signage strategy.

Residents comment that though it's a small town, it's surprisingly easy to get lost due to a lack of wayfinding. Opportunities to leverage cohesive branded wayfinding will help strengthen the Brand Story and lend an air of credibility to the town when considering external target audiences, and elevate a sense of pride within the community.

The "Welcome to Hornepayne" billboard sign, situated on the northern approach from Highway 631, is currently located quite a distance from the town centre and could benefit from a more aesthetically pleasing and nature-integrated design. There exist beautiful rock outcrops that could potentially be used to create a distinctive and enduring main town sign.

Considering a future signage strategy implies a potentially significant investment, yet would certainly position Hornepayne as the stable and proud community that it is – while adding yet another asset that identifies the town and helps place it as a bigger dot on the map.

Conclusion

The stakeholder engagement process was executed with a goal to unearth the unique attributes that define Hornepayne with the purpose of using these findings to create a strategic and compelling brand identity for the town.

Qualitative and quantitative data was gathered to shed light on the town's core values, strengths, and challenges. Feedback was gathered in the form of a digital survey, focus groups, and interviews.

Data collected during engagement efforts identified several concerns and priorities that are essential to address, such as the need for economic diversification, the newcomer experience in a closely-knit community, and the desire to infuse more pride-of-place within the town. Consulting specifically with Hornepayne's First Nations community regarding the rebranding effort in order to increase input and representation of this community should also be a careful consideration.

Clear emerging themes consistently surfaced in discussions and resonated deeply within the community. These themes include the profound connection to Hornepayne's beautiful natural surroundings, a love for outdoor recreational activity, a strong sense of community support and connectedness, a deep feeling of safety, security felt from reliable economic conditions, and an undeniable sense of hope for what the future brings.

Sentiments regarding key visual associations that have a significant impact on the town's identity were gathered. The Three Bears, the railway industry, being the geographical center of Ontario, and the captivating natural landscapes certainly all play a role in shaping the visual representation of Hornepayne. These visuals all have potential to be used within the new brand identity while staying true to uncovered themes, ensuring that they are effectively communicated within the brand framework.

Next steps involve translating these findings into tangible elements of the brand identity, including the creation of logo concepts and the development of a comprehensive brand framework. With these steps, CT aims to capture the true essence of Hornepayne and craft a brand that resonates deeply with its residents while drawing external audiences into the town's unique story.