Brockville, Ontario:
First Impressions Community Exchange Report



Image: Aerial photo from visit1000islands.com of Brockville, Ontario

Prepared for: Brockville, Ontario, Canada
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Executive summary:

This report captures a group of six Cobourg visitors' first impressions of Brockville, Ontario as part of the *First Impressions Community Exchange (FICE)* program between the two communities. The participants acted as "mystery visitors" (tourists, potential residents, investors, etc.) and shared feedback on Brockville's assets, challenges, and opportunities.

Overall Impression

- Brockville is charming, historic, and welcoming, with strong tourism assets.
- The waterfront, downtown districts, and cultural heritage stand out as strengths.
- Opportunities exist to improve downtown upkeep, accessibility, youth programming, and promotion.

Online Presence

- Websites and social media (Brockville.com, BrockvilleTourism, Downtown Brockville, etc.) were informative and appealing.
- Social media portrayed Brockville as inviting, active, and family friendly.
- Most visitors rated Brockville's online presence as good to excellent.

Key Strengths Observed

- **Waterfront & Tourism**: Railway Tunnel, cruises, marinas, Aquatarium, parks and festivals.
- **Downtown**: Walkable, vibrant, unique shops & dining, free parking options.
- **Heritage Assets**: Limestone buildings, historic architecture, preserved charm.
- **Business & Industry**: Active industrial park, major employers (3M, Canarm, Leclerc, Northern Cables).
- **Residents**: Proud and welcoming, strong customer service, and provide investment.

First Impression:

Community Visit:

Between September 7th – 13th, 2025, six (6) representatives from Cobourg visited Brockville, Ontario, with individual stays ranging from 20 minutes (train stop) to seven hours, most averaging three to six hours. The visiting teams were composed primarily of individuals aged 36 to 49, with one participant in the 50 to 64 age range, and represented a range of perspectives, including those of tourists, prospective residents (one with accessibility considerations), a potential business investor, and municipal officials. Prior to the visit, participants reviewed online sources such as Brockville.com,

BrockvilleTourism.com, DowntownBrockville.com, and various social media platforms. These resources portrayed Brockville as a quaint waterfront city with a vibrant downtown, strong tourism assets, and a welcoming, family-friendly atmosphere, shaping expectations of a community with cultural richness and high quality of life.

Using our senses

Taste: Bakery, Tradition
Smell: Fresh Water, Crisp
Hear: Laughter, Music – quietly
Feel: Safe, Welcoming, Charming

Community Entrances

Brockville left mixed impressions depending on the entrance route taken. Signage from the highway was generally clear and helpful, making navigation downtown easy without GPS, though some signs were fading, inconsistent, or confusing, particularly around the information centre. Approaching from the North Augusta exit, it gave a very favourable impression, with attractive residential areas and historic homes that felt clean and welcoming. In contrast, entering from Stewart Boulevard presented a less appealing view, with run-down plazas, long grass and weeds, and vacant properties that created an impression of neglect. The train station signage has some sun damage and element damage. It almost seems forgotten.

While the downtown appeared relatively clean and walkable. The occasional litter, damaged signage and poorly maintained sections detracted from the overall appeal, leaving the community's identity and branding somewhat unclear.

Question: Overall, how would you rate the community entrances? (6 responses)

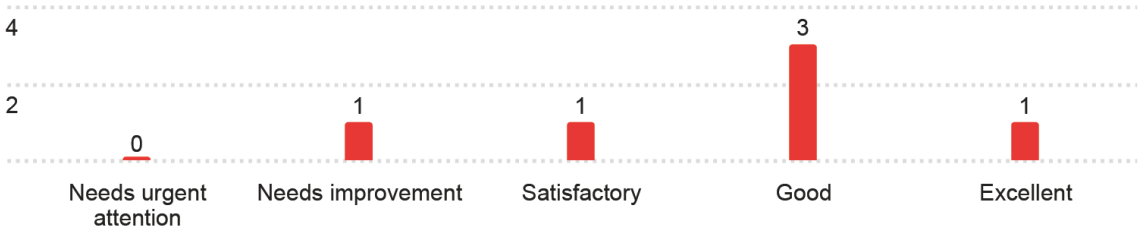


Image: Graph of responses on rating community entrances in Brockville, Ontario

Housing and Residential Areas:

The community of Brockville offers a diverse and generally adequate housing stock, featuring a balanced mix of historic brick century homes, modern waterfront condominiums, established neighbourhoods, and newer developments including townhouses and apartments. Entering the town along Highway 2 provides a scenic and positive first impression, with well-maintained homes and attractive lots, though other areas northwest of downtown appears more rundown, particularly near the Stingers facility, where the exterior detracts from an otherwise valuable recreational hub. Overall, Brockville's housing options accommodate a wide range of income levels and lifestyles, with some variation in property upkeep. Supporting infrastructure appears sufficient, with ongoing investment in roadwork and ample green space throughout residential areas.

Question: Rate the housing and residential areas on overall appeal and quality. (6 responses)



Image: Graph of responses on rating housing and residential areas in Brockville, Ontario

Local Government Services

Brockville's tourism facilities were found to be well-located and easily accessible, with particular appreciation for the dedicated waterfront tourism office, which also functions as a gift shop and cruise ticket centre. The staff were consistently described as professional, knowledgeable, and accommodating, providing detailed information on local dining, attractions, accommodations, and business resources in both English and French. While some attractions, such as the Aquatarium, were closed during the visit, staff provided clear curt guidance regarding fall operating hours.

Although, in contrast, the City Hall was perceived as less welcoming. Informational materials, including maps, were highly valued, although the downtown map may present

challenges for individuals with visual impairments. The visitors also noted limited public washroom availability and suggested that the municipality could also enhance business attraction efforts by establishing a dedicated section on the city's Economic Development part of the website.

Education, Health and Community Services

Education

Brockville offers a range of educational opportunities, including an excellent mix of elementary and secondary schools and views of the waterfront. St. Lawrence College provides diplomas, certificates, and trades programs. Schools were generally described as modern, well-maintained, and serving as anchor sites in the community, contributing to the town's small-town charm.

There were some challenges that were noted, including the difficulty in locating schools while driving, limited signage, and the absence of certain programs such as French immersion at select elementary schools, which may be important for some families or new residents. Despite these challenges, the community provides options for students to pursue education locally, from primary through post-secondary levels. The churches were noted as particularly prominent and well-situated landmarks. Residents indicated that daycare availability was reported to reflect common challenges found in other communities.

Health Care

There was signage for hospitals and family health centres, as most of the visitors noted as such. However, most did not stop at the local hospital, but one noted that it was easy to find these facilities, and that there are lots of options for care locally without having to travel.

Community Services

Community amenities and family-friendliness within Brockville were somewhat difficult to assess in a single visit. There were positive features noted which included the Fifty Plus Activity Centre and newcomer support through "United Welcome" – a Ukrainian newcomer soft landing initiative.

When asked the residents provided commentary that indicated that, while the town is attractive, some spaces and events may be less family-oriented compared to other communities. The event and tourism marketing was generally visible for the tourists, both online and in the downtown area, with the tourism office performing well in promoting local activities; however, some of the materials, such as the printed weekly events calendar, were outdated. Overall, while certain amenities and programs are promoted effectively, awareness of specific services and family-focused offerings appeared limited.

Question: Rate the availability, overall appeal and quality of the following:

(6 responses)

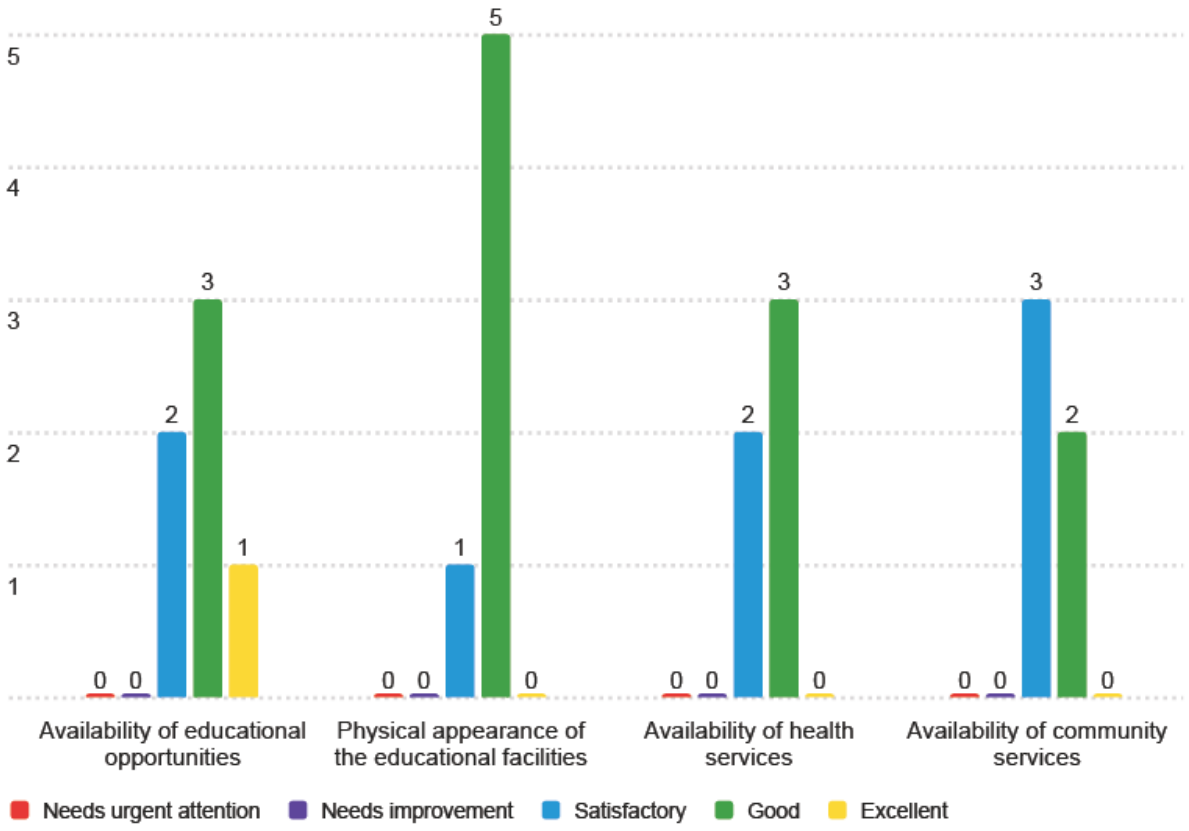


Image: Overall appeal and quality of the following in Brockville, Ontario

Downtown

Brockville's downtown area was widely praised for its charm, walkability, and waterfront appeal. The visitors noted the convenient and reasonably priced parking, clean public spaces, and clear signage, particularly the maps and wayfinding that make navigation straightforward. The mix of unique shops, dining options, and distinct districts was appreciated, as was the presence of seating along the waterfront. Some amenities, such as clean washrooms in Hardy Park, added to the positive experience, and there was recognition of the ongoing investment, including renovations and under-construction storefronts that signal opportunities for growth and vibrancy.

However, several areas for improvement were identified. The cobblestone sidewalks and certain street elements were seen as inaccessible and in need of repair, while the exterior of City Hall and many of the light posts would benefit from maintenance and repainting. Several storefronts appeared worn or vacant, and some signage was inconsistent or competing with other downtown branding. The public washrooms were limited, and accessibility features such as crosswalk signals were lacking. Despite these issues, the downtown's active atmosphere, mindful district layout, and waterfront walkability suggest strong potential for continued enhancement and community engagement.

Question: Rate the overall impression of the downtown. (6 responses)



Image: Graph of responses for overall impression of the downtown in Brockville, Ontario

Business and Industry

Retail and Services

Brockville offers a well-balanced mix of retail and services that generally meet everyday needs and “nice-to-have” options. The downtown and marina commercial districts were noted for their variety, thoughtful layout, attractive signage, and welcoming atmosphere. The Cobourg visitors appreciated the blend of independently owned and franchise businesses. There was friendly customer service, and the community’s focus on shopping local, supported by events such as monthly “Shop the Street” promotions. The Tall Ships Landing was highlighted as a striking and vibrant feature, though some felt it contrasted with the downtown’s charm.

The challenges that were noted include the commercial vacancies, particularly north of the downtown, the limited accessibility in much of the downtown area, and the perceptions of inadequate parking and promotion. Some residents felt there were limited activities in the community. Despite these concerns, the active involvement of the BIA and available resources such as commercial property listings on the City’s website suggest a supportive environment for business investment and continued downtown activation.

Food and Dining

Brockville offers a wide variety of dining options across the downtown and North End, ranging from independent restaurants to chain establishments, with choices to suit a range of budgets. The visitors noted the overall quality of service as excellent, though individual experiences with food varied slightly. Outdoor patios and the waterfront views of one restaurant were highlighted as enjoyable features, and unique experiences, such as a house concert for the public in a heritage home, added charm to the downtown scene. While a few additional coffee shops or casual food options could enhance variety, the city provides ample opportunities for residents and visitors to explore and enjoy local cuisine.

Industry

Brockville’s industrial and employment areas were diverse and well-established, encompassing sectors such as manufacturing, health, education, warehousing, and retail. The industrial parks were described as clean, welcoming, and easy to navigate, with ample space for future growth and investment. There are key employers, including 3M, Leclerc, Canarm, Wills, and Northern Cables, that contribute to a strong local economic base, and some facilities actively displayed hiring opportunities.

The Business parks' proximity to the highway and commercial cores enhances their attractiveness for new investment, and the available industrial properties suggest potential for further expansion.

Question: Rate the overall appeal and quality of the following: (6 Responses)

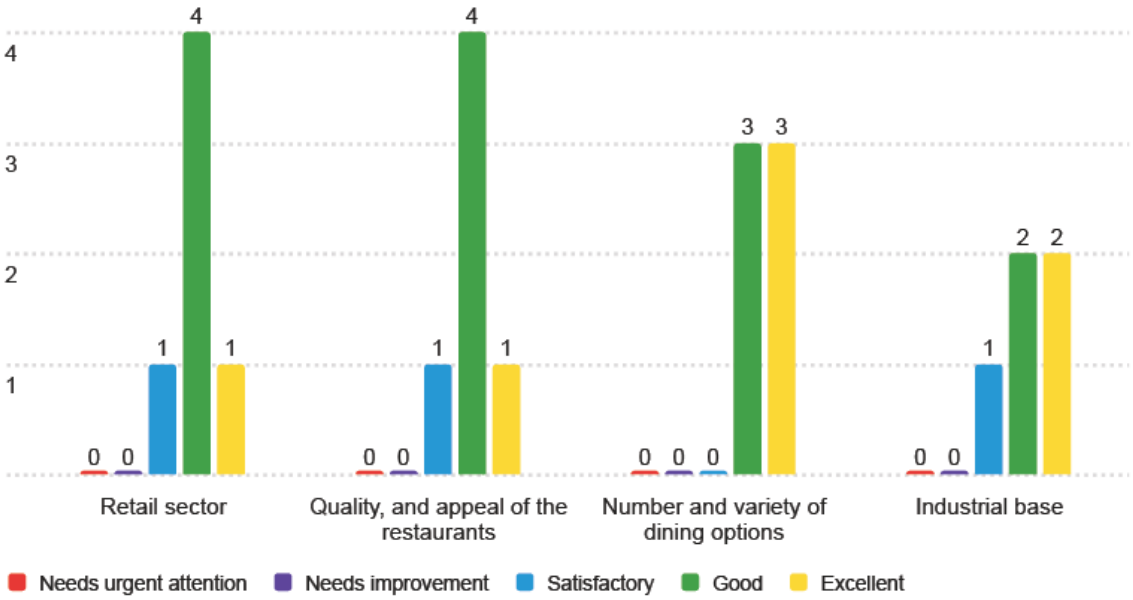


Image: Graph of responses for overall appeal and quality of the noted sectors in Brockville, Ontario

Tourism and Entertainment

Brockville presents a highly engaging and well-marketed tourism experience, with the waterfront serving as a central attraction. The visitors praised the variety of options available, including cruises (which were dog-friendly), marinas, vacation rentals, and cultural assets such as the railway tunnel, downtown theatre, and the Aquatarium. The walking paths and connectivity between the marina, downtown, and other areas were highlighted as particularly well-designed, offering safe, scenic, and immersive experiences. The signage throughout the city was noted as clear, consistent, and helpful, including cross-promotion between the tourism office and downtown, community bulletin boards, and event notifications. The visitors also appreciated the cleanliness and vibrancy of the waterfront, the mix of accommodations, and the accessible parking options.

The railway tunnel stood out as a major attraction, praised for its storytelling, walkability, and community-supported investment, though there were some issues noted, such as non-functioning lights and limited directional signage at the exit.

While the tourism office offered friendly service, it was occasionally understaffed, leading to long waits. Opportunities for improvement include additional public washrooms, bilingual signage, enhanced wayfinding after key attractions, and potentially developing full getaway packages to complement the itineraries already provided. Overall, Brockville demonstrates a strong commitment to tourism, with well-maintained assets, engaging experiences, and thoughtful community integration.

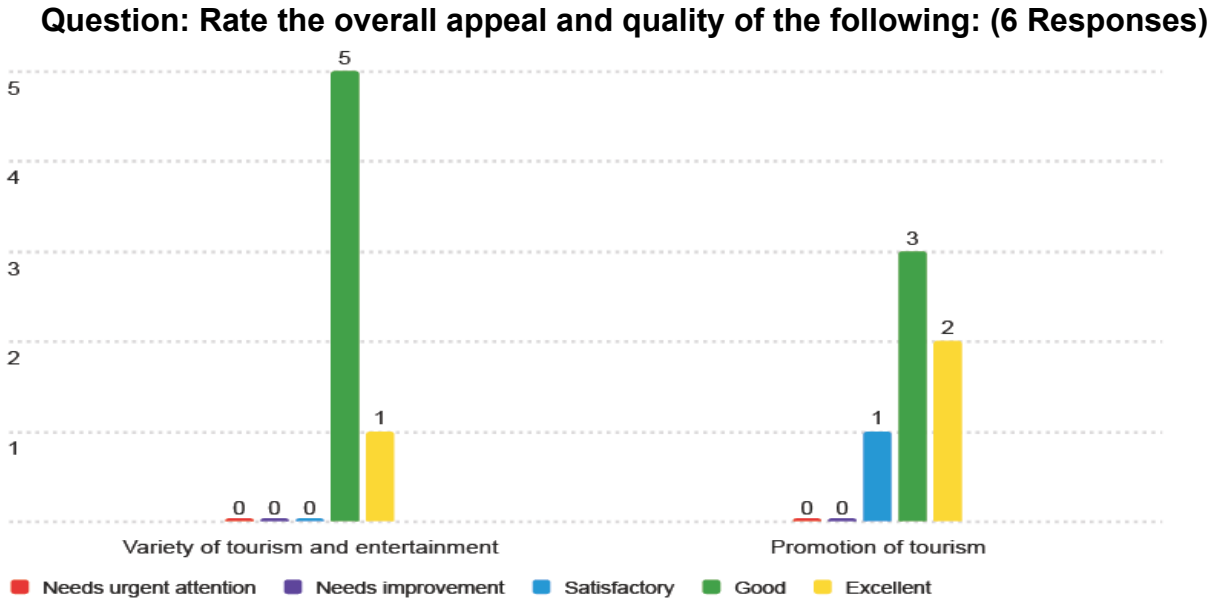


Image: Graph of responses for overall appeal and quality of tourism in Brockville, Ontario

Recreation, Culture and Heritage

Brockville presents a charming and welcoming community, rich in heritage and their cultural assets. The downtown is lined with stone and historic brick buildings, preserving the town's architectural character, while limestone structures throughout the city add visual interest to the community. The Brockville Railway Tunnel uniquely blends history with tourism and activation, providing a safe and engaging walking experience right along the vibrant waterfront. Most of the visitors noted the scenic drives, well-maintained churches, and attractive public buildings, including the courthouse and museum, which contribute to the town's historic appeal. Small details, such as the vine-covered home by the water, added character and charm to the streetscape.

Recreational opportunities are varied, from Hardy Park courts to the waterfront (Centeen Park) and attractions like Stingers, though some facilities show signs of neglect and would benefit from professional upgrades. The library and public spaces were accessible and easy to locate, with helpful amenities like bus stops and parking near by. The visitors also noted the difficulty in locating the arena (Memorial Centre), with limited and unclear signage, though there are plans for renovations, which shows ongoing investment in community facilities. There are neighbouring soccer fields and baseball diamonds which are appropriate near the residential area.

While culture and heritage are clearly valued by the community, there were some sites, including City Hall and certain sidewalks that appear weathered or less inviting. This suggests the opportunities for enhancement. A recommendation for more Public art and additional signage which could further enrich the "Arts District" and downtown experience, which will just continue to build on Brockville's strong sense of pride, heritage, and community.

Overall, the waterfront area was described as clean, vibrant, and well-connected, with accessible parking and tourism support, including the helpful booth in the park. The recreational amenities, combined with the scenic and charming downtown, contribute to a positive visitor and tourist experience, though clearer signage outside of these areas and improved visibility of facilities like the arena, soccer fields and baseball diamonds could further enhance accessibility and enjoyment.

Question: Rate the overall appeal and quality of the following: (6 Responses)

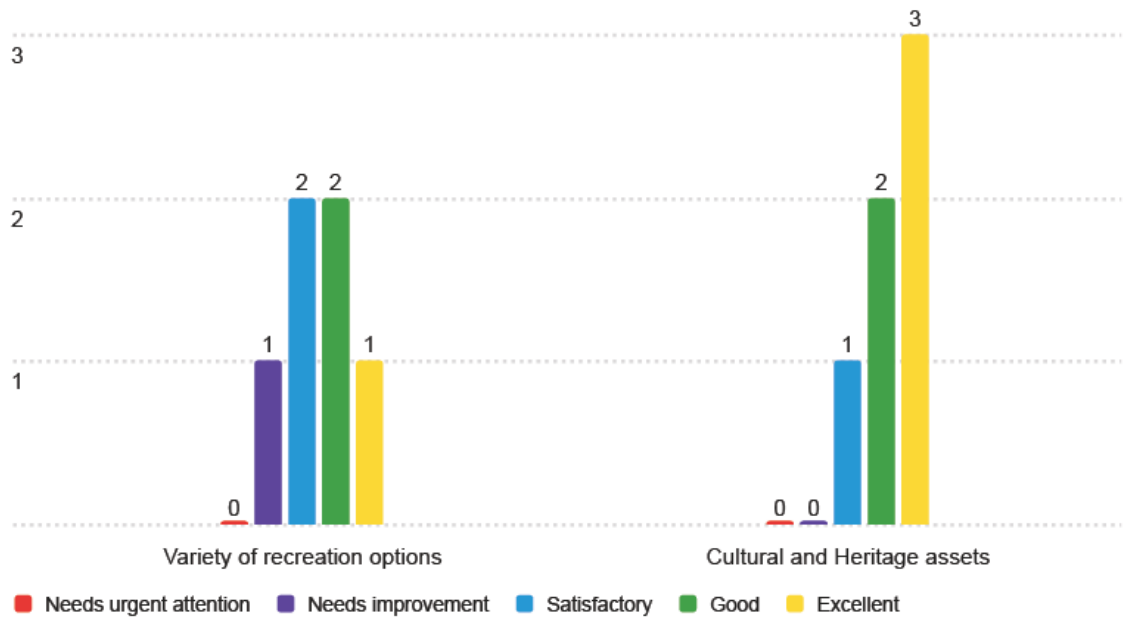


Image: Graph of responses for overall appeal and quality of options and assets in Brockville, Ontario

Question: Consider the suitability of the recreation and entertainment opportunities to different age groups. (5 Responses)

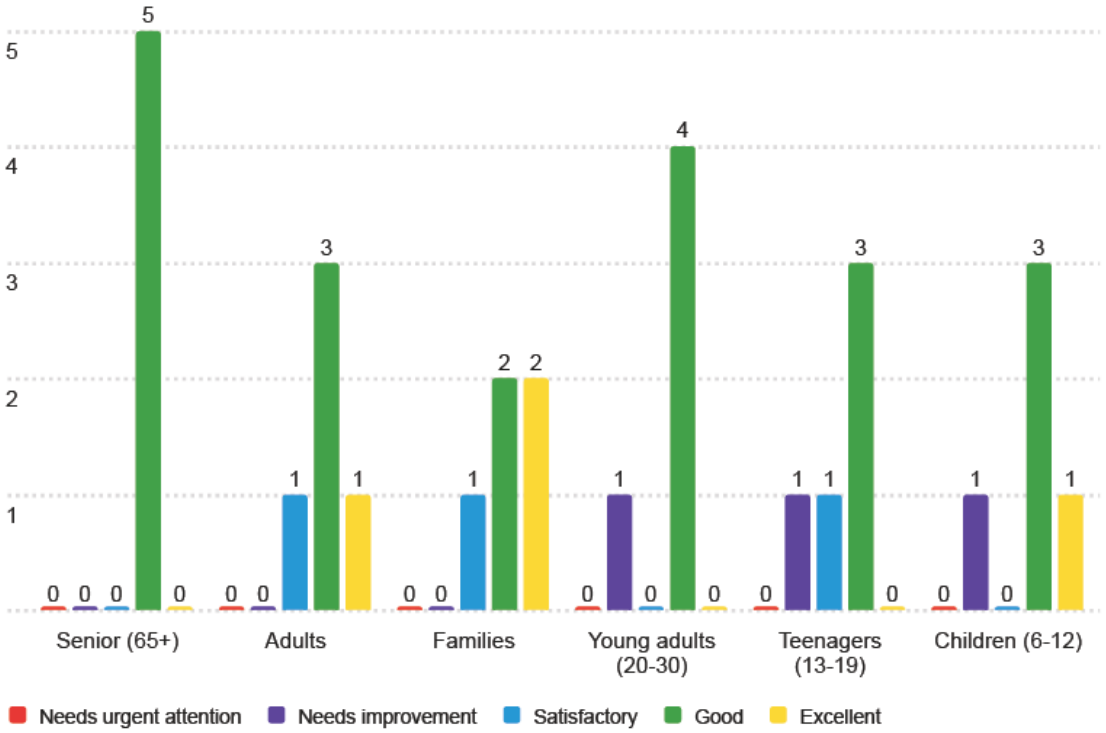


Image: Graph of responses for suitability of the recreation and entertainment in Brockville, Ontario

Resident Feedback

Residents expressed a strong sense of pride in Brockville and were generally positive about the community, happy to share recommendations on what to see and do. Many highlighted the town's charm and tourism appeal. The dedication of local business owners, who were also knowledgeable, passionate, but were reliant on tourism. They provided some concerns about parking and promotion.

Several of the residents detailed that there are limited activities for teens, young adults, and families, which makes it less appealing for younger generations. Engagement with cultural initiatives, such as festivals and nonprofit programs, were viewed positively, with the residents eager to support revitalization efforts as noted with the railway tunnel project.

While some of the residents recognized the BIA's efforts, there may have been some confusion about which organizations manage promotions and support businesses, and one thing to note was that the local Chamber of Commerce was largely absent from the conversations. Overall, Brockville is seen as a good place to live, with community pride and charm offsetting some perceived gaps in entertainment, youth activities, and downtown promotion.

Conclusion of Visitor Impressions of Brockville:

Visitors' initial perceptions of Brockville were generally low or neutral, often thinking it was "just a town on the highway 401 corridor." Upon visiting, most were pleasantly surprised by the town's charm, welcoming atmosphere, and range of offerings. The downtown, waterfront, marina, heritage sites, and small-town feel stood out as memorable features, along with family- and pet-friendly experiences like the Tiki Cruise. The town was praised for its eclectic, creative vibe, connectivity, and accessible amenities, as well as the thoughtful repurposing of spaces for recreation.

However, the visitors did indicate that there were areas needing improvement: some parts of downtown, specifically City Hall, vacant downtown properties, and secondary commercial areas gave a negative first impression than expected, creating a disconnect between the town's natural and heritage assets and the appearance of certain streets and buildings. Overall, visitors left with a positive impression and a desire to return, particularly in the summer months, but recognized opportunities for aesthetic and maintenance upgrades to strengthen first impressions.

Top Three (3) Strengths of Brockville:

1. **Waterfront & Natural Beauty:** The waterfront gives the city a resort-like feel, complemented by greenspaces, cruises on the waterway (including dog-friendly options), and natural beauty that enhances recreational and leisure experiences.
2. **Heritage & Charm:** Brockville celebrates its history through landmarks like the train tunnel, rail station, and references to Queen's visits, while maintaining a mix of old and new architecture that adds character and uniqueness to the community.
3. **Welcoming Community & Vibrant Downtown:** Residents are proud and friendly, contributing to a welcoming atmosphere. The downtown's distinct districts, relatively clean streets, variety of services, dining, shopping, and year-round events create a lively and inviting environment across the city.

Top Three (3) Opportunities of Brockville:

1. **Enhanced Promotion & Marketing:** Increase visibility of the town through advertising, strategic signage (highway), and digital presence, including quick links on the city's website for visitors and potential businesses. Enhancement of your accessibility for your online presence, and printed marketing materials.
2. **Waterfront & Recreational Development:** Expand the family-friendly activities, recreational facilities updates, and beachfront access. These can be modelled after successful programs in other communities, to attract visitors of all ages.

3. **Downtown & Infrastructure Revitalization:** Invest in signage (updates and bilingual), accessible infrastructure, public art, CIP programs, and the promotion of vacant storefronts to energize the downtown and support local entrepreneurs.

Top Three (3) Challenges for Brockville:

1. **Employment & Youth Retention:** Limited job opportunities, there seems to be only particularly ones in manufacturing, healthcare, and education. This makes it difficult to retain younger residents and attract new talent.
2. **Housing & Accessibility:** Tight rental market, aging infrastructure, hilly terrain, winter conditions, and downtown accessibility challenges create barriers for residents and visitors alike.
3. **Downtown & Neighbourhood Revitalization:** Certain areas outside the main downtown—especially heritage strips near the marina and parts of the west end—show signs of neglect, creating a perception of uneven prosperity and limiting the appeal of some neighbourhoods.

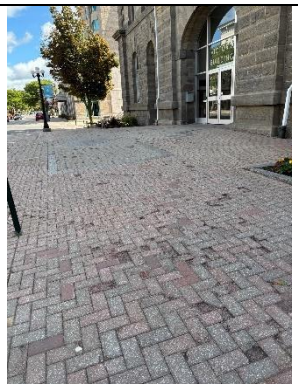
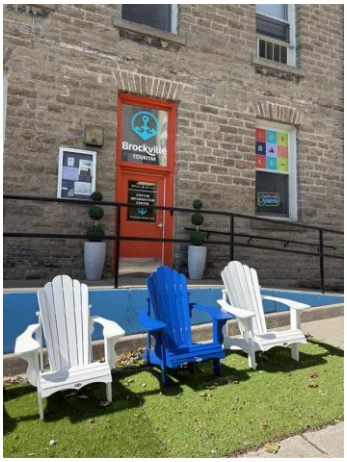
Quick Wins for Brockville:

1. **Improve Streetscape & Signage:** Replace sun-damaged signage (e.g., train station sign, or downtown signage), clean streetlights, tidy signage pole clutter, refresh cobblestones, and repaint street fixtures like the bike racks and light poles.
2. **Downtown & Community Improvements:** Update or create the Community Improvement Plan to provide incentives for property owners, support building upkeep, and enhance beautification efforts.
3. **Enhance Recreational Amenities & Activities:** Add an indoor children's play areas for year-round use, improve sidewalk conditions (e.g., in front of City Hall and downtown), and continue to promote all transit routes to better connect residents and visitors.
4. **Promote Community & Natural Appeal:** Emphasize Brockville's quality of life and natural attractions (like the 1000 Islands) in marketing and signage to attract more residents, visitors and potential businesses. There is also a very interesting niche here where people can scuba dive. This should be highlighted more then it is.
5. **Employment & Housing Support:** Highlight the business attraction initiatives and continue supporting housing improvements to address local employment and rental challenges. The real estate market does have many opportunities to buy and is beneficial for someone who is a first-time home buyer.

Photos from the visits:

Photo	Description of Photo
	Awkward walkway – looks like there was a mixture of old vs new. Perhaps revamp with some flowers or signage
 	Downtown Signage – many old signs and clutter. Remove the posts that are not being in use. Looks like there may have been a four-way stop sign
	Downtown Bike Rack – Looking tired and worn

	Downtown Brockville Sign – Very nice and easy to read – however no City of Brockville branding or logo on it.
 	Downtown crossing signage – however looking worn from the elements, and no indication of Downtown Brockville branding on it. However, the other side of the street looks less worn.
	Banner – with both logos on it to be consistent with branding.
 	Downtown Streetlight – needs some TLC and cleaning or updating

	This hydrant looks like there was some additional clutter to the hydrant that isn't required. May be from something else however just added clutter to make it look messy.
 	Cobblestone in front of Victoria Building
	The Tourism Office was so inviting – the municipal offices on the other hand didn't give the same vibe/welcoming.