

Digital Strategy 2026-2030



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Muskoka Heritage Place



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Introduction

Muskoka Heritage Place (MHP) is home to the Muskoka Museum, Muskoka Pioneer Village and Portage Flyer Train and is the steward of a vast collection of historical significance pertaining to Huntsville and Muskoka. Over 65,000 artifacts and archival material, ranging from newsprint to physical buildings designated under the Ontario Heritage Act, are safeguarded here. The site welcomes approximately 23,000 in-person visitors and engages approximately 15,000 virtual visitors annually (2024 stats).

The museum world is quickly transforming in a time when the digital age is at the forefront of society. COVID-19 propelled museums into shifting to digital adaptations of pre-COVID in-person programming and interactions. Since 2020, museums have been tasked with adapting to a new “normal” with audience engagement, be it programming, access to collections, etc.

As a response to this shift in the increase of digital offerings, Muskoka Heritage Place (MHP) is also transforming, to better reflect and remain relevant to its virtual and local communities and has created this Digital Strategy to direct digital creation over the next five years. The Strategy will guide MHP in fulfilling its mandate, expanding our reach (and to new audiences) and ensuring long-term sustainability. A preliminary survey to audiences has shown an interest in increased digital programs at MHP, and a follow-up in-depth digital survey to online and in-person visitors will be conducted in 2025.

Digital transformation offers a wide array of opportunities including:

- Providing relevant and engaging learning/educational programs that enhance the current curriculum to schools across the District of Muskoka and beyond.
- Improving access to the permanent collection to the public and research institutions
- Partnering with organizations to create inspiring and innovative initiatives.
- Leveraging online engagement opportunities through social media and digital platforms.
- Finding efficiencies in retrieving and utilizing data
- Preserving the collection and the area’s history in the event of a catastrophic event

MHP, which is owned and operated by the Town of Huntsville (ToH), will continue to work with the Town of Huntsville marketing team as they put into effect their marketing plan that continues to identify and research our audience in order to serve our community to our best ability. As a municipal entity, MHP is subject to ToH policies and procedures and

supported by its various departments. These supports are outlined below where they support this Digital Strategy.

Looking Forward

Looking to the future, Muskoka Heritage Place would like to have 25% of its content for virtual/online usage and 75% remain as in-person experiences, due to the nature of a working living history site.

Digital Strategy 2026-2030

Within this document is a roadmap for the next five years with annual milestones to continue to expand on producing engaging digital content for Muskoka Heritage Place, the Town of Huntsville and beyond.

Current State

Muskoka Heritage Place currently offers some digital experiences, mainly through its social media presence and website.

Providing both exhibitions and programming in-person and virtually will allow patrons to interact with MHP in whichever way makes them feel the most comfortable.

The Town of Huntsville's Community Services and Marketing staff have worked jointly to develop a Digital Strategy for Muskoka Heritage Place. The aim of the Digitization Strategy is to identify MHP's current digital capacity and create goals to preserve and provide public access to MHP's Collections.

This first section of this document lays out the current state of MHP's Collections. The subsequent sections of the document are the Digital Strategy itself.

This section provides our findings and observations based on document review, a public survey and desk research and analysis.

Scope of Services

Table 1 below lists common museum services MHP provides, as a review of its current state of digital offerings. The list of services and service descriptions was derived from the

Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN)’s resource “Capture Your Collections: A Guide for Managers Who Are Planning and Implementing Digitization Projects”.

Table 1. Common museum services performed by MHP and others

Museum Services	Service Description	MHP	Huntsville and Area Historical Society (HAAHS)	Huntsville Public Library (HPL)
Collections Management	Receiving, cataloguing and storing artifacts and archival materials with cultural/historical significance.	Yes	Partially*	Partially*
Conservation	Using preventive conservation methods to ensure material longevity and integrity.	Partially* (proper storage techniques, remedial cleaning)	No	No
Research	Conduct research to enhance understanding of artifacts and archival materials. Assist visitors with personal (genealogical or built heritage) research projects.	Yes	Yes	Partially*
Education	Provide educational programming to promote learning and cultural enrichment for visitors.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Digital Media	Create interactive and online experiences that engage virtual audiences.	Partially*	Partially*	Partially*
Marketing/ Communications	Promote programming, special	Yes	Partially*	Yes

	events, exhibitions and other museum activities through websites, social media campaigns, brochures, media kits.			
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**Partially means the organization provides the service but there is likely an opportunity to leverage partnerships to achieve digitization.*

The Huntsville Public Library and Huntsville and Area Historical Society also offer similar services and Muskoka Heritage Place would look to expand how to leverage these potential partnerships.

Levels of Digitization

Below is a Digitization Framework based on a review of resources published by CHIN. MHP has three levels of digitization which can generally be defined as:

Level 1 – Catalogued: Objects that are accurately documented in MHP’s online collections management system (CMS) by the Collections Coordinator and other designated staff creates a record for the item.

Level 2 – Digital Format: When digital record of an object that is catalogued has been created, either by scanning, photographing, or audio or visual recording, and is available to the public. Some items are born digital (e.g. digital photographs, etc.)

Level 3 – Reproducible: The object or item is available digitally and in multiple formats (e.g. virtual exhibit, online collections database, etc.).

MHP’s Current Level of Digitization

With the above Digitization Framework in mind, MHP’s collection can be assessed across the three levels to understand where the organization is today. Table 2 below outlines MHP’s collection types and the current level of digitization.

Level 1 - Catalogued: MHP uses PastPerfect collections management database and has recently migrated records to PastPerfect Cloud/online.

Level 2 - Digital Form: MHP intends to make some records accessible to online visitors in 2025, as migration to PastPerfect Cloud/online is finalized. Currently, researchers and visitors connect with the Collections Coordinator to set up an appointment to view records and information.

Level 3 - Reproducible: Work has commenced on interactive media, including an interactive GIS map and virtual exhibits that require uploading to the MHP website. MHP is looking to expand on digital offerings as outlined in the objectives and goals.

Table 2. MHP’s asset types and their current level of digitization

Asset Type	Rationale for Group	Total Objects (est.)	Total Linear Feet (est.)	Level of Digitization	Current Level of Digitization
Paper	Method of digitizing these materials will likely involve the use of Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software and other tools dedicated to scanning printed materials.	10,480	175 linear feet	Level 1 – Catalogued: Item/object is catalogued in the collections management database.	99%
				Level 2 – Digital Format: Catalogued item/object is then scanned or photographed to be available in a digital form.	14%
				Level 3 – Reproducible: The item/object is available to view online via online collections database, in a virtual exhibit, etc. Digitizing paper items/objects ensures the original item can be kept safely in storage while the duplicate can be used.	.1%.

Artwork/Photographs	Unlike written materials, paintings / pictures do not require the use of OCR software, they do however require specific care to ensure preservation.	21,650 items (included in linear feet)	79 linear	Level 1 – Catalogued: Item/object is catalogued in the collections management database.	99%
				Level 2 – Digital Format: Catalogued item/object is then scanned or photographed to be available in a digital form.	80%
				Level 3 – Reproducible: The item/object is available to view online via online collections database, in a virtual exhibit, etc. Digitizing paper items/objects ensures the original item can be kept safely in storage while the duplicate can be used.	.1%
Video/Audio Physical Media	How video and audio is digitized will differ based on how the information was captured / is presently stored. But the digitization levels for these materials is consistent.	114 motion picture reels 125 audio tapes 44 VHS Tapes		Level 1 – Catalogued: Item/object is catalogued in the collections management database.	99%
				Level 2 – Digital Format: Catalogued item/object is then scanned or photographed to be available in a digital form.	1%
				Level 3 – Reproducible: The item/object is available to view online via online collections database, in a virtual exhibit, etc. Digitizing paper items/objects ensures the original item can be kept safely in storage while the duplicate can be used.	0

All other physical objects – regular photo	All other physical objects	16,600		Level 1 – Catalogued: Item/object is catalogued in the collections management database.	99%
				Level 2 – Digital Format: Catalogued item/object is then scanned or photographed to be available in a digital form.	33%
				Level 3 – Reproducible: The item/object is available to view online via online collections database, in a virtual exhibit, etc. Digitizing paper items/objects ensures the original item can be kept safely in storage while the duplicate can be used.	.1%
Small physical objects – 3d Scan	All physical objects that can be feasibly captured via a 3D scan.	16,500		Level 1 – Catalogued: Item/object is catalogued in the collections management database	99%
				Level 2 – Digital Format: Catalogued item/object is then scanned or photographed to be available in a digital form.	0
				Level 3 – Reproducible: The item/object is available to view online via online collections database, in a virtual exhibit, etc. Digitizing paper items/objects ensures the original item can be kept safely in storage while the duplicate can be used.	0

Large Physical Objects – 3d Scan	Objects that could not be readily reproduced via 3D scan, e.g. industrial equipment	100		Level 1 – Catalogued: Item/object is catalogued in the collections management database.	0
				Level 2 – Digital Format: Catalogued item/object is then scanned or photographed to be available in a digital form.	0
				Level 3 – Reproducible: The item/object is available to view online via online collections database, in a virtual exhibit, etc. Digitizing paper items/objects ensures the original item can be kept safely in storage while the duplicate can be used.	0
Estimated Total Volume of Assets: 65, 613 items					

The total number of assets is derived through estimates provided through monthly reports pulled from the collections management database, PastPerfect.

Priority of Digitization

1. Items used for exhibition
2. Items used for research requests
3. Photographic prints
4. Archival material of historical significance*
5. Archival material of delicate nature
6. Artifacts of historical significance*
7. Artifacts with known provenance
8. Remainder of collection

**historical significant according to MHP mandate and collections standard*

Use of Digitized Material

- Collections management staff:
 - artifact identification (inventory, preservation and conservation purposes)
 - research
- Exhibit Staff
 - Research and exhibit development
 - print and virtual displays
- Programming Staff
 - Research and program development
 - Programming materials
- Social media
 - Local residents
 - Tourists and virtual community
- External research requests – such as photographs requested by publishers and general public
- Transcription of handwritten materials by remote volunteers

Digitized Record Storage

The digitized records MUST be managed appropriately in a shared network drive, a Town business system or an electronic documents and records management system EDRMS to ensure that they can be accessed as required, and to provide enhanced control, access and retrieval capabilities. Digitized material may be shared thorough PastPerfect Online, shared files within the TOH, short-term shared files via cloud storage with partner and the

public, at the discretion of the MHP Manager and/or Collections Coordinator. This also allows for the application of security classifications and other access controls as required. MHP will document any decisions made about the management of the digitized records in Digital Strategy.

Digitized content will be published or made accessible through:

- PastPerfect Web Edition database
- Website
 - Corporate -TOH, MHP, HPL, AT
 - Historical – OurOntario
- CHIN
- Social media accounts (MHP, TOH, HPL)
 - Facebook
 - X (Twitter)
 - Instagram
- Exhibits – A-V components to physical exhibits (e.g. Radio-Frequency Identification tags (RFID))
 - Online exhibits
 - Kiosk/satellite exhibits
- Programming – online/virtual
- Email via personal contact with Collections Coordinator
- Promotional material
- Gift shop products

Facility Conditions and Staffing

Facility Conditions

There are three main areas MHP uses to store the collections: main administrative building storage rooms (3), Rotary Village Station storage room (1), and climate controlled off-site storage room (1). All three facilities are climate/temperature controlled; two of which are monitored by staff on site and do not have fire suppression systems. The off-site storage is monitored by the storage company daily and the Collections Coordinator on a weekly basis and has a fire suppression system. All storage rooms have no windows, minimizing the risk of damage caused by UV radiation. The two on-site spaces have flooded in the past and foundation work has been carried out to mitigate this issue to prevent future flooding. Artifacts and archival materials are stored on shelves elevated one foot from the floor level. Some artifacts are stored in Muskoka Pioneer Village, in historic buildings. The windows of

these buildings generally have coverings to decrease the risk of light (UV) damage. No buildings have humidity control settings.

Physical objects in the main administrative building have humidity control using household humidifiers and dehumidifiers.

Security measures at the main administrative building include a security monitoring system (door sensors, fire and heat sensors, motion sensors). There is no security system at the Rotary Village Station, posing a potential risk to the collections stored there. The absence of backup power at all sites, excluding off-site storage and the Rotary Village Station, is a vulnerability.



Figure 1: Physical objects located in main administrative building.

In the event of a power outage, artifacts are at risk.

Staffing

The low percentage of digitization at MHP is due to limited staff capacity. The Collections Coordinator is the full-time equivalent (FTE) resource dedicated to accessioning artifacts into MHP's collections, but due to other responsibilities and duties, only 20% of their time can be dedicated to collections work. MHP is fortunate to have high school students placed at MHP as part of their cooperative, but they still require supervision and guidance from staff to ensure collections management practices are being followed.

Town of Huntsville's (ToH) Strategic Plan Connections, ToH & MHP Vision and Goals

Town of Huntsville Strategic Plan Connections

The digital strategy is a document which integrates with the pillars of the Town of Huntsville's 2025-2030 Strategic Plan.

Connection to Pillar #1: Balanced Growth

1.1. Engage in proactive, sustainable planning to support vibrant communities

1.1.5: New programming/rental/collection spaces with new/upgraded infrastructure (MM)

Connection to Pillar #3: Lively, Healthy & Safe Communities

3.2. Advance the well-being of the community and its evolving needs

3.2.1: programming

3.2.2.: diversity, equity and inclusion programming/exhibits

3.2.4.: comm services master plan - recommendation #77: Continue to explore and support opportunities to create additional activities and events at Muskoka Heritage Place that are consistent with its mission statement. This includes (but is not limited to) pursuit of the greenhouse initiative, community gardens, community arts hub, revitalization of existing assets (train station, buildings, etc.), etc. The ongoing development of a long-term strategy for MHP should assist in providing direction on service levels and long-term financial requirements

3.2.6.: community events

3.2.7.: partnerships with organizations and volunteer groups

3.2.8.: indigenous community relationships

3.3. Strengthen Huntsville's thriving business community and tourism industry through continued partnership

3.3.2.: tourism destination

Goals & Objectives (Initiatives)

Goal 1: Increase Capacity

Action	Departmental Responsibility	Estimated Cost & Funding Source	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Beyond
<p>1.1 Evaluate MHP’s current digital state to establish benchmarks for future evaluation methods.</p> <p>1.1.1 In-house data review by Collections Coordinator and Digital Marketing Coordinator</p>	MHP, Marketing	<p>In-house</p> <p>As part of Collections Coordinator 2025 work plan</p>	x						
<p>1.2 Engage staff to support digital content creation/digitize collection to help build capacity</p> <p>1.2.1 Support professional development and training related to digital creation</p> <p>1.2.2 Digitization student/intern and volunteers to photodocument collection</p> <p>1.2.3 Encourage interdepartmental collaboration with Marketing and GIS by dedicating student/intern to MHP digital content creation (0.1 FTE)</p>	MHP, HR, Marketing, GIS	<p>\$21,600 (\$19.00x300hrs + MERCs) x 3 positions</p> <p>External funding (YCW, CSJ, FedNor)</p>		X	X	X	X	X	

<p>1.3 Plan and implement IT solutions for digital growth</p> <p>1.3.1 Migration to PastPerfect online/cloud</p> <p>1.3.2 Fibre optic and RFIDs throughout site</p> <p>1.3.3 Integrating AI (PastPerfect, Copilot)</p>	MHP, IT	IT budget	X	X	X				
<p>1.4 Plan and implement marketing solutions for digital growth</p> <p>1.4.1 Adapt annual marketing plan to include QR codes, hashtags, digital mailing list</p>	Marketing	As part of work plan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<p>1.5 Continue developing partnerships with local organizations and businesses to support digitization efforts</p> <p>1.5.1 Develop virtual walking tour of Muskoka Pioneer Village with Huntsville and Area Historical Society</p> <p>1.5.2 Work with Huntsville Public Library for digital component on their website</p> <p>1.5.3 Continue developing stockpile of YourTV Muskoka “Did You Know” video history shorts</p>	MHP, HAAHS, HPL	As part of work plan			X	X			

Goal 2: Engage Audiences

Action	Departmental Responsibility	Estimated Cost	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Beyond
2.1 Conduct survey to determine virtual community needs and expectations 2.1.1 Online survey	Marketing / MHP	In-house	X						
2.2 Expand digital engagement with in-person and online audiences to promote dialogue and active participation by a broader audience 2.2.1 Creation of an interactive map showcasing Pioneer Village buildings and their stories	GIS	In-house	X	X					
2.3 Marketing Plan 2.3.1 Review marketing plan to educate communities about virtual and in-person offerings at MHP 2.3.2 Target diverse and marginalized audiences	Marketing / MHP	In-house / Digital tools may have budget impact	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2.4 Engage with diverse and inclusive stories 2.4.1 Create virtual exhibits to share stories where there are gaps in sharing those experiences on site.	Marketing / MHP	In-house / Exhibit budget / External funding (Digital Museums Canada)		X	X	X	X	X	

<p>2.5 Engage marginalized/underrepresented such as people with accessibility barriers</p> <p>2.5.1 3D scan of Village buildings, Muskoka Museum and Rotary Village Station</p>	MHP, IT	<p>\$5,200 + \$650 annual hosting fee</p> <p>External Funding (e.g., Enabling Accessibility Fund)</p>		X	X	X	X	X	
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Goal 3: Create Online Education

Action	Departmental Responsibility	Estimated Cost	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Beyond
<p>3.1 Develop online learning tools as a new way to engage and teach audiences about MHP’s exhibit and collections</p> <p>3.1.1 Develop Google Arts and Culture Online/Virtual Exhibits and Virtual Tours</p> <p>3.1.2 Develop Town of Huntsville Interactive Map with hands-on activities in video and graphic form on website</p>	MHP, IT, GIS	<p>As part of Collections Coordinator work plan</p> <p>Google Arts and Culture is a free platform</p>		X	X	X			

Goal 4: Improve Access

Action	Departmental Responsibility	Estimated Cost	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Beyond
4.1 Digitize collections for greater access and preservation 4.1.1 Digitization initiatives as per priority list	MHP, IT	In-house/as part of annual work plan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
4.2 Provide opportunities for researchers and residents to access materials 4.2.1 Create in-person and online interactive exhibitions that engage audiences and provide content for marketing	MHP, IT, GIS	In-house/as part of annual work plan In-house IT and GIS apps/technology		X	X	X	X	X	X
4.3 Create a long-term plan that addresses digitizing upcoming exhibitions 4.3.1 Review and update 3-year exhibit plan to include digital offerings	MHP	In-house	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Goal 5: Evaluate and Sustain

MHP needs clear and measurable (SMART) tools to use regularly to evaluate our goals and objectives.

Below are the key performance indicators (KPIs) we are currently using and new KPIs we will implement to evaluate this Digital Strategy:

Action	Departmental Responsibility	Estimated Cost	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Beyond
5.1 Social Media and Digital Media 5.1.1 Social media analytics including: follower count, engagements, impressions, reach, video views, website visits and link clicks 5.1.2 Earned media outcomes 5.1.3 Web analytics (Google Analytics) including page views, sessions, user, pages per session/average session duration, bounce rate, devices, geographic location and conversion goals	Marketing/MHP	As per annual work plans	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
5.2 Surveys 5.2.1 Visitor and resident feedback surveys	Marketing/MHP	As per annual work plans	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
5.3 Collections 5.3.1 Amount of museum and archival collection digitized	MHP	As per annual work plans	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

and available online via PastPerfect and MHP's website									
5.4 Programming 5.4.1 Adoption rates for new in-person and virtual programs, exhibits and special events 5.4.2 Revenue generation 5.4.3 Number of external collaborations, partnerships, donations and corporate sponsorships	MHP	As per annual work plans	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
6.1 Exhibits 6.1.1 Number of online projects	MHP	As per annual work plans	X	X	X	X	X	X	X