

Staff Report

Report To: Community Services Committee
Report From: Rebecca Ellerdien, Senior Advisor, External Relations and Investment Attraction
Meeting Date: October 15, 2025
Report Code: CM-25-026
Subject: External Relations and Investment Attraction Plan

Recommendations:

THAT in consideration of Staff Report CM-25-026 respecting External Relations and Investment Attraction Plan, the Community Services Committee recommends that City Council approve the External Relations and Investment Attraction Action Plan 2025-2027 as presented.

Highlights:

- The External Relations and Investment Attraction (ERIA) Action Plan 2025-2027 will advance the City's strategic priorities and foster economic growth by investing in key relationships, capacity-building, and opportunity generating initiatives.
- Four sectors will be prioritized for investment readiness and attraction initiatives: Clean Energy, Health Care and Life Sciences (including medical isotopes), Advanced Manufacturing, and Marine Innovation.
- Initial action items have been grouped into three phases of strategic focus to establish a strong foundation for growth.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

[Strategic Plan](#) Priority: Prosperous City & Fostering Mutually Beneficial and Respectful Relationships.

The action plan will foster economic growth, attract new talent, promote regional collaboration, and strengthen the City's relationship with key stakeholders.

Climate and Environmental Implications:

This supports the objectives of the City's Corporate Climate Change Adaptation Plan by considering climate adaptation in the development of the City's strategies, plans and policies.

Previous Report/Authority:

[Report CM-25-029 Re: Review of Final Draft - Future Owen Sound - Vision 2050 Long-Term Strategic Plan September 24, 2025](#)

[Report CM-25-015 Re: Community and Business Development Mid-Year Update June 25, 2025](#)

Background:

The new staff position of Senior Advisor, External Relations and Investment Attraction will advance the City's economic and corporate objectives through proactive engagement with government, Indigenous, and community partners.

The core responsibilities of this position are to identify and pursue opportunities that enhance the City's investment readiness and competitiveness that attract new investment, particularly in innovation industries focusing on life sciences, technology, clean energy and the green economy.

In addition to investment readiness and attraction, the role provides high-level policy analysis, monitors legislative developments, and also leads municipal advocacy efforts (Government Relations) while cultivating external relationships that foster collaboration and alignment between the city and community organizations through information sharing, and participating in community-based initiatives (Community and Indigenous Relations).

Staff have initiated work on these objectives while drafting the ERIA Action Plan 2025-2027 to provide strategic direction and track progress over time. The initial implementation of these actions will be targeted within the scope of an 18-month period.

The City of Owen Sound already collaborates with a wide range of external stakeholders, inclusive of the following categories:

- **Community Partners**
social services, community groups, volunteer organizations
- **Government Partners**
federal, provincial, municipal, and intergovernmental organizations
- **Indigenous Partners**
Saugeen Ojibway Nation, band leadership, community members
- **Institutional Partners**
Brightshores Health System, Georgian College, local school boards
- **Commercial Partners**
Local business owners, investors, developers

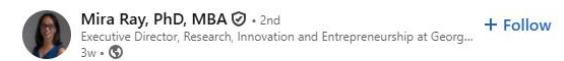
To achieve the City's goals, it is critical to invest in establishing, building, and maintaining stakeholder relationships. This includes establishing procedures to facilitate the transition of core relationships as part of the City's succession management procedures and incorporating relationship management as a defined task within departmental work plans.

Building on the extensive community engagement undertaken in support of the recently adopted [Future Owen Sound: Vision 2050 Long-Term Strategic Plan](#), staff have proactively engaged stakeholders in the development of the ERIA Action Plan.

This advance work included:

- More than two dozen one-on-one meetings with external stakeholders, including leadership of Georgian College, the Canadian Nuclear Isotope Council, Saugeen Ojibway Nation Environment Office staff, Invest Ontario, business leaders, grant officers, and other community, Indigenous, not-for-profit, small business, industrial, and institutional partners;
- Monthly meetings with Grey County municipal economic development officers to share data tools and resources for investment readiness in alignment with Grey County's [Economic Development, Tourism, and Culture Master Plan](#);
- Working collaboratively with Grey County Economic Development and Invest Ontario to package available industrial land for future development opportunities;
- Participation in multi-stakeholder meetings to establish alignment on shared goals (annual general meeting of the Southwestern

- Ontario Isotope Coalition, stakeholder discussion to foster a vibrant River District, and collaborative solutions to improve primary care);
- Site visits to solidify relationships and identify new opportunities, including Georgian College’s Centre for Research, Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Barrie with Grey County Economic Development, and a tour of Hydrogen Optimized’s facility with Public Energy Inc. which resulted in a proposal for an Owen Sound Hydrogen Peaker Plant; and
- An extensive literature review to explore holistic approaches to economic development and foster future growth.



So great to host Jacinda Rudolph and Rebecca Ellerdiem from the County of Grey and City of Owen Sound at our Barrie campus. So many ideas on how to support their communities through Georgian College Research & Innovation , Social Innovation at Georgian College , and Henry Bernick Entrepreneurship Centre.



Owen Sound Hydrogen Peaker Plant

Project Information Brief



Staff incorporated community feedback to develop a set of ambitious but achievable actions which could be implemented within the scope of an 18-month action plan.

However, this preparatory work also revealed ongoing challenges which will require specific and strategic consideration. These barriers include ongoing volatility in international trade; chronic underfunding within the health, child care, and education sectors; dysfunctional or under-resourced organizations with poor succession management; fierce competition to establish and retain primary care teams; and other factors impacting institutional trust.

Within this context, staff have chosen to prepare this action plan as a responsive, living document with intentional flexibility to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances while continuing to make measurable progress towards the City’s goals.

Analysis:

The ERIA Action Plan 2025-2027 will foster economic growth and prosperity by investing in key relationships, capacity-building, and opportunity generating initiatives with special emphasis on four priority sectors:

- **Clean Energy**
Advancing regional sector cluster development as members of the Clean Energy Frontier and Southwestern Ontario Isotope Coalition.
- **Health Care and Life Sciences**
Supporting the expansion of rural access to nuclear medicine by fostering strategic partnerships that build local capacity in research, education, training and treatment capacities.
- **Advanced Manufacturing**
Promoting labour market readiness and leveraging skilled trades training and apprenticeship to support current and future industrial development.
- **Marine Innovation**
Supporting Georgian College's delivery of industry-driven training and certification as Central Canada's marine centre of excellence, and promoting sustainable economic development through the Great Lakes and St Lawrence Cities Initiative.

These future-focused sectors share intersecting priorities: the production of lifesaving medical isotopes requires skilled workers at every stage of the supply chain, and investing in clean hydrogen technologies will further the decarbonization of marine transportation.

Initial actions are grouped into three areas of strategic focus identified by staff to provide structure and align with big picture goal setting as initiatives move naturally through interconnected phases:

Strategic Focus #1: Build Relationships

Actions to establish and strengthen relationships with key stakeholders through networking opportunities, proactive outreach, and ongoing engagement initiatives:

- **Develop coordinated plan to attract and retain residents**
 - Host a series of 3-5 employer engagement sessions.
 - Provide direct support to community-building initiatives to welcome new residents and enhance youth retention.

- **Identify key partners to foster growth and prosperity**
 - Prioritise opportunities to deepen the City’s relationship with critical partners through stakeholder engagement initiatives.
 - Promote the City’s interests through collective advocacy and membership in regional, national, and international initiatives.
- **Strengthen relationship with Indigenous communities**
 - Establish staff-to-staff working relationships and promote collaboration on shared goals through proactive outreach, communication, and resource-sharing.
 - Explore methods to formalize consideration and feedback on matters of mutual interest in the spirit of reconciliation.

Strategic Focus #2: Build Capacity

Actions to foster growth and unlock resources with strategic investments in capacity-building initiatives, research, and skills development, with a specific interest in facilitating innovation:

- **Develop data-informed practices to support growth**
 - Create an Economic Health report card to measure 10-12 trackable indicators of individual and collective prosperity over time (i.e., demographics, housing affordability, commercial-residential ratio, property tax rate, vacancy rate), supported by investments in data visualization and analysis tools (such as [Spotlight by Environics Analytics](#), and [Mass Culture’s Data Narratives for the Arts Initiative](#)).
 - Promote the City to 3-5 priority [PRIZM](#)[®] demographic profiles and initiate a scalable, localized marketing campaign with trackable metrics to inform future promotion.
- **Initiate strategy to attract employers and skilled workers**
 - Conduct a gap analysis and develop a targeted outreach plan to foster population growth, prioritizing young people, family-forming households, and skilled workers.
 - Work with Grey County Economic Development and other stakeholders to identify, prepare, and package ‘investment ready’ industrial land for future development.
- **Invest in community development initiatives**
 - Establish a local [Community Impact Lab](#), integrated with Georgian College’s Community Innovation Network and the

Future of Belonging project, to facilitate collaboration and stakeholder engagement on initiatives that will improve quality of life and advance the City's strategic priorities.

- Coordinate a cross-sector skills development and stakeholder engagement series on grant writing, entrepreneurship, and social innovation in collaboration with local partners.

Strategic Focus #3: Build Opportunity

Actions that will leverage partnerships to amplify regional strengths and attract new investment in future-focused sectors.

- **Leverage regional, national, and international partnerships**
 - Promote the City's intergovernmental priorities through active membership in multi-sector coalitions, initiatives, and organizations to amplify collective action and advocacy.
 - Establish a track record of strong delegations and advocacy for local interests by modelling collaborative leadership and information sharing between partners.
- **Advance cluster development of priority sectors**
 - Coordinate with partners to promote regional cluster development in clean energy, health care and life sciences, advanced manufacturing, and marine innovation.
- **Become a champion for innovation and stewardship**
 - Initiate stakeholder engagement initiatives to celebrate and promote local innovation in priority sectors, including speaking opportunities and incorporating local innovators into City events and promotions.
 - Invest in tools to enhance marketing and promotion efforts with digital-forward approaches and [technology stewardship](#) best practices.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The City of Owen Sound is well-positioned to significantly advance its economic interests by embracing its role as a regional hub and championing innovation through collaborative partnerships.

Once finalized and approved by council, the ERIA Action Plan 2025-2027 will be incorporated into the City's 2026 budget and the Senior Advisor's work plan. Staff will report back on individual action items as required, with a review of activities and recommendations for future actions in Q4 of 2026.

Financial Implications:

The work associated with the External Relations and Investment Attraction Action Plan will be carried out within the department's annual budget and incorporated into the City's 2026 budget. Certain initiatives may be eligible for support from the Vision 2050 implementation reserve, and staff will leverage existing resources to pursue additional funding and grant opportunities where applicable.

Communication Strategy:

Once approved, this action plan will be posted to the 'Reports, Studies and Plans' section of the City's website. The Senior Advisor will work with the Communications Team to develop communication plans for individual initiatives and action items, and to engage in ongoing transparent communication with stakeholders.

Consultation:

Grey County Economic Development
External Stakeholders

Attachments:

External Relations and Investment Attraction Action Plan 2025-2027

Recommended by:

Rebecca Ellerdiem, Senior Advisor, External Relations and Investment Attraction

Submission approved by:

Tim Simmonds, City Manager

For more information on this report, please contact Rebecca Ellerdiem, Senior Advisor, External Relations and Investment Attraction at <mailto:rellerdiem@owensound.ca> or 519-376-4440 x1254.