

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-26-017
Subject: Economic Health Report Card

Recommendations:

THAT in consideration of Staff Report CM-26-017 respecting the Economic Health Report Card, the Community Services Committee recommends that City Council receive the report for information purposes.

Highlights:

- The Owen Sound Economic Health Report Card is designed to measure trackable indicators of economic prosperity.
- Nine metrics were selected to present a snapshot overview of the City's demographics, affordability, and development.
- The goal of this initiative is not to duplicate data collection efforts; it is to collate available information from external and internal resources for the purpose of making informed recommendations.

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.

The Economic Health Report Card is part of establishing data-informed best practices that provide clarity and confidence in decisions made by the City and our partners.

Previous Report/Authority:

[Memorandum Re: Annual 2025 Development Update](#)

[Report CM-26-009 Re: Team Grey Memorandum of Understanding](#)

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

Background:

In October 2025, Council approved the [External Relations and Investment Attraction Action Plan 2025-2027](#) (ERIA action plan), which included three areas of strategic focus:

- **Build Relationships**—Actions to establish and strengthen relationships with key stakeholders through networking opportunities, proactive outreach, and ongoing engagement initiatives.
- **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
- **Build Opportunity**—Actions that will leverage partnerships to amplify regional strengths and attract new investment in future-focused sectors.

Under *Strategic Focus #2: Build Capacity*, we committed to develop data-informed practices to support growth, which included creating an economic health report card to measure trackable indicators over time, and investing in data visualization and analysis tools.

In February 2026, Council authorized staff to execute the Team Grey Memorandum of Understanding, which includes access to the Environics Analytics Spotlight platform. Staff continue to participate in monthly data-to-action roundtables hosted by Grey County.

Staff have now prepared an Economic Health Report Card as an at-a-glance snapshot resource using a combination of data sources, as detailed below.

Analysis and Options:

The goal of this initiative is not to duplicate data collection efforts; it is to collate available information from external and internal resources for the purpose of making informed recommendations.

Factors informing metric choice for the inaugural report card

For the baseline 2025 Economic Health Report Card (Attachment 1), staff considered relevance, data availability, and source reliability when choosing nine metrics:

- Demographics (*Environics Analytics—Attachment 2*)
 - Total Population
 - Median Age of Total Population
 - Average Household Income
- Affordability (*various*)
 - Housing/Median Sold Price ([HouseSigma](#))
 - Average Rent ([Apartments.com/CoStar](#))
 - Living Wage ([Ontario Living Wage Network](#))
- Development (*internal data*)
 - Commercial-Residential Tax Rate Ratio
 - New Residential Units by Permits Issued
 - Construction Value

Staff decided to narrow the focus to an initial set of economic health indicators aligned with the municipality's mandated responsibilities to allow for future expansion over time and as a tool to encourage greater use of data-informed practices. This list can be adapted and expanded in the future, particularly in years when Canadian Census data becomes available via Statistics Canada.

Staff also considered factors such as anticipated uses, comprehensiveness, the desire to provide an 'at-a-glance' snapshot for easy sharing, and data reliability over time. Staff chose to use third-party sources for information on housing costs to better capture current market realities (ie. the cost to rent an apartment or purchase a home for someone looking today, versus broader datasets influenced by what people historically paid for housing).

Other metrics staff considered that did not make the condensed list include the [top salmon caught at annual derby](#) as a tourism and environmental health indicator, the number of meals served by [Owen Sound Hunger and Relief Effort](#) as a food security indicator, and detailed employment data collected by the [Four County Labour Market Planning Board](#). Staff would like to include commercial or residential vacancy rates in the future; however, the [Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation](#) does not provide rental vacancy detail for communities the size of Owen Sound, and past efforts to

accurately capture local commercial vacancy involved door-to-door data collection, which was not feasible within the scope of this initiative to collate existing data. Staff will continue to monitor these data sources and to prioritize building relationships with community partners engaged in ongoing data collection.

Notable insights from the collection of economic health indicators

The 2025 Environics Analytics intercensal population projection indicates an 11.73% increase from the 2021 Census (Attachment 2, p.4-5). DemoStats 2025 uses a variety of weighted factors to develop informed predictions, including planned residential developments. It is important to note that the City also saw a 1,010% increase in the number of permits issued for new residential units, which likely impacted these population projections. The current modeling suggests that the period of population stability is shifting into a pattern of steady, sustained growth over the next decade (Attachment 2, p.6). The 2026 Census will provide the clearest picture of these trends, and staff will report back in early 2027 when that data becomes available.

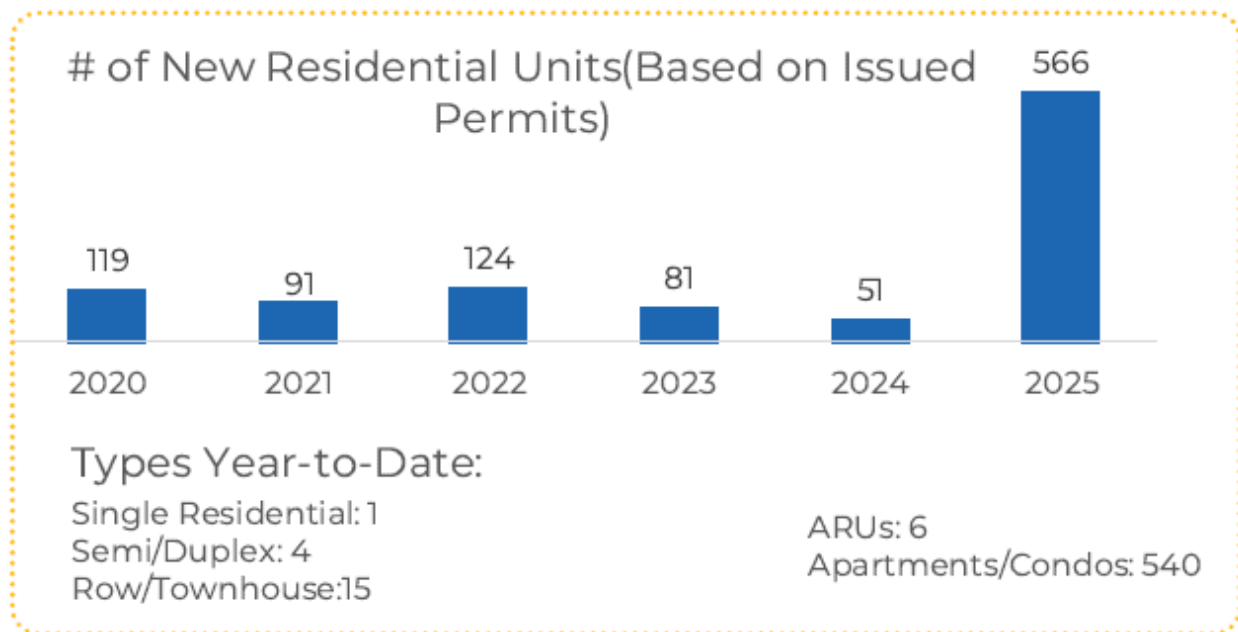


Figure 1 Source: City of Owen Sound Development Team, Annual Development Update, 2025

As noted above, there were significant groundbreakings for multiple high-density rental development projects in 2025, representing 540 apartment or condo units. This figure also includes at least 35 new affordable housing units, as per the [Annual 2025 Development Update](#). The 4,605 rented households within Owen Sound represent 42% of the City's 11,005

households and 45% of rented households in Grey County overall. (Attachment 2, p.4), which indicates that residents are disproportionately impacted by changes in provincial policy concerning renters.

While the area continues to experience the impacts of an aging population, the median age over the next five years is expected to decrease slightly from 45.7 to 45.4 (Attachment 2, p.1). This suggests that population decline is potentially being mitigated by in-migration by family-forming households. When benchmarked against the rest of Grey County, our population by age shows higher rates of people aged 25-34, and those over 80 years (Attachment 2, p.8). When the same data is benchmarked against the province, it shows a lower proportion of people aged 20-29, and higher index ranking of those aged 60 years and older.

This data supports two areas of opportunity to promote targeted growth:

- resident attraction initiatives for family-forming households; and
- promoting the attraction and retention of post-secondary students leveraging local assets such as Georgian College.

The detailed profiles that accompany the Top 5 PRIZM® segments (Attachment 2, p.7) give us greater insights into the households that make up three-quarters of our community:

PRIZM® Segment	Description
<p>#1</p> <p>Suburban Recliners</p> <p>25.47%</p>	<p>Suburban Recliners consists primarily of older individuals and couples living in affordable suburban neighbourhoods surrounding smaller and mid-sized cities.</p> <p>Characterized by a large proportion of empty-nesters and seniors earning modest lower-middle incomes, this segment tends to reside in single-detached homes and low-rise apartments, where they value a strong sense of community. These third-plus-generation Canadians enjoy their leisure time by attending local cultural events, theatre, and engaging in outdoor activities.</p> <p>Generally frugal, they make mindful spending decisions and show a strong interest in civic involvement and sustainability. Their lifestyle reflects a desire for connection, continuity, and meaningful engagement within their local communities.</p>

<p>#2</p> <p>Just Getting By</p> <p>15.1%</p>	<p>Just Getting By features younger adults and single-parent families living in large urban centres.</p> <p>These high-density neighbourhoods are typically composed of renters in low-rise apartment buildings. With education levels generally not extending beyond high school, residents earn low incomes through jobs in sales, services, trades, or manufacturing.</p> <p>Financial constraints shape their day-to-day lives, leading them to participate in affordable leisure activities such as billiards, bowling, and visiting video arcades. They tend to prioritize shared experiences over material goods and exhibit a strong sense of community and empathy.</p>
<p>#2</p> <p>Juggling Acts</p> <p>13.88%</p>	<p>Juggling Acts is characterized by a vibrant blend of young singles, couples, and families, particularly in small- and medium-sized cities such as London and Kitchener-Cambridge.</p> <p>This segment includes many renters living in row houses and low-rise apartments, typically earning middle incomes from service and blue-collar jobs. Their weekend activities are often family-focused, with a strong inclination toward outdoor adventures, neighbourhood festivals, and local fairs.</p> <p>They value authenticity and seek meaningful experiences that align with their practical outlook, family priorities, and desire for connection.</p>
<p>#4</p> <p>Slow Lane Suburbs</p> <p>13.57%</p>	<p>Slow Lane Suburbs consists of older singles and couples, primarily over the age of 55, residing in mid-sized cities.</p> <p>This segment enjoys a quiet lifestyle, often owning affordable single-detached homes, many inhabited by third-plus generation Canadians. With high school or college educations leading to steady, middle-income careers, they tend to run tight households while remaining active through outdoor recreation and local events such as food festivals.</p> <p>Their consumer habits lean toward frugality, yet they continue to value quality and social responsibility. Defined by deep roots and a sense of continuity, this segment embraces</p>

	a lifestyle shaped by simplicity, familiarity, and meaningful everyday moments.
<p>#5</p> <p>Old Town Roads</p> <p>7.4%</p>	<p>Old Town Roads is a segment of older couples and individuals living in Canada’s quaint small towns.</p> <p>Many are empty nesters or widowed, predominantly residing in older single-detached homes, and earning middle incomes through blue collar or agricultural work. These residents prioritize financial security as they approach or enter retirement. They enjoy time-honoured pastimes like fishing and gardening and have a strong appreciation for local events and music festivals.</p> <p>Traditional media remains central to their entertainment, with TV sports and classic rock or country music on the radio being favourites. Their lifestyle is defined by simplicity, familiarity, and strong ties to tradition.</p>

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(<https://spotlightcanada.com/Spotlight/About/1/2025>)

Further consideration and next steps

As per the ERIA action plan, staff will use the data and insights collected in the course of creating this report—along with insights from other activities including site visits and investment-readiness initiatives—to inform the creation of a targeted resident attraction marketing campaign.

Staff will continue to pursue improvements to data collection and analysis in collaboration with internal staff and external partners.

Resource Alignment:

Financial Resources

There are no new financial implications associated with this report.

Human Resources

The development of data-informed practices to support growth, such as the Economic Health Report Card, are in the 2026 work plan for the Senior Advisor, External Relations and Investment Attraction (~40 hours).

This initiative is also supported by the Communications Team for data visualization and graphic design, and by the Development Team for data collection and analysis.

Time and Scheduling

The Economic Health Report Card will be reviewed and updated annually.

Technology and Infrastructure

This initiative is supported by the City's access to the Environics Analytics Spotlight data-sharing platform through a joint initiative with Grey County.

Climate and Environmental Impacts:

There are no anticipated climate or environmental impacts.

Communication and Engagement:

The report card will be shared via the City's website and social media channels. This report will be linked to provide further detail and insights.

The report card will be included in the Q2 edition of the quarterly Economic Development newsletter.

Report Developed in Consultation With:

Carly McArthur, Communications Advisor

Attachments:

1. Attachment 1 - Economic Health Report Card 2025
2. Attachment 2 - Owen Sound Spotlight Report Nov 2025

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 x1254.