

Staff Report

Report To: Community Development, Tourism and Culture Advisory Committee

Report From: Tim Simmonds, City Manager

Meeting Date: June 11, 2021

Report Code: CM-21-012

Subject: Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative

Recommendations:

THAT in consideration of Staff Report CM-21-012 respecting Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, the Community Development, Tourism and Culture Advisory Committee recommends that City Council receive this report for information purposes.

Highlights:

- The City of Owen Sound has a long history of taking advantage of our natural features when developing shoreline amenities.
- Almost 2 km of Georgian Bay shoreline runs adjacent to City amenities.
- The membership in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative supports the recent Council endorsed Climate Adaptation Plan that works to embed a culture of sustainability within the City.
- The City has an opportunity to gain greater climate and economic information and learn best practices.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

[Strategic Plan](#) Priority: Prosperous City - KR2 - Develop a framework to attract key industry sector(s) for economic growth and investment that are matched to Owen Sound's economic strengths

Background:

The City of Owen Sound has a long history of taking advantage of our natural features when developing amenities. This includes Kelso Park on the west side of Owen Sound, a major attraction in the city, the host of the Summer Folk Music Festival, and the harbor walkway and trail along the east shoreline. Altogether, there are approximately 1,800m of shoreline that runs adjacent to City amenities.

Due to record high water levels starting in 2018 plus heavy wind and storm events, the city has experienced significant shoreline erosion and damage to the city's paved pathways and trails along the edge of the water. In 2020, Staff completed approximately 300m of shoreline protection work. The work consisted of enhanced designs incorporating stackable armour stone to form protective walls and simple designs that specified heavy gabion stone placed along the shoreline.

In 2021, the city will continue with its shoreline protection activities with slightly modified designs for the stackable armour stone walls.

Approximately 120m of shoreline directly adjacent to one of the major hotels in the city will be lined with stackable armour stone creating a beautiful shoreline walkway with water views of the bay. Staff is also rehabilitating another 175 m of shoreline with the use of the heavy gabion stone.

What is the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Initiative

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative is a coalition of mayors and other local officials advocating for the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. The organization was founded in May 2003 by Mayor Richard M. Daley of Chicago, joined shortly thereafter by Toronto Mayor David Miller, the founding Canadian Chair. The Cities Initiative has more than 130 member cities in the United States and Canada demonstrating the stewardship of local elected officials across the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence basin and a responsibility at the local level to enhance and sustain the Lakes and River.

Importance of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence to Mayors

Mayors in the basin have a direct interest and stake in the sustainability of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence. As the world's largest freshwater resource and an international treasure, they are essential to the continued vitality of the cities, townships, villages and counties along the shores and in the surrounding watershed.

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence support countless recreational, commercial, tourist and cultural activities for citizens and visitors; drive economic development and improve the economic value of shoreline communities; support critical aquatic and coastal ecosystems; provide fresh drinking water for millions of people; and support agricultural and industrial activities.

Why a Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative?

Despite such a significant stake in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence, mayors did not have an active voice in the development and implementation of policies and programs in the past. The Cities Initiative provides an avenue for the participation of local government in decision-making related to the Lakes and River as well as a network for restoration and protection best practices sharing between cities.

With the active involvement of local leaders from across the basin we can ensure that the mayors have a seat at the table in policy and decision-making about the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. The Cities Initiative has been a key participant in the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration in the United States, has been involved in the review of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, and is expanding its role in the Canada Ontario Agreement Respecting the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem and the St. Lawrence Plan.

Protecting, improving and preserving the Lakes and River are critical to ensuring public and environmental health as well as the economic prosperity of all Great Lakes and St. Lawrence communities. The Cities Initiative supports local efforts towards these goals through its overarching themes of water quality, water conservation, and waterfront vitality.

Analysis:

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative membership supports the recent Council endorsed Climate Adaptation Plan that works to embed a culture of sustainability within the City.

Adaptation is an essential response to climate change. It complements mitigation efforts and focuses on reducing the negative impacts of climate change. Adaptation and mitigation are not mutually exclusive, and some actions will benefit both mitigation and adaptation. Even with mitigation

efforts underway, the City needs to build resilience to ensure the adaptability of infrastructure and services to climate changes.

[The Corporate Climate Change Adaptation Plan](#) recommends specific measures to enhance the City's ability to cope with the impacts and risks associated with climate change.

The plan identified 46 Climatic threats. The staff assessed the threats for vulnerability (Low, Medium, and High) to understand how sensitive the current infrastructure, assets, and services are and their current capacity to adapt. Six of the 46 are in the HIGH category and directly related to water and the Great Lakes -

- Increased water levels in great lakes accelerating shoreline erosion, reducing natural infrastructure, and increasing maintenance requirements
- Riverine or overland flooding could result in public emergencies and/or evacuations
- Riverine or overland flooding, resulting in disruption or damage to City-owned assets (roads, underground infrastructure, natural infrastructure)

Mayors with interest in the Great Lakes, have agreed to:

1. Mayors will work jointly to advance the restoration and protection of the Great Lakes ecosystem; Seek partnerships and collaborate with other levels of government, various commissions and panels, and other organizations involved in Great Lakes issues;
2. Implement and advance existing mayoral initiatives concerning the Great Lakes;
3. Call upon the U.S. Congress and Canadian Parliament to appropriate funds for the development, by an independent panel of science and policy experts, which include the member Mayors and deliver a detailed plan for the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes. This Plan will be updated as various issues arise and will serve as a blueprint to guide agreed-upon future legislative and appropriations activities that restore and protect the Great Lakes ecosystem;
4. Identify, evaluate. highlight and share information with each other about successful local initiatives that protect and restore the Great

Lakes ecosystem while encouraging the vitality of Great Lakes communities;

5. Continue to meet, communicate and share ideas about the various issues the member cities are experiencing in order to advance the much needed knowledge, understanding and solutions of said issues, with the goal of creating as expeditiously as possible, comprehensive solutions.

Member municipalities range in population size and include some of North America's largest cities to small towns

More than 125 member municipalities participate in the 'Initiative'. A complete listing of members is available via this [link](#).

As noted in a [press release](#) issued in October 2020, titled, *Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative supports new Canadian stimulus program*, the 'Initiative' does proactively advocate and identify the impact that the Great Lakes has on the Canadian economy. Being a member of this organization could lead to greater information sharing and best practices for the City of Owen Sound.

The [2019 annual report](#) is attached for reference and information.

Financial Implications:

The Cities Initiative offers a 25 per cent discount on first-year membership dues. Dues are calculated by population. Owen Sound is in the 10,000 – 25,000. Annual dues are \$2,750. First-year dues will be approximately \$2,100 after the 25 per cent discount.

Communication Strategy:

A media advisory will be prepared and distributed.

Consultation:

City Manager's Office

Attachments:

Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative Annual Report 2019

Recommended by:

Tim Simmonds, City Manager

Reviewed by:

N/A

Submission approved by:

Tim Simmonds, City Manager

For more information on this report, please contact Tim Simmonds, City Manager at tsimmonds@owensound.ca or ext. 1210.