


STRATEGIC PLAN



City of Owen Sound
Vision 2050





Bridging
youth interests
with
community
initiatives.

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CANDRA SCHANK PHOTOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION

The City of Owen Sound's motto, "where you want to live," is at once simple yet incredibly aspirational. Much like cities larger in population, Owen Sound is confronted with challenges such as embracing new demographics, homelessness and outmigration of young people seeking opportunities in larger urban centres. Addressing these and other challenges, celebrating what's great about a place and identifying opportunities requires collective visioning. The Future Owen Sound—Vision 2050 initiative created an opportunity for a wide range of community stakeholders to identify tangible actions—immediate, mid- and long-term—to help their city live up to its motto.

This strategic vision plan, which is an update of the City's previous 2021-2023 Strategic Plan Refresh, is a pragmatic roadmap for achieving the larger aspiration of making Owen Sound a truly livable, safe and enjoyable city for everyone. To achieve this goal, we took an unconventional approach to its structure. Rather than developing a stand-alone document, likely to gather dust on a shelf, we reviewed our extensive list of actions generated by community members and connected them to existing, relevant City plans within each of the seven strategic pillars: Prosperous City, Green and Resilient City, Celebrating and Embracing Culture, City Building, A City That Moves, Safe City, and Fostering Mutually Beneficial and Respectful Relationships.

Here are a few quick examples:

Strategic Pillar: [Prosperous City](#)

Immediate Action: Undertake a student retention—high school and post-secondary—audit to better understand housing requirements, lifestyle needs and employment goals.

The [Georgian College Strategic Plan 2022–2024](#) and [Student Housing Strategy](#) both play an integral role in addressing the issue of student retention and exploring the possibility of expanded academic programming.

Strategic Pillar: [Green and Resilient City](#)

Mid-term Action: In collaboration with social service sector leaders and local advocates, develop a community resilience strategy addressing preventative measures, protections and protocols for responding to the needs of historically vulnerable populations.

A Climate Change Risk Analysis completed in 2019 as part of the Climate Change Adaptation Plan ([see pages 20–24](#)) focused primarily on infrastructure-related risks around flooding, heat and storm surges, but also included heat-related risks for vulnerable populations.

Strategic Pillar: [Embracing and Celebrating Culture](#)

Immediate Action: Engage leaders and knowledge keepers of the Saugeen Ojibway Nation to identify 2–3 Indigenous-led and focused initiatives that uplift their cultural expressions and contributions.

A November 2023 report from the [River District Board of Management](#) includes a recommendation directing staff to explore ways the River District could honour the history and legacy of First Nations people in the area by incorporating art, traditional plants and traditional names in the River District.

In fact, beneath each of the seven themes, we include a section subtitled Existing Plans and/or Potential Collaborators, and another subtitled Community Engagement Summary. By taking the time to connect strategic actions with existing City plans, potential community collaborators and community voices, we were able to:

- Assess how existing municipal plans currently align with strategic planning actions and connect them all to a unifying vision;
- Clarify how actions in existing plans could be prioritized or updated to better align with the strategic vision plan;
- Focus the daily work of City staff on clear strategic priorities;
- Point City staff to local experts and leaders who may be of support to them;
- Reinforce the collective nature of this work.

The Strategic Plan also includes stretch actions, meaning actions that extend beyond what the City is currently doing or currently has the capacity to do. These stretch actions are intentionally inserted in the mid-term section of each theme to build time for relationship building, resource development/fundraising and professional learning. Importantly, we also, unconventionally, include a list of potential funding sources to support actions in the plan, acknowledging the immense financial resources required for achieving both pragmatic and stretch actions, and as a way of helping both the City and community stakeholders to truly hit the ground running with this important work.

Also, this plan strikes a balance between specific actions and actions that are determined as time progresses. This approach is required due to the City's desire to plan over a 25-year period. Given this long horizon, considerable economic, environmental and social shifts are inevitable. As such, we felt it was especially important to not be overly prescriptive and to create a bit of space for trying and evaluating things. This approach will also allow the City to update the plan as required and for community stakeholders to remain at the forefront of this ongoing work.

The Future Owen Sound—Vision 2050 plan is more of a pathway than a blueprint; it is intended to prompt a community journey and set the stage for planning and priority setting by future City Councils. And as with all journeys, it will have twists and turns on the way to what we hope is Owen Sound's vibrant future.

Jay Pitter

Principal, Jay Pitter Placemaking

STRATEGIC PLAN

Q&A

What is a municipal strategic plan?

A municipal strategic plan is a holistic, long-term roadmap that identifies a coherent vision tied to a set of goals related to infrastructure, housing, environment, culture, social supports and the local economy. These plans integrate input from numerous stakeholders, including elected officials, city staff, community members, institutions, non-profits and the business community. Goals are broken down into actions, timelines and quantifiable metrics.

Why is a strategic plan important?

A strategic plan creates an opportunity for municipalities to join hands with community stakeholders to collectively dream aloud. This includes voicing both challenges and aspirations and, importantly, translating inputs into tangible actions. Coordinated work through a strategic plan allows the city to identify priorities, assist with work planning and allocate resources (finances, time, expertise) accordingly. Finally, a strategic plan is an ongoing conversation with community stakeholders, fostering transparency, accountability and collaboration.

Why is a long-term strategic plan important at this moment?

Owen Sound is on the precipice of economic, social and environmental changes as the city develops, which has created both challenges and opportunities. For example, housing affordability is a stress point with over one third of people reporting it was their top concern in a recent Vital Focus on Housing Report. Additionally, key themes from the Vision 2050 public engagement process included concerns related to homelessness, public safety, downtown/waterfront revitalization, active transportation, job creation, youth retention, newcomer integration, tourism promotion and environmental sustainability.

While these may be shared by other smaller cities, Owen Sound is in a unique position as a regional hub and cultural centre. It's a place with a strong community identity for those who live here, but also a place that draws others from surrounding communities to live, work and play. A strategic plan is critical at this moment to help both manage these changes and guide the city along a path that is economically, socially, environmentally and culturally forward-thinking.

Who is this strategic plan for?

The Future Owen Sound—Vision 2050 Strategic Plan was developed through a collaborative process that included input from city staff, elected officials, non-profit organizations, businesses and a variety of community stakeholders. This collaborative process is key as the Strategic Plan is a plan that belongs to all of Owen Sound and it will take everyone to see it through successfully.

City Staff and Elected Officials

The Strategic Plan is a critical guide for City staff and elected officials to use with work planning, priority-setting and coordination across departments and other levels of government, with partnership opportunities clearly identified throughout. The Strategic Plan should guide overall decision-making, budgeting and general city communication with the public.

Institutions, Other Levels of Government and Non-Profits

The Strategic Plan provides guidance for institutions, other levels of government (e.g., Grey and Bruce Counties) and non-profit organizations to identify areas of alignment with City goals. Through the Strategic Plan, these groups can identify potential partnership opportunities with the municipality. This allows both parties to share funding, knowledge and other resources to achieve these shared goals.

Community Stakeholders

The Strategic Plan is unique because the community is clearly identified as a key partner and collaborator. During engagement sessions, community members were able to identify how they could contribute to the success of the Strategic Plan. There is now a further opportunity for community members to engage with the plan by identifying ways to collaboratively work with the city and its partners to achieve its goals and actions.



PRINCIPLES

The principles guiding the Strategic Plan actions are as follows:

Accessibility

Owen Sound is a city that strives to be physically, socially and financially accessible so that everyone has opportunities to connect, contribute and thrive.

Resilience

Owen Sound is a city that strives to be resilient in the face of environmental, economic and social change while celebrating its multiple strengths and attributes.

Community Care and Compassion

Owen Sound is a city that strives to address challenges, differences and individuals experiencing difficulties with compassionate community care.

Trust Building and Collaboration

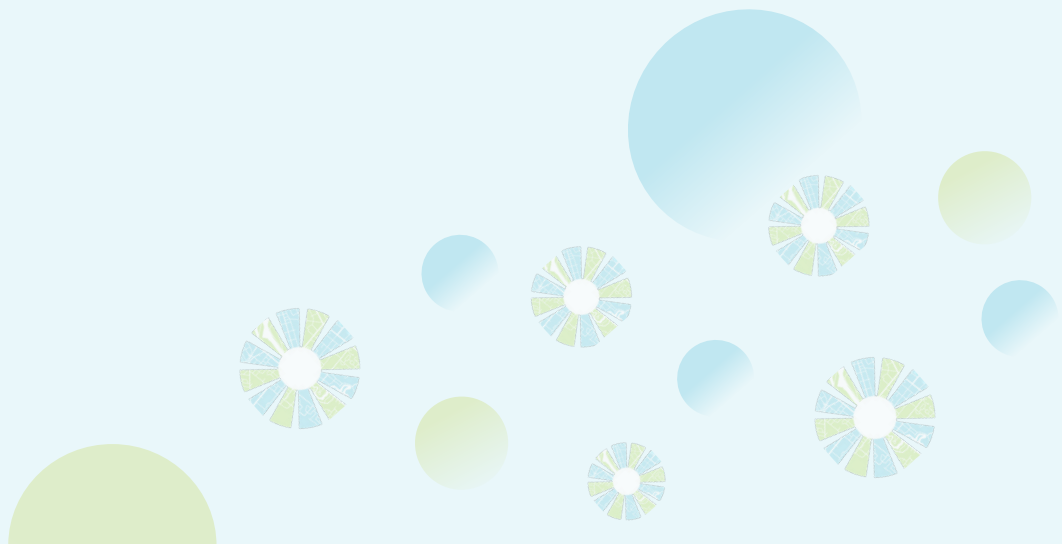
Owen Sound is a city that strives to build a culture of trust and collaboration between City staff, elected officials and community stakeholder groups—extending beyond familiar social networks and echo chambers.

Accountability and Transparency

Owen Sound is a city that strives to be transparent and accountable in a manner that creates space for grace, learning and collective problem-solving.

Courage

Owen Sound is a city that strives to courageously try new approaches, acknowledge when there is room for improvement and embrace big opportunities.



BACKGROUND

The land on which Owen Sound now sits is known as the heart of Turtle Island and is situated on the traditional territory of the Anishinabek Nation: the People of the Three Fires known as Ojibway, Odawa and Pottawatomie Nations.¹ The city now called Owen Sound was colonized in 1841 by Charles Rankin and originally renamed Sydenham, which was changed in 1851 to Owen Sound after the British Admiral Edward Owen.² According to 2025 Environics data, Owen Sound has a population of 22,732 with a median age of 58 and 6.3% of the population identifying as a visible minority.³

Owen Sound's population drove economic growth in the 20th century, with auto parts manufacturing playing a key role, but with the decline in industrial manufacturing, the city's economy has shifted more to healthcare, services and retail as the largest urban centre in Grey and Bruce Counties.⁴ Tourism is also a key economic driver, supported by the city's scenic location on the southern shore of Georgian Bay, with its expansive harbour, winding rivers, tree-lined streets, extensive parks and trails, and a vibrant historic River District.⁵

As a regional hub surrounded by smaller municipalities, Owen Sound has a rich cultural history, beginning with the cultural traditions of local First Nations communities. The city is home to many local artists, animators and producers, with music institutions such as the Georgian Bay Symphony, regional events like the Salmon Spectacular and Summerfolk, as well as arts institutions like the Tom Thomson Art Gallery.⁶ Additionally, the city has a thriving sports community, including the Owen Sound Attack junior hockey team and Senior Lacrosse and Baseball teams, but also minor sports leagues and teams that host thousands of visitors at games and tournaments all year long.

Owen Sound is well-positioned as a regional hub to build on its strengths while attracting new opportunities for all.

The following are a few helpful tips for reading this Strategic Plan:

Immediate Actions	=	6 months – 2 years
Mid-Term Actions	=	2 years – 7 years
Long-Term Actions	=	7 years – 10 years

1 <https://www.owensound.ca/living-here/indigenous-reconciliation/>

2 <https://www.owensound.ca/living-here/about-owen-sound/history/>

3 <https://www.owensound.ca/business-building-development/community-profile/demographic-data/>

4 <https://madeingrey.ca/business-environment>

5 <https://www.owensoundtourism.ca/en/>

6 <https://www.destinationontario.com/en-ca/cities-towns/owen-sound>

As referenced in the introduction, this is not a stand-alone document. Similar to how Owen Sound is a hub with surrounding “spoke” communities, we’ve positioned this plan in the centre of more than 15 important City and broader institutional documents. Again, we’ve done so to: align this Strategic Plan with other exceptional work and thinking that has predated it; embed its actions in the daily work of City staff and potential collaborators; and avoid duplication of effort and unnecessary spending. Throughout this entire document, we build on existing thinking and actions while reminding you that success will be dependent on the embrace of a collaborative effort.

When reviewing the Existing Plans and/or Potential Collaborators subsection beneath each theme, please note that not all local experts are listed. If you, an individual or organization, are able and willing to contribute to any actions, please do not hesitate to contact the City of Owen Sound’s City Manager or the Senior Manager, Strategic Initiatives, to offer your expertise.

Some actions in the strategic plan may technically fit in more than one category. For example, many actions related to infrastructure, such as the installation of bike lanes, benches and public-private partnership (P3) projects, could all technically fall under the City-building theme. However, you will see some of these action items in the City That Moves or Green and Resilient City categories because they are intended to specifically advance those goals.

You’ll notice that many immediate actions are focused on education, engagement and communication. That’s intentional. These three areas of focus were repeated themes during the course of the community engagement sessions. Whether building better relations with local Indigenous communities, encouraging more community members to embrace active transportation or enhancing support for cultural artists and animators, community stakeholders stressed the importance of developing informational primers or leveraging the City’s website to profile individuals and organizations. We completely support this approach, and honour the feedback we received from community stakeholders with respect to education, engagement and communication.

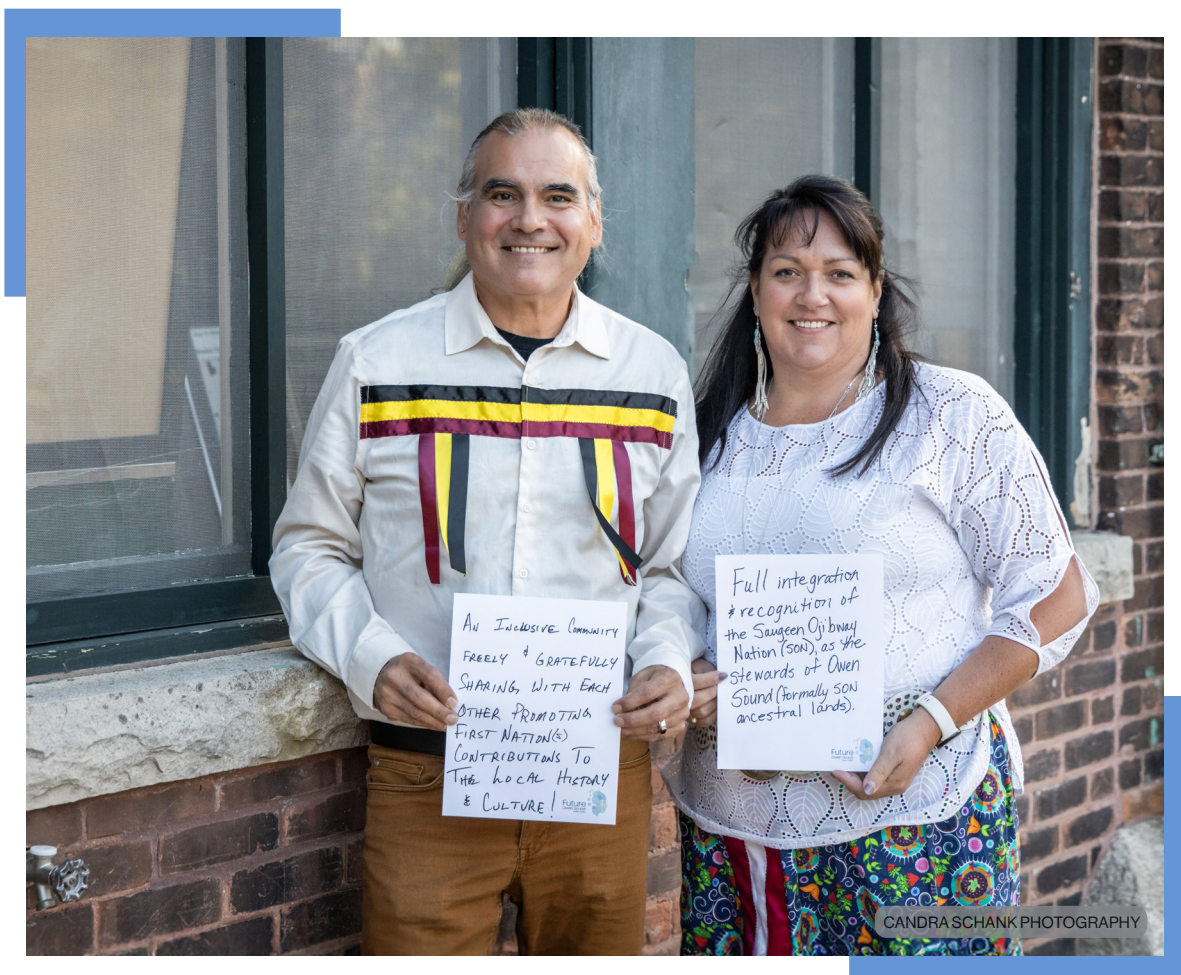
You’ll also notice that mid-term actions tend to be flexible; this is also intentional. While we outline numerous specific actions, we leave some space for more flexible actions that can be determined after education, engagement and communication. For example, in the case of student retention, the mid-term action is:

“Based on the outcomes from the student retention audit, forge a partnership to both expand academic offerings and trade programs at an existing post-secondary institution or establish a satellite campus in the city.”

At this juncture, we can’t possibly know exactly which type of expansion or satellite is desired or possible. However, we are clear that both are required to address the needs and aspirations of community stakeholders. We’ve been clear about the metric (two academic

partnerships) while leaving space for the specifics (exact institutions, program types, etc.) to, again, provide City staff with the space they need to advance actions in a way that is responsive to their daily realities and to keep community stakeholder priorities at the forefront of this work.

Lastly, strategic plans are “living” documents that must be clear enough to advance SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) while also being flexible enough to respond to emerging circumstances. This is especially important in the case of a plan like this one with a 25-year horizon. Equally important, many of the actions in this plan require the City to either revisit actions outlined in previous plans or complete audits and reviews in progress aligned with the community’s priorities. As such, in some instances, we opted to avoid identifying specific actions ourselves and attaching specific metrics. Instead, to respond to the realities of the current municipal work being undertaken, yet to be reported on in some instances, and to keep community stakeholders at the forefront of the decision-making process, we advised that priorities in a few existing plans be determined through further consultation with community stakeholders. When reading this plan, please note that it is recommended that the plan be reviewed annually via a dashboard inclusive of clear metrics and milestones. Also, City Council, in close collaboration with community members, should establish priorities that build on previous actions.



Themes

PROSPEROUS CITY

GREEN AND RESILIENT CITY

CELEBRATING AND EMBRACING CULTURE

CITY BUILDING

A CITY THAT MOVES

SAFE CITY

FOSTERING MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL AND
RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS

Theme

PROSPEROUS CITY

Definition: Supporting initiatives that increase competitive economic advantages for current and new businesses and their employees. Also, addressing other aspects of prosperity such as contributing to a good quality of life for all and recognizing the experience of elders, the potential of youth and collective community knowledge and precious local resources.

By 2050 Owen Sound will... attract a highly skilled, intergenerational workforce and work in close partnership with existing sectors such as agriculture, healthcare, and tourism and culture—as well as newer industries, particularly in future-focused sectors such as technology and sustainability.

IMMEDIATE

- Undertake a student retention—high school and post-secondary—audit to better understand housing requirements, lifestyle needs and employment goals.
- Implement 3–5 employer engagement sessions, with a focus on young families and workers, to identify shared economic prosperity interests and correlate initiatives to advance shared goals.

MID-TERM

- Based on the outcomes from the student retention audit, forge a partnership to both expand academic offerings and trade programs at an existing post-secondary institution or establish a satellite campus in the city.
- Based on employer engagement session outcomes, develop a plan to collaboratively fund and implement a few pilot or permanent initiatives.

LONG-TERM

- Welcome the first student cohort to an expanded academic program hosted by an existing post-secondary institution or satellite campus.
 - Complete (or approach completion of) three or more placemaking initiatives (housing, amenities, transportation, etc.) directly aligned with accommodating a larger and more diverse workforce.
-

Existing Plans and/or Potential Collaborators

Among the existing plans that could support the actions of this theme are the [Georgian College Strategic Plan 2025–2030](#) and [Student Housing Strategy](#). Both of these plans may play an integral role in addressing the issue of student retention and exploring the possibility of expanded academic programming. Owen Sound's [Official Plan](#) and [Community Improvement Plan](#) also point to both supporting business and fostering development in the city. Additionally, the [Grey County Economic Development, Tourism and Culture Master Plan \(2023\)](#), on pages 28–32, references the welcoming and retention of new residents, networking opportunities and educational initiatives, and they host an [annual job fair](#), all of which may support a growing and diversified workforce. The Owen Sound and Area District Chamber of Commerce was also listed as a potential partner and connected community resource.

Community Engagement Summary

Community members highlighted the importance of retaining existing employment opportunities as well as attracting new employers through diversifying the local economy, specifically within the tourism, healthcare, technology, advanced manufacturing and sustainability sectors. People also wanted to see the City better leverage current cultural and natural assets, such as the waterfront area, for both the enjoyment of existing residents and tourism potential. Additionally, to support the local economy, there was a desire to provide more support to small businesses and entrepreneurs, particularly downtown. Finally, people wanted to see specific actions for youth, seniors, Indigenous Peoples and newcomers that help foster a more inclusive and supported community.



In my dream version of Owen Sound, I wake up in the morning and I don't have to worry if my paycheque will pay the bills, and I can eventually afford to retire. I can take a bus to work and back, or just to a show. My kids have career opportunities that pay more than minimum wage and live nearby so they can help me out in my decline."

- Survey Respondent

Theme

GREEN AND RESILIENT CITY

Definition: Strengthening the city's environmental, social and economic ability to mitigate and adapt to the climate crisis. Also, leveraging the city's natural resources and infrastructure to support healthy lifestyles.

By 2050 Owen Sound will... be a city with a wide range of resilient and sustainable practices that protect the planet, people and economy.

IMMEDIATE

- Follow through on previous City Council approval (January 2020) for funding to hire a permanent, full-time climate change coordinator.
- Develop a series of plain-language public education primers, outlining clear actions community stakeholders can take to contribute to a more resilient city.
- Work closely with existing climate action experts and advocates at the Owen Sound Climate Action Team and begin to implement 3–5 priority actions from the Climate Action Strategy.

MID-TERM

- Continue to advance priority actions, building in an evaluation process to determine impact, possible recalibration and on-boarding of new priority actions, if required.
- When updating environmental and green related projects, contract local Indigenous land stewards and knowledge keepers.
- In collaboration with social service sector leaders and local advocates, develop a community resilience strategy addressing preventative measures, protections and protocols for responding to the needs of historically vulnerable populations.

LONG-TERM

- Complete five meaningful and measurable initiatives—a combination of infrastructure, policies and procedures—that advance a more green and resilient city in close collaboration with community stakeholders.
 - Cultivate a community of green and resilient city champions with diverse representation across community stakeholder groups and sectors.
 - Continue to proactively assess and prepare for climate crisis risks—environmental, social and economic—by reviewing and updating the Climate Action Strategy and implementing the actions identified.
-

Existing Plans and/or Potential Collaborators

These actions align with the [Climate Action Strategy](#) (2023), [Climate Mitigation Plan](#) (2023) and [Climate Change Adaptation Plan](#) (2021). Also, a Climate Change Risk Analysis, completed in 2019 as part of the Climate Change Adaptation Plan ([see pages 20–24](#)), assessed risks around flooding, heat and storm surges, focusing primarily on infrastructure-related risks but also heat-related risks for vulnerable populations. Additionally, the City's in-progress tree inventory project, [boulevard planting](#) programs, [Emerald Ash Borer Management Plan](#) (2014), [Recreation, Parks and Facilities Master Plan \(2018–2028\)](#) and [Official Plan](#) (pages 4–5 and 104) will be critical inputs. Finally, the City can leverage existing local groups like [Climate Action Owen Sound](#) and [The Sustainability Project](#) for expertise and priority setting.

Community Engagement Summary

Community members highlighted the importance of implementing the City's current Climate Action Strategy. They also wanted more opportunities for community engagement and stewardship opportunities. Specifically, people wanted to see: more attention paid to tree planting; naturalization with native/resilient species; green infrastructure development; energy efficiency and the switch to renewable energy; and transportation-related elements like expanding transit service and promoting walking and cycling.



I see a city that is built around and encourages outdoor and open-air living with more visible green spaces that encourage family gatherings and safe walking trails/bike lanes in the city centre to enhance physical (and mental) well being.”

- Survey Respondent



STREET ART
⇒ THOUGHT PROVOKING FORUMS
(Always more looks)
ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR ALL
A CITY FILLED WITH COLOUR
Future

2ND AVE PEDESTRIANIZED!
MUSIC! PATIOS!
BIKES! LAUGHTER!
... A GIANT CHESS BOARD
CHECKERS!
STREET ARTISTS!
LOVE!
Future

Theme

CELEBRATING AND EMBRACING CULTURE

Definition: Uplifting all aspects of the city’s local culture, including Indigenous Peoples’ cultural histories and practices, the cultural histories and practices of all residents, and formal institutional arts and culture expressions. Also, contributing to creating an inclusive, welcoming and prosperous culture that creates the conditions for harmonious demographic and economic growth.

By 2050 Owen Sound will... be a city that supports and celebrates the long-standing cultural knowledge and expressions of Indigenous Peoples, its rich local cultural resources—from artists to growers to storied sites—while also embracing contributions from new populations.

IMMEDIATE

- Engage leaders and knowledge keepers of the Saugeen Ojibway Nation to identify 2–3 Indigenous-led and Indigenous-focused initiatives that uplift their cultural expressions and contributions.
- Amplify and celebrate cultural artists, animators and producers of all identities on the City’s website, and collaborate with this stakeholder group to identify 2–3 resource development initiatives for supporting their work.
- Conduct and communicate a high-level economic impact analysis to assess the City’s current contributions and revenue capture of tourist events.
- Collaborate with informal and settlement sector programs welcoming new Owen Sound residents, and cover the nominal refreshment fee (on a monthly basis) for current gatherings.

MID-TERM

- Initiate a municipal branding campaign that clearly identifies why Owen Sound is “where you want to live” and visit.
 - In collaboration with cultural leaders of all identities and sectors, create and implement a resource development plan to fund specific initiatives and the livelihoods of cultural leaders.
 - Develop and launch a broader tourism strategy that: creates a greater revenue capture from existing City-sponsored initiatives; pilots 2–3 new City-led events; and better leverages rich, local cultural resources (people and places).
-

LONG-TERM

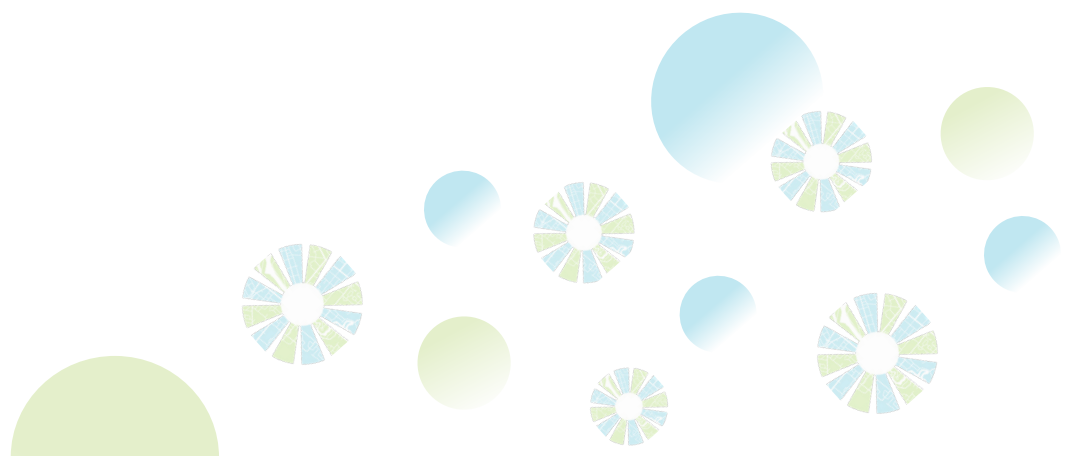
- Develop a solid reputation for 2–3 City-led, revenue-generating (for the City and local businesses) tourist events while continuing to support existing successful cultural events.
- Generate stable revenue—through the development of a small local arts council or in partnership with a philanthropic partner—for cultural artists and animators.
- Better track and amplify in-kind municipal contributions to third-party cultural events.
- Establish 4–5 initiatives with Indigenous Peoples and newcomers highlighting their cultural celebrations and contributions alongside current cultural programming.

Existing Plans and/or Potential Collaborators

The actions highlighted in this theme could be integrated into an updated Cultural Master Plan, initially developed in 2012. The Tourism Action Plan and River District Action Plan, both slated for updates in 2025, could also integrate these actions. A November 2023 report from the [River District Board of Management](#) includes a recommendation directing staff to explore ways the River District could honour the history and legacy of First Nations people in the area by incorporating art, traditional plants and traditional names in the River District. Moreover, along with informal welcoming initiatives led by local leaders, [YMCA Settlement and Language Services](#) and [Welcoming Communities Grey Bruce](#) may be two excellent collaborators given their mandates. The City's own [Inclusion Strategy 2023–2028](#) (see pages 11–14 for specific actions) addresses inclusion with respect to city committees, and within city communications and programs.

Community Engagement Summary

Community members highlighted the need to better support existing arts and culture within the city by providing more funding for arts-related activities, spaces for arts activities and amplification of their practices. Specifically, community stakeholders wanted to see the establishment of an advisory committee or arts council to help resource their work and they wanted to be better integrated into larger cultural plans.



“

Owen Sound is a vibrant community that emphasizes its connection to the water by creating safe, comfortable parks, streets and public spaces that are easily walkable; where a strong history of arts & culture is celebrated, our agricultural roots are valued, new residents are welcomed; diverse business owners are embraced, and development is harnessed for the betterment of the future.”

- Survey Respondent



Theme

CITY BUILDING

Definition: Enhancing urban development, planning and placemaking processes to create places and spaces that contribute to complete communities for existing residents, future residents and tourists.

By 2050 Owen Sound will... be a city whose infrastructure, community amenities and housing stock are well maintained, accessible and responsive to the evolving requirements of community stakeholders and visitors.

IMMEDIATE

- Consider infrastructure priorities identified by community stakeholders across all strategic priorities, and identify 2–3 public-private partnerships (P3s).
- Update the City's urban design guidelines based on community stakeholder priorities.
- Identify three ways the City can leverage municipal lands and scope of influence to meaningfully contribute to addressing the local housing crisis.

MID-TERM

- Initiate 2–3 public-private partnership (P3) initiatives with meaningful community development agreements.
- Initiate or significantly contribute to a housing initiative that helps to alleviate impacts of the housing crisis on disproportionately impacted community stakeholders.

LONG-TERM

- Ensure the majority of current infrastructure is well maintained, alongside the institution of an ongoing repair and replacement plan.
 - Oversee 3–4 major public-private partnerships (P3s) at varying degrees of completion, with a priority on the downtown, waterfront and housing.
-

Existing Plans and/or Potential Collaborators

There are currently [numerous asset management plans/audits](#) in progress, including: Building Condition Assessment (2024–2025), Parks Asset Assessment (2025), Asset Management Levels of Service (2025), Asset Management Lifecycle Management Profiles (2025) and Asset Management Policy Update (2025), with new [zoning](#) and urban design guidelines for the whole city planned for 2025-26. Also, the [Community Improvement Plan](#) contains content pertaining to the harbour and downtown aligned with this theme's priorities, such as: the Façade and Structural Improvement Grant Program; Accessibility Improvement Grant Program; and Vacant Building Conversion and Expansion Grant Program. Moreover, the City's [Official Plan](#) includes attainable and rental housing actions, including utilizing incentive programs to support development of “attainable housing units” and developing an inclusionary zoning policy.

Community Engagement Summary

Community members highlighted the importance of ensuring city infrastructure (transportation, public space, water and waste) is well-maintained, sustainable and contributes to a more connected city, and that new developments are planned with increased community participation. Specifically, people wanted to see more public space projects, revitalization of the waterfront and downtown, more public washroom access, better heritage retention and reuse, and incentives for affordable housing development.

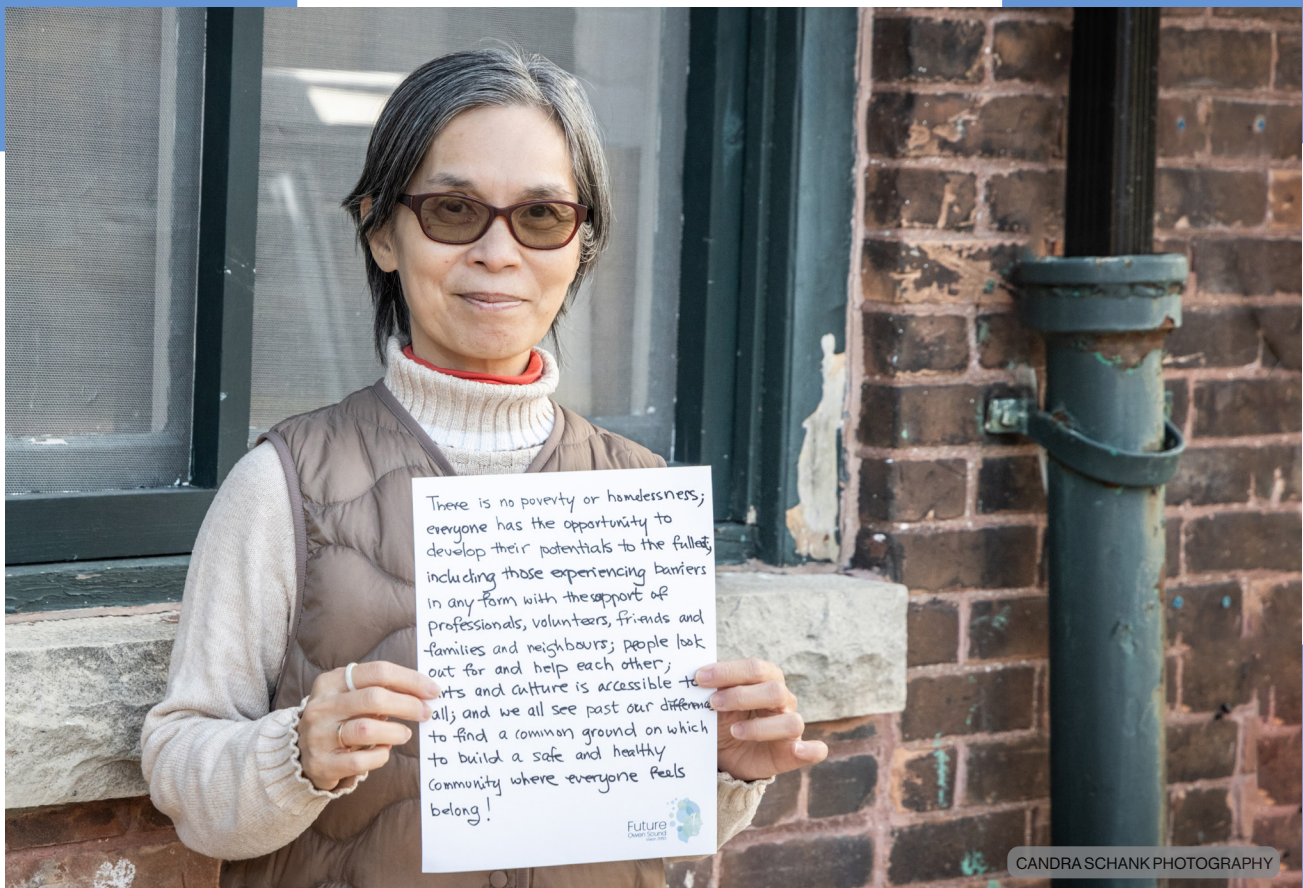


My ideal Owen Sound provides an opportunity to rent a two- or three-bedroom place for me and my two kids that won't cost me twice as much as I make in a month, a city that has a modern and robust urban transit system with inter-township/ interprovince bus service, a place where my kids can grow up and want to put down roots.”

- Survey Respondent



CANDRA SCHANK PHOTOGRAPHY



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Theme

A CITY THAT MOVES

Definition: Facilitating sustainable transportation options and creating community connectivity. Also, this entails ensuring that everyone experiences dignity and accessibility while travelling and recognizing that movement throughout a city is not simply about moving people from point A to point B. It is also about ensuring that everyone is able to access things they need, community connection and opportunities.

By 2050 Owen Sound will... be connected by a comprehensive transportation network, accommodating multiple types of sustainable and accessible ways of travelling through the city.

IMMEDIATE

- Provide a public update on the status of actions from the Route Optimization Study (2021) and Transportation Master Plan (2010) — specifically highlighting those related to active transportation and pedestrian infrastructure — including actions which are complete, in progress and unfinished.
- In close collaboration with local active and public transportation advocates, conduct an active and public transportation audit as part of the upcoming 2026 Transportation Master Plan update.
- Review public campaigns focused on active transportation and develop 3–5 plain-language education resources.

MID-TERM

- Raise money for, pilot and evaluate three quick-start interventions that address:
 - a. accessible and connected infrastructure;
 - b. public transit options taken from the Route Optimization Study;
 - c. enhanced mobility for Indigenous Peoples both within the City of Owen Sound and to and from neighbouring Indigenous communities.

Specific interventions should correlate with the community engagement processes outlined in the immediate actions and be supported by the co-created priorities conveyed in the 2026 Transportation Master Plan update.

- Increase and improve public transit services with an emphasis on accessible vehicles and accessible services.
-

LONG-TERM

- Improve accessibility, in terms of mobility-related infrastructure and services, in three high-needs (as defined by community stakeholders) areas.
 - Improve network connectivity (streets and trails) in three high-volume and high-needs areas (as defined by community stakeholders and data).
 - Implement recommendations and actions from the 2026 Transportation Master Plan instead of having a separate action
-

Existing Plans and/or Potential Collaborators

The [Transportation Master Plan](#) (2010), referenced above — which will be updated in 2026 — the [Route Optimization Study](#) (2021) and the [Recreation Trails Master Plan](#) (2012) are three strategic documents that can be leveraged to achieve and inform the actions above. Additionally, the City's [Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2024–2028](#) as well as the [Transit Accessibility Plan](#) (2014) will be key guiding documents. The City is also in the process of installing several pedestrian crossings across the city over the next two years, including in the vicinity of schools.

Community Engagement Summary

Community members highlighted the importance of ensuring roads, trails/pathways, sidewalks, bike lanes and other transportation infrastructure are accessible, well-maintained, well-lit and connected. Specifically, people wanted to see a transportation plan that addresses network and service gaps, expansion of bike lanes and sidewalks, promotion of sustainable transit (e.g., electric buses, cycling) and exploration of alternative transit models (e.g., bus dispatching service), and a plan that ensures public transit, which is a significant pain point, is accessible and equitable.



One of the ways this goal can be achieved is by focusing on creating an accessible pedestrian environment. By focusing on pedestrian users, the City will become accessible to users of all ages and abilities, which is key for our aging community. An objective for the City should be to ensure that residents can access all parts of the City, by transit, active trails, and sidewalks. The lack of a personal vehicle should not be a barrier to accessing parts of the City.”

- Survey Respondent



Theme

SAFE CITY

Definition: Contributing to inclusivity, diversity and accessibility in our community and participating in initiatives focused on a range of long-term, systemic safety solutions that respond to current and future residents.

By 2050 Owen Sound will... be regarded as a city that acknowledges multiple factors — physical, psychological, historical, etc. — that impact a sense of security, and where institutions and community members are committed to protecting each other's safety.

IMMEDIATE

- In collaboration with social service organizations, leverage the City's communications platforms to publish and promote a listing of local agencies and organizations best suited to address non-crime-related issues.
- In collaboration with the social service sector, launch a public education campaign and engagements that both amplify facts about and destigmatize survival- and mental health-based safety issues.
- In close consultation with business owners, develop and/or move existing programming to animate the downtown — a positive community buzz versus surveillance approach.
- When updating City plans and policies, consider how the safety of various community stakeholder groups may be compromised — whether vulnerable road users or historically marginalized groups — by conventional policies and design approaches.

MID-TERM

- Cultivate regular downtown programming in partnership with businesses and cultural leaders.
 - Support Police Services, who have engaged in academic research and are actively partnering with social service agencies, to pilot and evaluate 2–3 evidence-based preventative programs that address the causes of, rather than responses to, criminal and/or concerning activity.
 - Together with diverse community stakeholders, develop a collective community safety statement articulating shared values, accountability and compassion.
-

LONG-TERM

- Ensure holistic safety metrics—considering physical, psychological and historical dimensions of safety—are integrated across all design, development and policy projects.
 - Realize the establishment of a role in supporting Police Services and social service organizations with respect to the implementation of preventative programs that address the causes of, rather than responses to, criminal and/or concerning activity.
 - Forge a vibrant downtown beyond weekday business hours with 3–5 ongoing programs and after-hours community presence.
-

Existing Plans and/or Potential Collaborators

The City's [River District Action Plan](#) (2020) includes a strategic priority for creating a “safe and clean space” alongside a number of actions (see pages 15–17). [Bruce Grey's Community Safety and Well-Being Planning](#) includes priority areas related to addictions/substance abuse, mental health, crime prevention, housing and homelessness, and poverty and income. Each area gives current context and lists organizations in the Counties that are working on those issues. Also, the [Owen Sound Police Service Operations Plan 2023–2026](#) includes actions to undertake a service delivery model review (goal S3). The City hosts a [Community Assistance and Support](#) directory with a 211 Ontario service on their website, both of which could be enhanced to address actions aligned with this theme. Also, the Mobile Mental Health and Addiction Response Team (MMHART), Brightshores Wellness and Recovery Centre and Supportive Outreach Services (S.O.S.) currently provide responsive services to support individuals experiencing challenges that sometimes result in risky or unsafe behaviours in public spaces.

Community Engagement Summary

Community members highlighted the importance of addressing homelessness, drug addiction and mental health through increased social support and better coordination with existing non-profit organizations and social service providers. They also highlighted the need for strategies for youth, Indigenous and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals. Many community stakeholders wanted to see the implementation of more safe consumption sites to encourage a harm reduction approach. Broad public education campaigns and better relationship-building with Indigenous communities were also suggested to reduce the stigmatization of individuals experiencing challenges and/or engaging in risky or unsafe behaviours in public spaces. Organizations addressing issues such as homelessness and harm reduction requested greater support from the City in terms of extending beyond their stated scope of responsibility to collaborate on fundraising and advocacy initiatives, and by extending municipal spaces to support their work.

“

A safe community where people have places to go and connect and homelessness is decreased.”

- Survey Respondent



CANDRA SCHANK PHOTOGRAPHY

Theme

FOSTERING MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL AND RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS

Definition: Establishing, reconciling and continually nurturing relationships that result in mutual benefit, trust and shared understanding.

By 2050 Owen Sound will... build bridges of mutual respect and trust across multiple stakeholder groups to collaboratively advance productive democratic processes and to develop a more relational, front-line presence.

IMMEDIATE

- Identify the top five recent productive collaborations between the City and external partners and translate them to a Collaboration and Partnership Policy that includes a framework for principles, roles/responsibilities, etc. to guide future partnerships.
- Create a web page clearly indicating 5–7 ways community stakeholders can communicate with City staff outside of a formal deputation or complaints process.
- Establish “community hours” for City staff and elected officials, which will enable community stakeholders to interact with them in a friendly and informal manner.

MID-TERM

- Review and refine the community engagement framework and toolkit to clearly identify and articulate engagement approaches and requirements for key types of municipal projects, committees, and policy and decision-making processes.
- Incorporate budget and resources for community engagement into capital projects, inclusive of funding for local community engagement experts to work alongside consultants and city staff.
- Develop communications procedures for accountable and respectful dialogue with community members regarding municipal initiatives, crises, conflict resolution, etc.

LONG-TERM

- Foster a sustainable and productive group of local community engagement experts and champions, reflective of various stakeholder groups.
 - Formalize in-house community engagement good practices, which include integrating community stakeholders on community engagement teams.
 - Document case studies from the community engagement framework and communication procedures that exemplify successful modelling of transparency, accountability and resilience.
-

Existing Plans and/or Potential Collaborators

Current documents that align with this theme are the [Agreement Development Policy](#), approved in 2024 and set for review one year post-implementation, and the [Community Engagement Policy](#) and [Community Engagement Toolkit](#) (set for review in 2028).

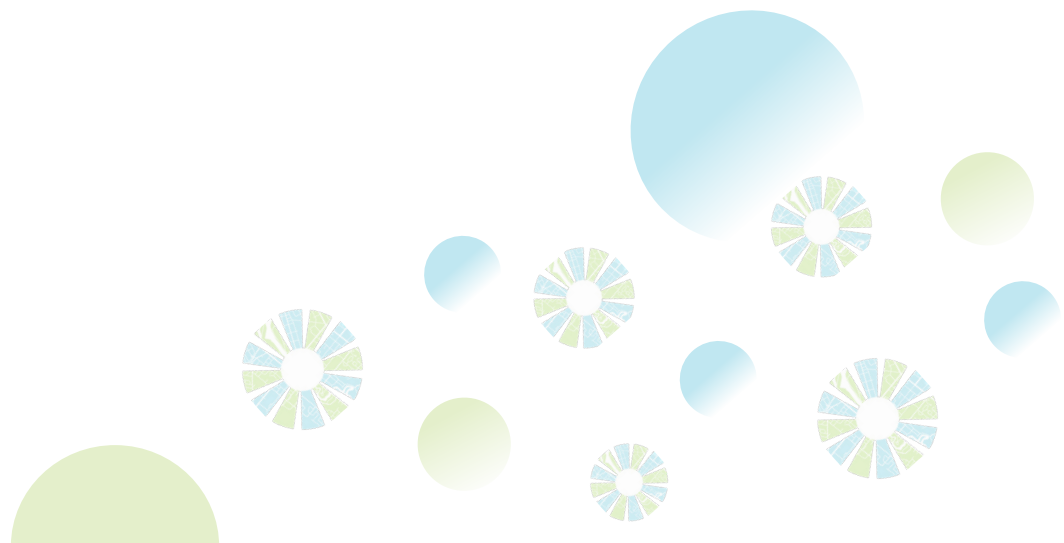
Community Engagement Summary

Community members highlighted the importance of increased transparency and accountability at city hall as well as more opportunities for community involvement, especially creative engagement opportunities. Specifically, people wanted to see more educational resources/guides on how the city works, better coordination of individuals and groups who could work together with the city towards locally made solutions, and partnerships with other municipalities to address complex issues, such as mental health, addiction and homelessness. Additionally, it was noted that community members could also amend their approach to voicing concerns and ideas in a more solutions-oriented, collaborative manner to assist in building better relationships with City staff and elected officials.



Embrace diversity, learn from those who are different and go with the flow. Change is always positive.”

- Survey Respondent



Future Owen Sound—Vision 2050

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

PROSPEROUS CITY

1. [Green Municipal Fund \(GMF\) — Federation of Canadian Municipalities](#)
Funds projects that advance energy efficiency, active transportation and sustainable municipal innovation to attract investment and reduce emissions.
Type: Non-governmental (municipal–NGO partnership)
Amount: Varies (grants, loans and blended financing available)
2. [Ontario Trillium Foundation — Grow Grant](#)
Supports multi-year projects that enhance community well-being through programs such as youth retention, skills development and cultural engagement.
Type: Provincial
Amount: Up to \$200,000 per year (2–3 years)
3. [Ontario Trillium Foundation — Capital Grant](#)
Provides capital funding to enhance community infrastructure, public spaces and cultural venues that foster economic participation and inclusion.
Type: Provincial
Amount: Up to \$200,000
4. [Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation \(NOHFC\)](#)
Offers funding for workforce development, business startups and innovation in smaller Ontario communities, including skills training and entrepreneurial programs.
Type: Provincial
Amount: Varies by stream (typically \$25,000–\$500,000 depending on the project)
5. [Canada Cultural Spaces Fund \(CCSF\)](#)
Funds the renovation and development of spaces that support cultural events, Indigenous arts and heritage programming.
Type: Federal
Amount: Varies (average \$250,000–\$3,000,000 based on project scope)
6. [Skills Development Fund \(SDF\) — Ontario](#)
Supports employer-led training programs, apprenticeship expansion and workforce development in key growth sectors.
Type: Provincial
Amount: Varies (typical project range: \$100,000 to multi-million)

GREEN AND RESILIENT CITY

1. [Tree Canada's Treemendous Communities Grant](#)
Supports community tree planting projects that deliver long-term environmental and social benefits in residential areas.
Type: Non-governmental (charitable NGO)
Amount: Up to \$10,000
2. [Climate Change Adaptation Program \(CCAP\)](#)
A federal co-funding initiative to support projects that advance climate change adaptation in natural resource sectors and municipal systems.
Type: Federal
Amount: Up to \$500,000
3. [Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund \(DMAF\)](#)
Funds large-scale infrastructure upgrades that reduce the impact of natural disasters like floods and wildfires.
Type: Federal
Amount: Varies (large-scale projects)
4. [Green Municipal Fund \(GMF\)](#)
Provides grants and loans to municipalities for sustainable development, including tree canopy audits and green infrastructure.
Type: Non-governmental (Federation of Canadian Municipalities)
Amount: Varies (based on project scope and type of funding)
5. [Zero Emission Transit Fund](#)
Supports capital and planning projects to electrify public transit fleets and reduce GHG emissions.
Type: Federal
Amount: Varies (project-dependent)
6. [Municipal Climate Resiliency Grant — Intact Centre](#)
One-time grant supporting municipal-level climate adaptation efforts such as stormwater infrastructure upgrades.
Type: Non-governmental (corporate/foundation — Intact Insurance)
Amount: Up to \$200,000
7. [Flood Hazard Identification and Mapping Program \(FHIMP\)](#)
Federal-provincial program funding flood risk mapping and analysis to enhance climate resilience planning.
Type: Federal-Provincial
Amount: Part of a \$15-million fund (available until April 2027 or until fully subscribed)

CELEBRATING AND EMBRACING CULTURE

1. [Ontario Arts Council—Operating Grant](#)
Supports non-profit arts organizations with core operational costs, offering stable, multi-year funding that helps sustain cultural programming and infrastructure.
Type: Provincial
Amount: Varies by organization size; typically multi-year commitments
2. [Indigenous Tourism Destination Fund—Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada \(ITAC\)](#)
Provides funding to support Indigenous-owned or partnered tourism initiatives across Canada, advancing cultural preservation, workforce development and community-based economic growth.
Type: Federal (administered via ITAC)
Amount: Part of a \$2.5-million national funding commitment; varies by project
3. [Canada Cultural Investment Fund \(CCIF\)](#)
Encourages private sector investment in arts and culture by supporting endowments, capacity-building and strategic funding partnerships.
Type: Federal
Amount: Varies; matching fund model often used
4. [Canada Arts Presentation Fund \(CAPF\)](#)
Supports organizations that present professional arts festivals or events, including community-based performing arts programs.
Type: Federal
Amount: Up to \$200,000 annually; some festivals receive more based on scale
5. [Museums Assistance Program—Indigenous Heritage Component](#)
Funds projects that preserve, manage and promote Indigenous cultural heritage, supporting Indigenous-led museums, heritage initiatives and cultural education.
Type: Federal
Amount: Varies by project; typically mid-to-large-scale funding

CITY BUILDING

1. [Active Transportation Fund \(Canada\)](#)
Federal fund supporting planning and capital projects that build or enhance infrastructure for walking, biking and rolling, such as trails, bike lanes, pedestrian bridges and more.
Type: Federal
Amount: Planning projects—up to \$50,000; capital projects—up to 100% of eligible costs (varies by project)
2. [Bruce County Destination Infrastructure and Active Transportation Grant](#)
Supports infrastructure improvements for core visitor attractions and active transportation areas with a tourism mandate.
Type: Regional (county-level)
Amount: Up to \$2,500 (50% matching)
3. [Streetscape Beautification Grant—Bruce County](#)
Encourages aesthetic and pedestrian-friendly improvements to downtowns and commercial hubs.
Type: Regional (county-level)
Amount: Up to \$10,000 (50% matching)
4. [Ontario Trillium Foundation—Grow Grant](#)
Provides multi-year funding for projects that build healthy and connected communities, including pedestrianization, climate action and placemaking.
Type: Provincial
Amount: Up to \$200,000 per year for 2–3 years
5. [Ontario Trillium Foundation—Capital Grant](#)
Funds the renovation, expansion and enhancement of community facilities and spaces for recreational, cultural and social use.
Type: Provincial
Amount: Up to \$200,000
6. [Inclusive Community Grants \(Ontario\)](#)
Supports projects that enhance accessibility and inclusion in public spaces, buildings and amenities—particularly benefiting older adults and people with disabilities.
Type: Provincial
Amount: Up to \$60,000
7. [Enabling Accessibility Fund \(Canada\)](#)
Federal grant for projects that increase accessibility in community spaces, including public washrooms and facilities.
Type: Federal
Amount: Ranges from \$200,000 to \$3,000,000 depending on project scope

A CITY THAT MOVES

1. [Canada Community-Building Fund \(CCBF\)](#)
Provides stable, long-term federal funding for municipalities to support public transit, roads and core infrastructure projects.
Type: Federal
Amount: \$2.4 billion annually across Canada; Ontario to receive \$932 million in 2025-26
2. [Green Municipal Fund \(GMF\)](#)
Offers loans and grants for projects advancing sustainability in energy, transportation and land use, including municipal fleet electrification.
Type: Non-governmental (Federation of Canadian Municipalities)
Amount: Varies depending on project scope and stream
3. [Rural Transit Solutions Fund](#)
Funds rural municipalities to expand or establish public transit systems, including zero-emission vehicles, stop infrastructure and trails integrated with transit.
Type: Federal
Amount: Varies; funding available for capital and planning components
4. [Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund \(OCIF\)](#)
Provides annual funding to rural and northern communities for core infrastructure renewal, including roads, sidewalks, bridges and stormwater systems.
Type: Provincial
Amount: \$400 million province-wide in 2025; minimum of \$100,000 per eligible municipality
5. [Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund \(OMPF\)](#)
Supports rural and northern municipalities with operating and infrastructure funding, prioritizing communities with limited fiscal capacity.
Type: Provincial
Amount: \$500 million annually (2024), distributed among 390 municipalities
6. [Ontario Transit Investment Fund \(OTIF\)](#)
Provides \$5 million in annual funding for small and rural municipalities to enhance transit infrastructure such as buses, on-demand service and accessibility upgrades.
Type: Provincial
Amount: Up to \$5 million annually across eligible municipalities
7. [Canada Public Transit Fund](#)
Federal investment of \$3 billion annually to improve and expand public and active transportation systems across Canada.
Type: Federal
Amount: Varies

SAFE CITY

1. [Crime Prevention Action Fund—Public Safety Canada](#)
Supports development of tools, resources and programs that promote community-based crime prevention, including mental health crisis response and diversion strategies.
Type: Federal
Amount: Varies by project scope (typically multi-year contribution agreements)
2. [Resilient Communities Fund—Ontario Trillium Foundation](#)
Provides flexible funding for non-profits to rebuild capacity and deliver responsive services in areas such as harm reduction, homelessness response and food security.
Type: Provincial
Amount: Up to \$200,000
3. [Canada Healthy Communities Initiative](#)
Funds community projects that create safe, accessible and inclusive public spaces through innovative design and participatory planning.
Type: Federal
Amount: Up to \$250,000
4. [Indigenous Community Capital Grants Program \(Ontario\)](#)
Supports Indigenous-led safety, infrastructure and wellness projects, including cultural and housing facilities.
Type: Provincial
Amount: Varies; based on capital and planning scope
5. [Rural Economic Development Program \(Ontario\)](#)
Invests in rural community capacity building and economic inclusion, including supports for newcomer safety, social infrastructure and civic belonging.
Type: Provincial
Amount: Varies; grants typically range from \$5,000 to \$250,000
6. [Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program \(ICIP\)](#)
Provides infrastructure funding to improve access to essential services, including after-hours emergency supports and community health facilities in rural areas.
Type: Federal-Provincial
Amount: Varies depending on project stream (community, transit, green infrastructure, etc.)

FOSTERING MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL AND RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS

1. [Community Support, Multiculturalism, and Anti-Racism Initiatives \(CSMARI\) Program—Canadian Heritage \(Events Component\)](#)

Supports projects that build respectful, inclusive communities through anti-racism education, cultural celebration and newcomer engagement.

Type: Federal

Amount: While exact maximums are not specified in the current guidelines, historical data from Canadian Heritage indicates over \$20.9 million has been invested in 950+ events since 2018, averaging approximately \$22,000 per event

2. [New Horizons for Seniors Program—Employment and Social Development Canada](#)

Funds projects that promote intergenerational knowledge-sharing, social inclusion and newcomer integration—especially in rural or underserved communities.

Type: Federal

Amount: Up to \$25,000 (community-based) or more under Pan-Canadian stream

3. [Ontario Anti-Racism Anti-Hate Grant Program](#)

Provides funding to local organizations supporting anti-racism education, hate prevention and intercultural relationship building.

Type: Provincial

Amount: Up to \$200,000 depending on project scale and community reach

4. [Partnership Development Grants—Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council \(SSHRC\)](#)

Supports the development of new partnerships or the design and testing of partnership approaches with respect to research and related activities. These grants encourage collaboration between post-secondary institutions and other sectors, including community organizations, to address challenges such as social inclusion, equity and intercultural understanding. Note: this grant is open to Canadian post-secondary institutions, in partnership with public, private and not-for-profit organizations.

Type: Federal

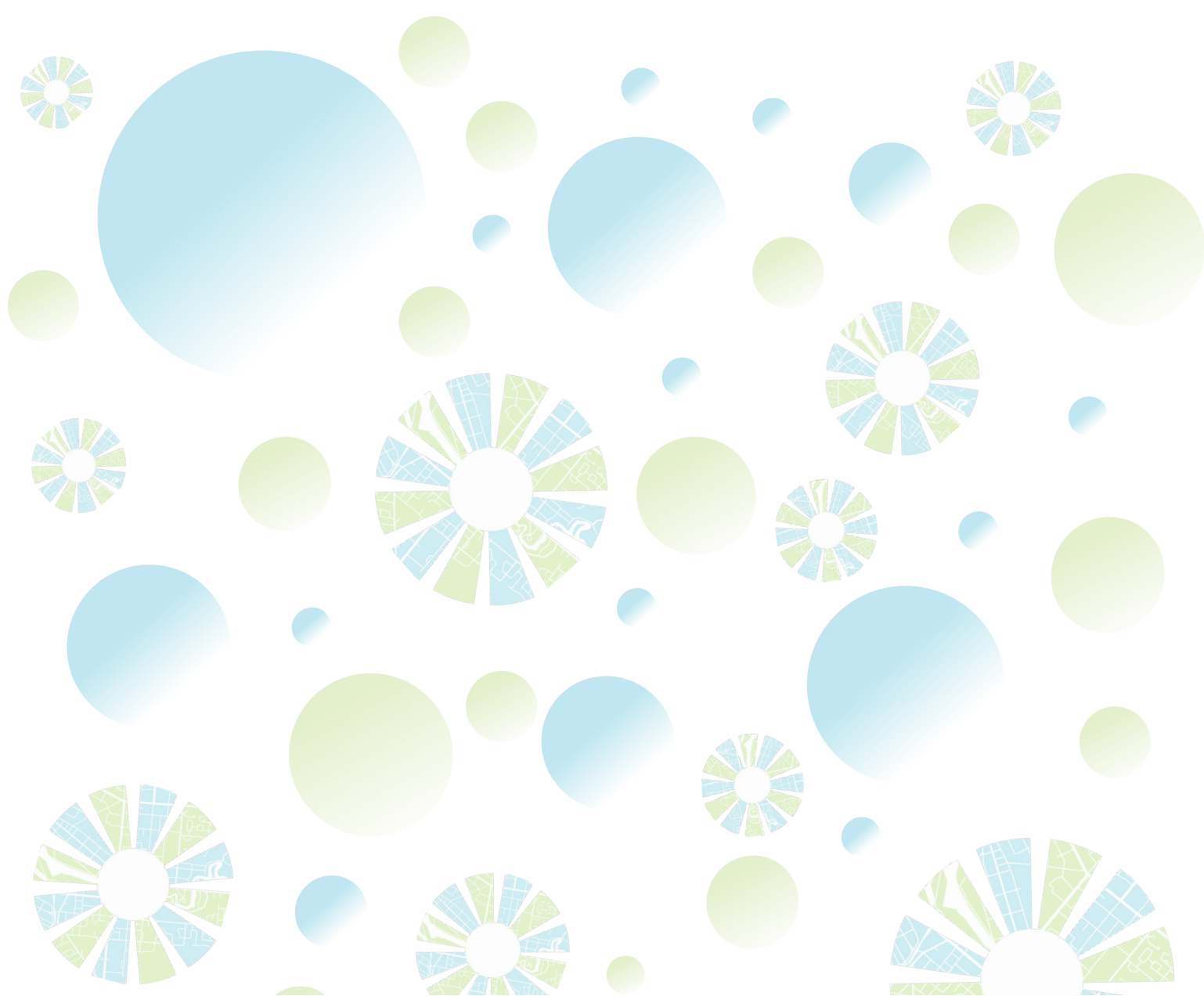
Amount: \$75,000 to \$200,000 over 1 to 3 years

5. [Anti-Racism Action Program \(ARAP\)—Canadian Heritage](#)

Provides funding to address systemic barriers in employment, justice and social participation for Indigenous peoples, racialized communities and religious minority communities through community-based projects.

Type: Federal

Amount: Varies by project; previously funded projects have ranged from \$50,000 to \$500,000 depending on scope and duration



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