

Staff Report

Report To: Community Services Committee
Report From: Rebecca Ellerdien, Senior Advisor, External Relations and Investment Attraction
Meeting Date: February 18, 2026
Report Code: CM-26-010
Subject: Initiatives to Support Investment Readiness

Recommendations:

THAT in consideration of Staff Report CM-26-010 respecting Initiatives to Support Investment Readiness, the Community Services Committee recommends that City Council directs staff to:

1. Collaborate with Grey County on investment readiness initiatives including assessments or feasibility studies required to support site packaging activities;
2. Apply for grant funding to implement the External Relations and Investment Attraction Action Plan 2025-2027; and
3. Bring forward a by-law to amend the Board and Committee By-law to:
 - a. Establish a Harbour Development Task Force, as outlined in the Terms of Reference attached to the report; and
 - b. Appoint the members that accept an invitation from staff.

Highlights:

- The City of Owen Sound is actively pursuing investment readiness initiatives that include close collaboration with Grey County and other stakeholders.
- Provincial cost-share funding of up to \$150,000 is available for projects that support the implementation an existing economic development plan or strategy.

- A proposed Harbour Development Task Force will promote regional collaboration between the City, First Nations, Grey County municipalities, and other stakeholders.
- The task force mandate will be to consider harbour development opportunities and to report back to council with recommendations for future action by Fall 2026.

Vision 2050 - Strategic Plan Alignment:

[Strategic Plan](#) Priority: Prosperous City – Supporting initiatives that increase competitive economic advantages for current and new businesses and their employees.

Community stakeholder responses to the Future Owen Sound—Vision 2050 strategic planning survey encouraged initiatives to support job creation and business development. Many respondents also referenced pride in the City’s strong marine history as a federal port and expressed a desire for investment in the revitalization of the City’s waterfront. Multiple priorities include the potential to strengthen relationships with local First Nations on development opportunities.

Previous Report/Authority:

[Report CM-25-026 Re: External Relations and Investment Attraction Plan](#)

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

[Report CM-25-010 from the Senior Manager of Strategic Initiatives and Operational Effectiveness Re: Vision 2050 - Community Engagement Report](#)

[Presentation Re: Grey County’s 2024 Annual Report](#)

Background:

The City of Owen Sound is actively pursuing investment readiness initiatives that include close collaboration with Grey County and other local, regional, national and international stakeholders. The following action plans form the basis for the recommendations of this report.

Regional collaboration for an 'Investment Ready' Grey County

As per the [Grey County Economic Development, Tourism and Culture Master Plan](#), the following actions fall within 'Investment Ready':

2.4 Explore options to create municipally owned employment lands, including three large-scale industrial parks strategically positioned across the Region.

2.5 Identify and resource significant regional economic development projects that will generate generational wealth, to positively impact Grey and its member municipalities.

Staff continue to work collaboratively with Grey County to develop sector profiles, promote data-informed practices, and identify employment lands to support investment readiness. Grey County has engaged a consultant, Think Compass, to support work on major economic development projects.

Representatives of Council and staff have also recently participated in economic development workshops hosted by Grey County:

- The inaugural 2024 Annual Economic Development Leadership Forum
- The April 2025 Warden's Economic Development Leadership Luncheon
- The October 2025 Annual Economic Development Leadership Forum

International opportunity and the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor

In September 2025, the [Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative \(the "Cities Initiative"\) published an Economic Transformation Action Plan](#) to support the establishment of the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor. As host city to a federal port, Owen Sound and Grey County are part of a multi-jurisdictional global trade corridor.

As per the Cities Initiative media release:

The Action Plan provides a 10-year blueprint to position the region as the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor and one of North America's fastest-growing economies over the next decade while safeguarding the region's unparalleled freshwater resources for current and future generations.

With 84 percent of North America's surface freshwater, a highly integrated regional economy that ranks as the third largest in the

world and other comparative advantages, the region is uniquely positioned to thrive in an era of global water scarcity.

Through the implementation of the Action Plan, the Cities Initiative and its partners aim to build on these strengths and contribute to the achievement of the following regional goals by 2035:

- Attract 500,000 new businesses that are committed to sustainability*
- Create 18 million jobs for the region's residents*
- Avoid any percentage increase in consumptive water loss*
- Improve water quality from 'fair' to 'good'*
- Reduce emissions by 300 million metric tons*

Developing Owen Sound's Vision 2050 into a roadmap to prosperity

In October 2025, following the adoption of the [Future Owen Sound—Vision 2050 Long-Term Strategic Plan](#), an 18-month [External Relations and Investment Attraction Action Plan](#) (“ERIA action plan”) was created to capture initial actions supporting multiple strategic priorities, with a special emphasis on building collaborative relationships as a secure foundation for future growth and prosperity.

The current [Owen Sound Harbour & Downtown Urban Design/Master Plan Strategy](#) was developed in 2000 with a focus on comprehensive urban design. The work of the ERIA action plan will look to existing planning documents for tie-ins to the broader economic development context of the harbour and waterfront district.

Analysis and Options:

Staff recommend taking a proactive approach to support investment readiness initiatives, as many of these opportunities require a long-term outlook to anticipate and prepare for future infrastructure needs. This work is agnostic to any known or unknown opportunities. The recommendations support strategic advancement of the City's investment attraction goals.

Notably, within the current global context, there are funding and investment opportunities today that did not exist a year ago. The opportunity risk of inaction is substantial.

With careful work and coordination between partners, the City is strategically positioned to advance regional prosperity. This work includes:

- identifying, preparing, and/or preserving prime employment lands;
- pursuing funding opportunities and partnerships to implement action plans; and
- strengthening our relationships with core partners, including neighbouring municipalities, First Nations, and other stakeholders.

Site identification to promote prosperity and attract investment

Industrial site packaging for future development is included as a core responsibility of the new External Relations and Investment Attraction portfolio.

In July 2025, the City of Owen Sound's City Manager and Senior Advisor, External Relations and Investment Attraction, met with Grey County and [Invest Ontario](#) to learn more about the new provincial agency's work to streamline investment attraction.

Preparing an Invest Ontario partner portal listing for a city-owned site(s) is included in the Senior Advisor's 2026 work plan.

Staff are actively engaged in work to identify and package future employment lands in collaboration with Grey County and other stakeholders.

The first recommendation of this report is necessary to advance this work by enabling the collection of more detailed information required to advance development initiatives that will contribute to the City's long-term prosperity.

Implementation of capacity-building action plan initiatives

The ERIA action plan includes short- and medium-term initiatives designed to build relationships, build capacity, and build opportunity.

The Rural Ontario Development (ROD) Program's [Economic diversification, competitiveness and capacity building stream](#) provides cost-share funding for projects that support communities to build economic development capacity and implement strategies that increase competitiveness to retain businesses, attract investment and enhance growth.

- Economic diversification and competitiveness: projects will support the implementation an existing economic development plan or strategy. This stream offers up to 50 per cent cost-share, up to \$150,000.

Eligible expenses for this funding include professional fees such as legal and assessment costs, event marketing and promotion costs, honorariums for

Indigenous Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers, workshop and training development, speaker fees, and event related transportation costs.

The second recommendation of this report will authorize staff to apply for funding through ROD or other applicable grant programs to recover a portion of the costs associated with implementing the ERIA action plan. Matched contribution funding would be allocated within this year's budget, next year's budget, or, if necessary, through an additional request in the 2027 budget. Staff will also work collaboratively with Grey County on joint funding applications for unallocated costs where applicable.

Promoting collaboration and reconciliation on shared goals

While we celebrate the Port of Owen Sound's historical significance, with Vision 2050 our community is now looking to the future. Waterfront revitalization and opportunities for regional collaboration on economic development initiatives were both noted as significant community priorities.

In November 2025, staff attended the Cities Initiatives' [Ontario Water Leaders Summit](#), where Grey County Warden Andrea Matrosovs was joined by Saugeen First Nation Chief Conrad Ritchie to highlight local reconciliation efforts on a panel about building stronger First Nation-Municipal relationships. Both emphasized the shared goal of building connection and stronger relationships in our region.

Over the last number of months, staff have begun to build an informed picture of our current infrastructure realities as well as preliminary work to envision future scenarios for the revitalization of Owen Sound's harbour.

Staff strongly recommend convening a task force to provide more detailed insight into options and opportunities for the Owen Sound harbour. Staff furthermore recommend that this task force be used to support the strategic priority to foster mutually beneficial and respectful relationships by including Indigenous representation as well as members from all Grey County municipalities connected by Georgian Bay's coastline, in alignment with the economic development action plans at the local, regional, and international levels referenced above.

Additionally, as per the [Association of Municipalities of Ontario's Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan](#), "municipalities and First Nations communities are neighbours, sharing resources, and infrastructure, as well as overlapping interests in community well-being and regional development," and further calls on municipalities to commit to the value of Inclusion and Collaboration

and “commit to shared leadership and co-development, ensuring Indigenous Peoples are meaningfully involved in shaping decisions that impact them.”

In accordance with [By-law No. 2026-008, Establishment of Boards, Committees and Task Forces](#), staff have drafted a proposed Terms of Reference for a Harbour Development Task Force (Attachment 1).

If approved, staff will issue invitations to task force members based on the preferred composition identified below, which include:

- Two (2) seats for the Owen Sound Mayor and the Chair of the Community Services Committee (or Council designate);
- Two (2) seats for Indigenous members, such as Saugeen Ojibway Nation or Nawash Economic Development Corporation;
- Four (4) seats for representatives of Grey County and Grey County municipalities located on the shoreline of Georgian Bay; and
- Four (4) seats for institutional or community experts with special knowledge related to the task force mandate.

A meeting schedule will be determined pending the members’ acceptance of the invitation to join the task force. Up to six (6) meetings will be held at the call of the chair, at a location determined by the chair. The proposed mandate is to consider harbour development opportunities and to report back to council with recommendations for future action.

The third and final recommendation of this report is to direct staff to bring forward a by-law to amend the Board and Committee By-law to establish a Harbour Development Task Force in accordance with the proposed Terms of Reference attached to the report and appoint the members that accept the invitation sent by staff.

Resource Alignment:

Financial Resources

There are no new financial implications associated with this report.

Staff will apply for grant funding to support the implementation of the ERIA action plan, which may require a matching contribution that would be pursued through this year’s budget, next year’s budget, or, if necessary, through an additional request in the 2027 budget.

Costs associated with the Harbour Development Task Force are expected to remain within existing departmental budget allocations.

Human Resources

Investment readiness initiatives are included in the 2026 work plan for the Senior Advisor, External Relations and Investment Attraction and are part of the role's core responsibilities.

Approximately 180 hours of staff time have been allocated to identify and pursue opportunities that enhance the City's investment readiness and competitiveness, such as enhancing local hydrogen sector profile, activating the Harbour District, and packaging industrial lands for future development in collaboration with Grey County. The Senior Advisor will continue to provide in-kind support when collaborating with external partners.

The Harbour Development Task Force is anticipated to require approximately 12 to 18 hours of staff time (approximately 2-3 hours per meeting for up to 6 meetings) from the Clerks Department and Planning Department. This would include the support of a recording secretary and informational briefings from other staff as needed.

Time and Scheduling

The deadline for the next intake of the Rural Ontario Development program is February 26, 2026.

Staff will continue to explore available grants and funding opportunities to support investment readiness initiatives, including opportunities for collaboration with external stakeholders.

The timeline to issue invitations for the Harbour Development Task Force is March 2026, with the initial meeting occurring in Spring 2026 and a report back expected by Fall 2026.

Technology and Infrastructure

N/A

Climate and Environmental Impacts:

The recommendation supports the City's Climate Mitigation Plan.

Activities to support the City's investment readiness have the potential for environmental impact. These recommendations aim to reduce climate and environmental impacts through planning, design, and operation of assets and other projects.

Communication and Engagement:

Updates on initiatives to support investment readiness will be included in the quarterly economic development newsletter. Individual communications plans and/or media releases will be prepared when recommended by Communications staff.

Report Developed in Consultation With:

Communications Team

Briana Bloomfield, City Clerk

Attachments:

Proposed Terms of Reference for Harbour Development Task Force

Reviewed by:

Tim Simmonds, City Manager

Submission approved by:

Tim Simmonds, City Manager

For more information on this report, please contact Rebecca Ellerdien, Senior Advisor, External Relations and Investment Attraction at rellerdien@owensound.ca or 519-376-4440 x 1254.