

MUNICIPALITY OF CALLANDER

Callander Bay Heritage Museum

Strategic Plan 2026–2029

Submitted to Council for Consideration
May 2026

Preamble: Strategic Context

The Callander Bay Heritage Museum is a municipal institution. Its purpose, priorities, and use of resources must align with the direction set by Council and not operate as a separate entity pursuing its own course.

The Municipality of Callander's Strategic Plan 2025–2028 establishes the framework within which this Museum Strategic Plan is prepared. Council's adopted vision to grow thoughtfully while preserving Callander's natural charm and local character places clear obligations on all municipal services, including the museum.

The Strategic Plan's governing lens is Retention and Attraction: every action item is evaluated for its contribution to keeping existing residents and drawing new ones. The museum is explicitly named within that framework.

Two specific commitments in the Strategic Plan 2025–2028 directly govern this document:

Council Priority	What It Requires of the Museum
Celebrate Our History (Years 1–2)	Find ways to incorporate Callander's history into the built environment, including walking tours, interpretive signage, and educational programming that connects residents to local heritage.
An Aligned Vision (Completed 2025)	A service delivery review was completed in 2025 to assess staffing capacity and alignment with Council's goals. This Strategic Plan is the direct outcome of that review, translating its findings into a four-year direction for the museum.

This Strategic Plan responds directly to those commitments. It reflects the findings of the 2025 service delivery review, input gathered through a community survey conducted in early 2026 (117 respondents), and a review of Callander's own planning history, including the 2012 Downtown Waterfront Revitalization Master Design Strategy, which established logging, nautical, and railway heritage as the defining design themes for the downtown core.

The Strategic Plan also reflects the municipality's broader values of Preservation, Community Well-being, and Community Spirit as defined in the 2025–2028 plan. Heritage programming that builds pride, draws residents together, and honours Callander's origins is a direct expression of them.

Identity: Vision and Mission

Vision

Our vision is to cultivate a dynamic community hub where Callander's heritage is celebrated, inspiring curiosity, community pride, and igniting a lasting passion for history in all who visit.

We aspire to be the definitive home for Callander's story, from its logging and railway heritage to the Dionne Quintuplets, offering experiences that are authentic, place-based, and uniquely ours.

Mission

The Callander Bay Heritage Museum preserves and interprets the stories and history of Callander. We bring our history to life through the people, artifacts, and historical locations that define our community. We foster meaningful connections across generations, encouraging pride, belonging, and a deeper understanding of our shared past.

Central to that work is telling the three chapters that define Callander's origins: the logging economy that built it, the water and rail systems that connected it, and the Quintuplets story that made it known to the world.

1. Strategic Diagnosis

The Opportunity

The Callander Bay Heritage Museum has served this community with dedication. The Dionne Quintuplets story, one of the most remarkable in Canadian history, has been a meaningful part of that work, and it remains part of Callander's identity. This strategy does not set that work aside. It builds on it.

The strategic opportunity is to tell the broader story of how Callander was built. The logging, the waterways, the railway, and the communities that grew around them represent a rich and largely untold heritage that only this museum is positioned to claim.

What the Community Is Telling Us

A community survey conducted in early 2026 provides direct evidence that residents are ready for this direction. Key findings:

Survey Finding	What It Signals
Rail & Early Settlement scored 4.0/5 as a 'Most Callander' story, the highest of any category	Community members already see this as core to Callander's identity, not a secondary theme.
Logging/working waterfront scored 3.8/5, ahead of the Dionne Quintuplets (3.4/5)	The industrial heritage story resonates strongly, and residents rate it as more distinctly 'Callander' than the Quintuplets.
64% of respondents said the Quintuplets should be 'a chapter in the broader Callander story'; only	There is clear community appetite for exactly the repositioning this strategy proposes.

Survey Finding	What It Signals
13% said they should be the central, permanent focus	
'More exhibits on Callander's history' was the top-rated improvement priority (3.8/5)	Residents want more local history, not less. The demand is there.

A Direction Already Established

This strategy also builds on a foundation that already exists. The Municipality's 2012 Downtown Waterfront Revitalization Master Design Strategy explicitly named the nautical, logging, and railway heritage as Callander's primary design themes, providing the basis for streetscape design, signage, lighting, and public realm character throughout the downtown core.

The museum telling the story of logging, water, and rail is not a departure from Callander's established identity. It is the museum finally aligning with it.

The Strategic Choice

The museum's next chapter is to become the place that tells the full story of how Callander was built, giving the logging, waterway, and railway heritage the depth and permanence it has long deserved, while honouring the Quintuplets and other stories within that larger narrative.

2. What Success Looks Like

By 2029, the Callander Bay Heritage Museum will be recognized as the authoritative institution on Callander's logging, water, and rail heritage, a museum that explains how this town was built, not merely that it existed.

Success is defined along four dimensions:

Dimension	Definition of Success
Position	The museum is recognized as the authority on Callander's industrial and settlement heritage, a position no nearby institution can credibly challenge.
Relevance	Steady visitation from school groups, regional heritage tourists, and residents, with visitation patterns that are not dependent on event-driven spikes.
Integration	The museum functions as a cultural anchor within the broader community, connected to the library, community spaces, and the downtown waterfront.
Fiscal Contribution	The museum supports Callander's broader municipal strategy by attracting

Dimension	Definition of Success
	families, building community identity, and strengthening the case for Callander as a destination.

Success means being distinct, chosen, and remembered for something only Callander can credibly claim.

3. Strategic Focus

Our Focus

The museum will concentrate its interpretive, educational, and operational resources in the following areas:

Primary Story: Three Chapters, One Town

Callander's story unfolds across three distinct chapters, each representing a different era and a different way this community made its mark. Together, they form the interpretive spine of the museum.

Chapter 1: Logging and the Working Waterfront

- The logging and timber transport history of Callander and the surrounding region
- Water-based industrial systems: log booms, Callander Bay, the waterways that moved timber to market
- The lived experience of working communities shaped by the northern forest
- The economic foundation that explains why Callander exists at all

Chapter 2: Water and Rail

- Rail-based infrastructure: the railway expansion tied to the timber economy
- The 'train wars' that shaped regional economic development
- How Callander Bay and the rail network connected this community to markets and to the wider world
- The systems that transformed a logging camp into a town

Chapter 3: The Dionne Quintuplets

- The birth of the world's first surviving quintuplets in Callander in 1934
- The moment Callander became known to the world
- The social and cultural story of a working northern town suddenly at the centre of global attention
- A nationally significant chapter that belongs in its full community context

Primary Audiences

- School groups: Ontario curriculum-aligned programming that connects students to

regional industrial history

- Regional heritage tourists: visitors seeking authentic, place-specific stories
- Callander residents: people seeking connection to local identity and community origins
- Researchers and storytellers focused on labour history, land use, and northern Ontario industry

The museum will operate as a place-based institution rooted in Callander's own origins and geography.

The Core Story + Context Model

The primary narrative spans three chapters: logging, water and rail, and the Dionne Quintuplets. Together, they tell the complete story of how Callander was built, connected, and known.

Other important stories will be incorporated as context and texture that enrich the core narrative, not as competing centres of gravity.

Story Layer	Role in the Museum
Logging, Water and Rail, and the Dionne Quintuplets	The three chapters that form the interpretive spine of the museum. Each represents a distinct era: the logging economy that built the town, the rail and waterway systems that connected it, and the Quintuplets story that put Callander on the world map.
The waterways as foundation	Geographic and historical context: Callander Bay and the river system as the original routes of movement, trade, and access that made the logging economy possible, and that continue to define the community's relationship to place.
Settlement patterns and community life	Structural context: why people came to this place, how the working community was organized, and the social fabric that the logging economy created.
The Dionne Quintuplets	An essential chapter. A significant and nationally known story that unfolded within a working lumber town. Presented with the care it deserves as part of the full Callander story.
Lake, bay, and waterfront life	Living context. The recreational, social, and environmental relationship between residents and Callander Bay that continues to define the community today.

This model does not diminish any part of Callander's history. It organizes those stories in a way that gives visitors and residents a coherent sense of how this place came to be.

4. Strategic Boundaries

Staying Focused

A clear story told well is more valuable than a broad story told thinly. In order to do justice to all three chapters of Callander's history, the museum will maintain clear priorities:

- New exhibits and acquisitions will be evaluated for how they contribute to the full Callander narrative, not simply for their individual interest
- Programming decisions will favour depth and consistency over short-term event-driven activities that don't build lasting relevance
- Resources will be concentrated where they strengthen the museum's core story and institutional identity

5. Competitive Differentiation

What Makes Us Different

The Callander Bay Heritage Museum will differentiate by doing what no nearby institution can: explaining how Callander actually worked.

The strategic distinction is methodological, not simply topical. Rather than displaying outcomes, artifacts in cases and photographs on walls, the museum will make invisible systems visible. It will show process.

What Other Museums Do	What We Will Do
Display outcomes: artifacts and photos	Show process: how systems worked, step by step
Describe what happened	Explain why it happened and how the pieces connected
Present heritage as nostalgia	Present heritage as mechanism: how land, labour, and infrastructure created this town
Ask visitors to admire the past	Help visitors understand the past

The Interpretive Approach

Visitors will understand:

- How logs moved from the northern forest to Callander Bay
- How log booms were assembled and floated across the bay to processing
- How jackladders lifted timber onto rail cars
- How the railway expansion was tied to, and in some cases fought over, timber control
- How a working town grew around this system of forest, water, and rail

This is not description. It is explanation. Explanation builds the kind of understanding that creates return visits, word-of-mouth recommendations, and educational value that schools will schedule and participate in.

6. Core Capabilities

To deliver this strategy well, the museum will build on existing strengths while developing specific capabilities that allow the full Callander story to come alive for visitors.

Capability	What It Means in Practice
Interpretive Storytelling	Staff and volunteers skilled at bringing industrial history to life, helping visitors understand how systems worked and why they mattered.
Process-Based Exhibition Design	Exhibits that show how one thing led to another, how forest became timber, timber became trade, and trade became community.
Visual and Spatial Explanation	Photographs, diagrams, maps of log routes and rail lines, making the geography and mechanics of Callander's history visible and legible.
Oral History and Lived Experience	Collecting and integrating community memory, the stories of people who worked these systems, or whose families did, before those connections are lost.
Curriculum-Aligned Programming	Structured educational programs tied to Ontario curriculum expectations, making the museum a destination for school groups across the region.

Building these capabilities does not mean abandoning what the museum already does well. It means giving staff and volunteers a clear direction for where to invest their energy and creativity.

7. Decision Framework

The Governing Question

All significant decisions, new acquisitions, new exhibits, programming choices, partnerships, and marketing investments will be evaluated against a single governing question:

Does this help us tell the story of how Callander was built, connected, and known?

This question applies to:

- New artifact acquisitions
- New or revised exhibits
- Educational programming
- Community partnerships and co-presentations
- Grant applications and funding priorities
- Marketing and communications

If the answer is unclear, it is worth pausing. Clarity about what the museum is building toward is more valuable than saying yes to everything.

Relationship to the Municipal Strategic Plan

The Heritage Museum's decisions should also be evaluated for alignment with the Municipality of Callander's Strategic Plan 2025–2028. Museum programming and investments that support the following Council priorities will receive preference:

- Family attraction and retention: curriculum-aligned school programming
- Community identity and belonging: exhibits connecting residents to Callander's origins
- Community connection: programming and partnerships that link the museum to the library, community centre, and downtown core
- Tourism by-product: heritage visitation from North Bay and regional visitors

8. The Visitor Experience

What Visitors Will Learn

Callander exists because of logging. The forest created jobs. Water moved the timber. Railways connected to markets. Communities grew around this work.

What Visitors Will See

- Photographs and documentation of log booms floating across Callander Bay
- A clear, visual explanation of how jackladders worked and why they mattered
- Maps and diagrams showing how railway expansion was tied to timber control and regional markets
- Artifacts and tools that show how the physical work of logging actually got done
- Stories of the 'train wars', the competitive battles over rail access that shaped regional economic history
- The Dionne Quintuplets presented as a significant national story that unfolded within this working industrial town
- The settlement patterns and community life that grew around the logging economy, the people behind the industry

The Experience Standard

Visitors leave with a specific understanding: not just that Callander has a history, but why this town is here, how it functioned, and what the people who built it actually did. That depth of understanding is what creates memorable, shareable, and educationally valuable museum experiences.

9. Four-Year Direction

This strategy is not a single project. It unfolds over time, each phase building confidence, capability, and momentum for the next. The pace will be shaped by resourcing, volunteer capacity, and the natural rhythm of institutional change.

Phase 1: Alignment and Planning (2026)

PRIORITY DIRECTION

- Formally adopt this plan at the Committee level and share with Council for endorsement
- Establish the governing question as the active guide for programming and acquisition conversations
- Review existing exhibits with the Core Story model in mind, understanding what the museum has, what it is telling, and where the gaps are
- Begin conversations with educators and curriculum contacts about school programming possibilities
- Identify community members with living connections to the logging and railway era, and begin capturing those stories before they are lost

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

Committee, staff, and volunteers share a common understanding of where the museum is heading and why. The governing question is in use.

Phase 2: Programming and Storytelling (2027)

PRIORITY DIRECTION

- Develop and launch initial school programming connecting students to Callander's industrial heritage
- Refresh at least one exhibit area to reflect the full Callander story, logging, rail, waterfront, and community life together
- Establish oral history materials as a permanent, accessible part of the museum's collection
- Clarify how the Dionne Quintuplets are presented within the full story, with the care and prominence they deserve as an essential chapter

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

Visitors begin to experience a more complete story of Callander. School groups have a reason to visit. The museum's narrative direction is visible.

Phase 3: Depth and Community Connection (2028)

PRIORITY DIRECTION

- Continue building out the full story across the museum's exhibit spaces
- Expand school and community programming based on what has worked in Phase 2

- Strengthen the museum's role as a community gathering place: through events, lectures, and walking tours that connect the museum to the broader downtown and waterfront
- Explore partnerships with regional heritage organizations and tourism networks

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

The museum is recognized by residents, visitors, and school groups as the place that tells the full story of how Callander was built. Programming is active and growing.

Phase 4: Review and Next Chapter (2029)

PRIORITY DIRECTION

- Conduct a formal review of progress against this plan, including visitation, programming, and community feedback
- Report to Council on outcomes and alignment with the municipality's strategic priorities
- Identify what the next four-year direction should be, informed by what has been learned

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

The museum has a clear record of what it set out to do and what it achieved. Council has the information needed to support the next phase of investment and direction.

10. Strategic Rationale

Benefits of This Strategy

This strategic direction produces a set of compounding advantages, each reinforcing the others.

Benefit	Why It Matters
Authentic, defensible position	No nearby institution can challenge Callander's ownership of the logging, water, and rail story. This position is durable.
Long-term staying power	The primary story is not dependent on anniversaries or event-driven interest. It grows stronger as the museum invests in it.
Clear educational value	Ontario curriculum alignment creates a steady, fundable school program market that is independent of general tourism fluctuations.
Laser-focused spending	A governing question eliminates ambiguity in acquisition, programming, and exhibit decisions. Resources concentrate where they compound.
Support for Callander's municipal goals	The museum directly supports the Municipality's strategy: family attraction, community identity, and a stronger and more connected community.

Required Trade-offs

Telling Callander's full story well requires making choices about focus. This strategy asks the museum to:

- Prioritize depth over breadth, doing fewer things with greater quality and coherence
- Maintain focus when new opportunities arise that are interesting but would pull energy away from the museum's core direction
- Invest in telling fewer stories with greater depth, recognizing that coherence and clarity serve visitors better than comprehensiveness

This strategy chooses depth over breadth and understanding over nostalgia. It positions the museum as the institution that tells the full story of why Callander exists, a genuine community asset that grows in value over time.

11. Governance and Accountability

Ownership and Reporting

This Strategic Plan is a document of the Callander Bay Heritage Museum Committee, submitted to Council for endorsement. Implementation accountability rests with:

Role	Responsibility
Museum Committee	Overall governance of the strategy; annual review and reporting to Council
Museum Staff / Curator	Day-to-day implementation; applying the governing question to operational decisions
Council Liaison	Ensuring alignment between museum strategy and municipal strategic plan; escalation point for resourcing decisions
Municipal Staff	Ensuring museum planning aligns with broader municipal facility and community space decisions

Annual Review

The Committee will conduct an annual strategy review each Q1, assessing:

- Progress against phase milestones
- Alignment of operational decisions with the governing question
- Visitation and programming metrics
- Resourcing adequacy for the current phase

A brief written summary of this review will be submitted to Council annually. It does not require a full report, but Council should be able to confirm, year over year, that the museum is executing the strategy it adopted.