



## Staff Report

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**Report To:** River District Board of Management  
**Report From:** Viveca Gravel, River District Coordinator  
**Meeting Date:** January 8, 2025  
**Report Code:** CS-25-003  
**Subject:** 2025 Events, Activations & Promotions Plan

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### Recommendations:

THAT in consideration of Staff Report CS-25-003 respecting 2025 Events, Activations & Promotions Plan, the River District Board of Management:

1. Approves the 2024 Events, Activation, and Promotions as outlined in the report; and
2. Appoints River District Board Members to the Membership Event working group for 2025.

### Highlights:

- The River District Action Plan establishes a plan for Branding, Management, Experience Development and Promotion in the River District as part of creating and engaging space and bringing more people to the River District.
- This report presents the outline of events and animations proposed for the 2025 year.
- Budgets have been estimated for each event, revised to allow for a promotions-specific line item.
- This report takes 2024 feedback into consideration in its execution.

### River District Action Plan Alignment:

#### River District Experience Development

- Strategic Objective: Create an engaging space.

- Recommendation: Continue to invest in the animation and activation of the River District.
- Tactic:
  - a. Encourage animation of the River District;
  - b. Encourage new and continued programming; and
  - c. Encourage new activities and attractions to engage visitors and locals.

### **River District Promotion**

- Strategic Objective: Attract people to the River District.
- Recommendation: Follow a strategic, multi-layered, collaborative, and bold promotions plan for the River District.
- Tactic:
  - a. Encourage animation of the River District;
  - b. Brand RDBM Social Media accounts for alignment with the River District look and feel;
  - c. Regularly schedule social media posts;
  - d. Digital advertising. Deliver digital ad campaign to local and nearby residents in the target market;
  - e. Leverage local social media influencers;
  - f. Claim the River District Google business and Trip Advisor page.

### **Climate and Environmental Implications:**

There are no anticipated climate or environmental impacts.

### **Previous Report/Authority:**

CS-24-002 – 2024 Year End Events, Activations and Promotions Wrap Up (being presented to the board on January 8, 2025)

[CS-24-071](#) – Draft 2025 River District Budget

### **Background:**

In addition to the direction and action provided by the River District Action Plan, the joint operating agreement between the City and the River District Board of Management (RDBM) provides direction with respect to:

- Events & Activations

- Marketing & Promotions

## **8.0 EVENTS AND ACTIVATION**

8.1 City staff will work with the River District Board of Management to establish, based on the RDBM budget, a program of annual RDBM events/attractions. This event planning will be completed by the end of January each year.

8.2 City staff will work to plan, market, promote and deliver each event in accordance with the plan set and approved by the River District Board of Management.

8.3 City staff will report on the progress and do a wrap-up of each event, including financial performance, to the River District Board of Management.

## **9.0 MARKETING AND PROMOTION**

9.1 City staff will work with the River District Board of Management to establish, based on the RDBM budget, an annual plan for marketing and promotion reflecting the goals and objectives identified in the River District Action Plan.

9.2 City staff will work to implement the plan and report to the RDBM twice annually on the progress.

9.3 City staff will work with the RDBM collaboratively to implement the recommendations of the River District Action Plan subject to budget approval each year, including a Wayfinding Signage Strategy.

Two of the four pillars in the River District Action Plan are River District Experience Development and River District Promotion.

The purpose of this report is to provide recommendations regarding River District Events, Activations, and Promotions for 2025 as contemplated by the operating agreement.

### **Analysis:**

Staff have planned the River District events, activations, and promotions based on successes, feedback and lessons learned in 2024 and with the River District Action Plan in mind. The events as presented are also in line with the draft 2025 budget.

## **River District Experience Development (Events & Animation)**

### **Wheel & Ride Safety Festival**

With the success and partnerships established in 2023 and the success of the Wheel & Ride bike program in 2024, staff are proposing a similar event in 2025.

The Wheel & Ride Safety Festival

Date: May 3, 2024, a half-day event

Location: 8<sup>th</sup> Street East between 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue.

This event will be run in partnership with Owen Sound Police Services, Kiwanis Club of Owen Sound, Optimist Club of Sydenham and District, Owen Sound and District Junior Optimists, and Scenic Cycle. Like last year, Owen Sound Fire & Emergency Services and Grey County EMS will be invited to participate.

Proposed Budget - \$400

Breakdown of Expenses

- Advertising - \$300.00
- Miscellaneous - \$100.00

### **Pride Event**

The Pride Parade is run by Grey Bruce Pride and runs in June every year along 2nd Avenue East. While the road is closed, staff recommend the businesses take advantage of the crowds by putting out tables along the sidewalk and offering sales or specials should they choose. Staff will work with the organizer to optimize the benefit of the event in the River District.

Proposed Budget - \$200.00 for advertising

### **River District Blooms**

In 2024 River District Blooms saw some changes from the first year seeing a more focused approach to the installations. It is recommended that the initiative around blooms continues to be flexible and for 2025 allocate funds toward a partnership with the City on more sustainable and natural plantings in the pods at street level.

Proposed budget - \$1,000.00

## Hottest Street Sale

Date: July 12, 2025, from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Location: 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue East, 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> Street East, 9<sup>th</sup> Street East

With the ongoing success of the Hottest Street Sale in 2024, it is recommended that this event return in much the same format as last year.

Similar to last year, merchants will be located on 2nd Avenue East between 7th Street and 11th Street as well as 9th Street.

Like last year, there will be something for everyone, with a variety of different food and drink vendors and great deals from River District businesses and more.

Again, the RDBM will host the Summerfolk Stage in partnership with the Georgian Bay Folk Society, where there will be musical performances starting at 9:00 a.m. and running the duration of the entire event. Once more, the River District will partner with the Owen Sound & District Chamber of Commerce to facilitate the popular community stage and in other ways as possible.

The Hottest Street Sale will require the closure of 2nd Avenue East from 7th Street East to 11th Street East, starting at 5:00 a.m. Saturday morning. 9th Street East would also be closed from 1st Avenue East to 3rd Avenue East.

Staff continue to engage with community groups in efforts to make the event sustainable and as engaging as possible.

As in years past, there will be an open invitation for vendors/artisans to participate. The revenue from registrations will be used to increase advertising efforts, if possible.

This year, staff propose an additional fee option for small home-based businesses that are not considered artisanal or commercial.

<b>Business Type</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Fee per space</b>
River District Members	Businesses not located in the closed-off area will be assigned a spot as close as possible to their business location.	No charge

<b>Business Type</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Fee per space</b>
Artist/Artisans	Artists and artisans are welcome to exhibit in the Hottest Street Sale. However, all participants must be approved and assigned space by River District staff.	\$15.00
Non-Profit Community Group/Charity	All NFP Groups and Charities participating in the event must be approved by and assigned space by River District staff.	\$25.00
Non-River District Member Commercial	All non-members participating in the event must be approved by and assigned space by River District staff.	\$125.00
Small home-based businesses	All participants must be approved and assigned space by River District staff.	\$75.00

Proposed Budget - \$8,500.00

#### Breakdown of Expenses

- Advertising - \$3,500.00
- Entertainment - \$3,000.00
- Miscellaneous - \$1,000.00
- Rental Fees & Charges - \$2,500.00
- Insurance - \$500.00

Vendor fees have been estimated at \$2,000.00. Should the fees collected be less than budgeted, the event expenses will be reduced accordingly to stay within budget.

#### **Cars & Coffee & Concours d'Lemons**

Date: Saturday, September 13, 2025, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Location: 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue East, 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> Street East and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue West 8<sup>th</sup> Street to 9<sup>th</sup> Street.

In partnership with the Cobble Beach Concours d'Elegance, staff recommend hosting the Cars & Coffee car show event along 2nd Avenue East. Based on

the Cobble Beach schedule, the event will take place on Saturday, September 13, during the Concours d'Elegance weekend in 2025.

This event would mirror the 2024 event, with 2nd Avenue East closed from 7th to 11th Streets with all intersections remaining open for the duration.

Concours d'Lemons will continue to use the space along 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue West and run similarly to 2024. Staff will work closely with Hagerty on the execution of that portion of the event.

Cobble Beach has already indicated that they would like to move forward with this event in 2025.

Proposed Budget - \$1,500.00

Breakdown of Expenses

Advertising - \$900.00

Entertainment - \$400.00

Prizing - \$200.00

### **Trick-or-Treat Trail**

Date: Saturday, October 25, 2025

Location: Entire River District Area

Staff recommends hosting the event again, where each business is encouraged to offer trick-or-treating on Saturday, October 25, 2025, during regular business hours.

Staff will collect the list of participating businesses, create a trick-or-treating map, and promote the event over social media, encouraging parents to bring their children to the River District on that day.

Each business would be responsible for its treats and any décor associated with its business. No street closure is required as this would be during daylight hours, and parents are encouraged to be with children using signalized intersections and pedestrian crossings only.

Proposed Budget - \$400.00

Breakdown of Expenses

Advertising - \$300.00

Prizing - \$100.00

## **Holiday Magic**

Date: Saturday, November 15, 2025

Event starts at 4 p.m.

Parade 5 p.m.

Lighting 7 p.m. – after the parade

Location: Entire River District Area

Holiday Magic is again proposed in conjunction with the annual Kiwanis Santa Claus Parade and lighting of the Festival of Northern Lights.

The Kiwanis Santa Clause Parade is planned for Saturday, November 15, 2025, at 5:00 p.m. The annual Festival of Northern Lights Opening Ceremonies will also happen on November 15, later in the evening.

It is proposed that we repeat the successful River District Holiday Magic event in 2025.

The event is proposed to begin November 15 at 4:00 p.m. with the traditional road closures of 2nd Avenue East from 8th to 18th Street East and 3rd Avenue East from 8th to 11th Street East.

2025 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kiwanis Club of Owen Sound. There have been preliminary discussions about adding an element to the evening events to celebrate the occasion. Further information will be provided to the RDBM later in the year.

The following would be duplicated from the 2024 event:

- Decorated windows (see Holiday Window Painting/Decorating);
- Entertainers/Buskers;
- Warming stations;
- Photo Booth;
- Select food vendors selling food varieties not currently available in the River District, such as cotton candy, roasted chestnuts, popcorn, and grab-and-go items; and
- River District businesses would be encouraged to decorate their stores and offer sale items for holiday shopping and stay open into the evening for shoppers after the parade and lights.

This event marks the start of the Holiday Shopping Passport & window decorating contests.



It is proposed that street hockey also be included as part of Holiday Magic in the River District in cooperation with the City's HockeyFest 2025 Event. The timing and location of the road hockey may occur early in the day. Staff recommends supporting and partnering with the City in this initiative.

Proposed Budget - \$3,600.00

#### Breakdown of Expenses

Advertising - \$2,000.00

Entertainment - \$400.00

Branded Instant Photo Booth - \$1,000.00

Miscellaneous - \$200.00

### **Moonlight Madness**

Date: Friday, December 5, 2025, beginning at 5 p.m. – 9 p.m.

Businesses will be encouraged to offer specials and promotions in-store and activate their stores in some way to entice shoppers to spend the evening in the River District. All participating businesses will be included in the event's marketing and promotion efforts.

In addition to the shopping initiative, local choirs and bands will be invited to perform within the River District. Fire tables will be available at designated spots, creating a warming station and inviting space.

Staff recommends duplicating the successful artisan market at the Farmers' Market, bringing in select vendors for beverages and handmade gifts.

Proposed Budget - \$4,400.00

#### Breakdown of Expenses

Advertising - \$3,000.00

Entertainment – \$900.00

Miscellaneous - \$500.00

The Holiday Artisan Market will generate additional funds by requiring a fee for all vendor booths and is self-funded. There have been preliminary discussions around an external group running the market in partnership with the River District.

### **River District Promotions**

#### **Locals Love It Here**

Dates: January, May, June, August

The River District Action Plan outlines the implementation of a Locals Love It Here promotion. In 2023, the Locals Love It Here brand became an umbrella campaign with several initiatives.

Staff recommends continuing to expand this campaign into 2025, focusing predominantly on the celebration of local businesses.

Staff would work in partnership with Owen Sound Tourism on the execution of an ambassador program, turning local business owners into the best tourism guides.

Locals Love It Here budget would also be allocated to Shop Local campaigns in the events off seasons such as January, February, April, and October each targeted to demographics outlined in the River District Action Plan and around how to live your best life in the River District.

Proposed Budget - \$2,000.00

Breakdown of Expenses

- Ambassador Program - \$1,000.00
- Off season promotional campaigns - \$1,000.00

### **Just Say Yes**

Date: February 14, 2025

A collaborative event between the City of Owen Sound and the River District where a wedding event at City Hall takes place on Valentine's Day as a kind of in-and-out wedding pop-up.

This event would continue to run on February 14, 2025. This event had an extensive positive reach in 2023 and 2024, and twelve (12) marriages took place between 9:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. The benefit to the River District is that it gets promoted as a wedding destination. This benefits businesses that could be involved in weddings, such as salons, spas, and restaurants.

2025 brings a special opportunity because the event runs on a Friday, making the possibility for receptions at local businesses higher. Businesses will continue to be encouraged to get involved in some capacity.

Proposed Budget - \$500.00 (pre-approved in 2024)

## Breakdown of Expenses

- Advertising - \$350.00
- Miscellaneous - \$150.00

Staff also recommend that this event be pre-approved at the same budget for 2026 so that planning can take place starting in late 2025.

## **River District Best Pizza**

Dates: March 3 to March 27, 2025

Scones of the River District continues to be a fun and engaging promotion; however, with the event having run for three years, staff recommend changing the focus to Pizza every other year. 2025 would be the first year for River District Best Pizza, and conceptually, it is the same as Scones of the River District. Each participating business presents it's best slice, and the community votes for it's favourite for a chance to win River District Gift Certificates. The winning business also benefits from a small promotional campaign celebrating them as the best.

The Scones trophy is quite large and can accommodate pizza's by leveraging the other side.

Proposed Budget - \$600.00

## Breakdown of Expenses

- Advertising - \$300.00
- Prizing - \$200.00
- Miscellaneous - \$100.00

## **Warmest Seats on the Street Contest**

Date: November 4 to 13, 2025

Starting November 4, 2025, a radio contest to win the "Warmest Seats on the Street" would begin. The winners of this radio contest will win premium seats for the Santa Claus Parade on November 15. These comfortable seats would be covered by a tent with an unobstructed view of the parade. In addition to their "Warmest Seats," the family would also receive a prize pack consisting of a River District gift certificate and possible River District business merchandise. The "Warmest Seat" contest would be sponsored by one or several businesses to circumvent costs associated with the contest.

The contest would close on November 13, with the announcement on November 13.

Proposed Budget – All financial implications for this contest will be attributed to the Holiday Magic event.

### **Holiday Window Painting/Decorating**

Date: November 15 to December 14, 2025

Starting on November 15, 2025, River District businesses will be encouraged to participate in a holiday window painting/decorating contest. Each participating business will be provided with a QR code to post in the window, which will link to a voting platform. Guests to the River District will be invited to vote (by following the QR code or going online) until December 14 for their favourite window display. The business owner with the most votes will win a \$500 Cobble Beach Gift Card. One entrant will be randomly selected from the voters and announced on December 15; this winner will win a River District gift certificate for \$100. This animation initiative will help to beautify the River District for the holiday season. In addition, it will create a sense of community for businesses and guests alike and involve guests in the River District holiday spirit.

Proposed Budget - \$800.00

#### **Breakdown of Expenses**

- Advertising - \$150.00
- Materials - \$50.00
- Prizing - \$600.00

### **Holiday Shopping Passports**

Date: Date: November 15 to December 14, 2025

In 2024, a holiday shopping passport was used to encourage patrons to shop at more than one store in the River District during the holiday season, as well as promote holiday shopping. For 2024, it is recommended that this initiative be repeated. Interested businesses would provide a small item at a minimum of \$25.00 value and a gift certificate for \$25.00 to include in a gift basket, and their name would be included on a passport.

Guests to the River District would collect a minimum of five stickers (stickers provided to participating businesses to be placed on the passport when a guest makes a purchase). Once a minimum of five stickers are collected,

guests to the River District could then submit their passports to City Hall or any participating location.

It is proposed that this initiative be launched on the evening of the Santa Claus Parade on November 15, 2025, having volunteers hand out passports as well as offer passports to participating businesses to encourage people to shop that day. This initiative would end on December 14 with a draw for the winner on December 15 from the submitted passports. The winner would then take home the gift basket and \$700.00 in gift certificates.

Proposed Budget - \$1,000.00

Breakdown of Expenses

- Materials - \$700.00
- Prizing - \$100.00
- Advertising - \$150.00
- Miscellaneous - \$50.00

### **New Business Welcome Initiative**

2024 was the first year for this welcome initiative, and it was very positive. Staff recommend allocating a portion of the River District promotional budget to new businesses. In addition to a welcome post on social media and mention in the monthly newsletter, staff would run a short promotion for each new business on social media that would include photos, location, hours of operation, and contact details. Each new business welcome promotion would be budgeted at \$50.00. Staff recommends the RDBM approve staff to reallocate additional budget from other Events and Activations should the need arise to promote more businesses than is budgeted if budget is available.

Proposed Budget - \$600.00

### **Business Led Initiatives**

The budget allocated to business led initiatives in 2024 was a great value to both staff and businesses. Businesses often approach staff about possible promotions for various events. This initiative would allow for the allocation of budget to business-led events/initiatives/activations first come, first served, and to a maximum of \$200.00 each.

Each initiative will have to include a minimum of five (5) participating businesses. All funds will be managed through staff. The expectation would be that the businesses take on responsibility for organizing and executing the

events with support from staff in terms of promotion and ensuring the River District brand standards are being adhered to.

Proposed Budget - \$1,000.00

### **Annual Promotional Materials and General Advertising**

Over the last few years, staff have leveraged the Holiday Magic budget for purchases such as brochures, rack cards, signage, and annual print advertising plans. Since there are now a few years of available data on costs, staff have readjusted the budget into two separate line items. This budget is recommended to cover all the items listed above and no longer affect the Holiday Magic budget.

Proposed Budget - \$4,000.00

### **Website Support**

As part of the ongoing hosting and maintenance of [owensoundriverdistrict.ca](http://owensoundriverdistrict.ca), staff suggests allocating a budget to the annual plan.

Proposed Budget - \$1,300.00

### **Feedback Collection**

Staff will circulate an opportunity for feedback from businesses in the newsletter following each event. This feedback will be used to help determine success from a business owner's perspective.

Staff will also circulate feedback opportunities through QR Codes, links and write in methods to attendees following the events to collect data that will help in future event planning.

### **City of Owen Sound Events & Activations**

In addition to the events noted above, staff will work with the City of Owen Sound on the promotion and support of:

- Snowen Sound Frolics
- Savour Owen Sound
- Mid Week Music
- the Salmon Run
- other events and activations within the River District to ensure additional promotion where available.

### **River District Membership Celebration**

The membership celebration is an annual tradition that celebrates the membership as a community and allows them to celebrate each other and network. Staff recommends continuing this celebration in 2025 while maintaining the budget line as it has been in the past. Efforts will be made to find cost savings where possible. Staff requests that a small working group of board members be assembled as in previous years and ask that the directors volunteer at the River District Board of Membership meeting held on January 8, 2025. The working group and block captains would be tasked with the physical distribution of invitations.

Proposed Budget - \$5,000.00

### **Financial Implications:**

The proposed River District Marketing and Events budget is \$31,500. The below table shows the proposed events, activations, and promotions as outlined in this report.

The River District Membership Celebration is its own budgetary line item of \$5,000.00 and is not reflected in the \$31,500.00.

<b>2025 Events &amp; Promotions</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Proposed Budget</b>
Wheel & Ride	Proposed	\$400.00
Pride	Proposed	\$200.00
River District Blooms	Proposed	\$1,000.00
Hottest Street Sale	Proposed	\$8,500.00
Cars & Coffee & Concours d'Lemons	Proposed	\$1,500.00
Trick-or-Treat Trail	Proposed	\$400.00
Holiday Magic	Proposed	\$3,600.00
Moonlight Madness	Proposed	\$4,400.00
Locals Love It Here	Proposed	\$2,000.00
Just Say Yes	Approved in 2024	\$500.00
River District Best Pizza	Proposed	\$500.00

<b>2025 Events &amp; Promotions</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Proposed Budget</b>
Warmest Seat on the Street	Proposed	Absorbed under the Holiday Magic budget
Holiday Window Decorating Contest	Proposed	\$800.00
Holiday Shopping Passports	Proposed	\$800.00
New Business Welcome Initiative	Proposed	\$600.00
Business Led Initiatives	Proposed	\$1,000.00
Annual Promotional Materials and General Advertising	Proposed	\$4,000.00
Website Support	Proposed	\$1,300.00
River District Membership Celebration	Proposed	\$5,000.00

Total River District Events, Activations and Promotional Budget    \$31,500.00

Total Allocated Budget Proposed    \$31,500.00

Membership Celebration Proposed Budget    \$5,000.00

The [Municipal Accommodation Tax](#) began collection in March 2024. These funds can be allocated to tourism-based events, activations and infrastructure upgrades at the direction of the committee. A plan for how and when these funds will be allocated is slated for early 2025, and details will be shared with the River District Board of Management. This plan is based with no expectation of additional funding and may change as the year progresses.

### **Communication Strategy:**

Events, activations, and promotions will all be shared through the River District Review Newsletter, which is distributed monthly. In addition, Media Advisories will be circulated if they are appropriate to the event or activation.



Specific businesses will be reached out to directly for events concerning them. All information regarding events, activations, and promotions will be shared on social media either directly or first through [owensoundriverdistrict.ca](http://owensoundriverdistrict.ca).

**Consultation:**

Pamela Coulter, Director of Community Services

**Attachments:**

None.

**Recommended by:**

Viveca Gravel, River District Coordinator

Pamela Coulter, Director of Community Services

**Submission approved by:**

Tim Simmonds, City Manager

For more information on this report, please contact Viveca Gravel, River District Coordinator at [vgravel@owensound.ca](mailto:vgravel@owensound.ca) or 519-376-4440 ext. 1209.