

INTRODUCTION

Owen Sound is a vibrant City with a commitment to responsible governance and community enhancement. The City's identity is built upon its storied past, picturesque location on the shores of Georgian Bay, and diverse business climate. Owen Sound is home to 21,753 residents and hosts thousands of tourists year round. The City is a business, social, and cultural resource hub for approximately 100,000 people that live in the surrounding region. This Economic Development Action Plan is designed to maintain and enhance the City's vitality, and to investigate ways to capitalize on the community's various assets. The Action Plan calls upon the City's citizens, government, and staff to embrace innovative thinking, collaboration, and above all – action. The directions laid out in this Action Plan are designed to be implemented and to inspire a shift toward a new goal-oriented ambition for the City as a whole. The Action Plan needs to remain flexible to respond to fluctuating economic conditions. Regardless of the current state of the economy, there are always sound opportunities to pursue and develop. Community partners have been identified in this strategy as key to our community's future economic health. This Action Plan, with its partners, is meant to achieve that end and in doing so fulfill the City's mission and move towards our vision.

MISSION

The City of Owen Sound governs and advocates on behalf of all citizens by providing infrastructure and services which respect the environment and allow individuals and businesses to prosper.

VISION

Owen Sound's vision is to be a community of choice for all, distinguishable by its authenticity, natural amenities, diversity and community spirit.

STRATEGIC AREAS

1.0 PRIORITIZE THE DOWNTOWN AND HARBOURFRONT AREA AS THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FOCUS OF THE CITY

Develop policies and incentives to attract private and public investment to the Downtown and Harbourfront in order to draw businesses, residents, and tourists into these areas.

1.1 Strengthen, expand and clarify the Community Improvement Plan to maximize the incentives used to attract new investment into the downtown.

1.1.1 Clarify and strengthen incentives available to assist developers with façade and structural improvements, redevelopment, and remediation of vacant lands.

- 1.1.2 Market and publicize the 'improved' Community Improvement Plan more aggressively to businesses, landlords, and developers.
- 1.1.3 Expand the funding and eligibility criteria of the Community Improvement Plan, in order to increase participation from the business community, and increase the resource levels to leverage more private sector investment.

Lead : Community Services (Immediate, 2009, Q3/4)

- 1.2 Create new incentives and improve support to existing programs to bolster public and private investment within the Downtown.

- 1.2.1 Identify and develop significant incentives for residential developers (including waiving of fees, development charges, and deferring payments), to encourage a mix of housing types, densities, and tenure within the Downtown and along the Harbourfront. Coordinate and focus efforts between the City and the DIA on its core mandate of beatification, marketing and promotion.

Lead: Finance, (Immediate, 2009, Q4)

- 1.2.2 Encourage and assist public institutions to expand and locate in the Downtown and Harbourfront area. This includes existing institutional anchors like City Hall, Owen Sound and North Grey Union Public Library, the Billy Bishop Home and Museum, and the Tom Thomson Art Gallery.

Lead: Economic Development & City Manager, (Longer Term, 2011, Q1)

- 1.2.3 Develop an investment package to encourage new tourist lodging in the Downtown and along the Harbourfront, including hotel chains and potential inn/bed and breakfast operators.

Lead: Economic Development & City Manager, (Medium, 2010, Q4)

- 1.3 Expose and maximize the potential of the Downtown and Harbourfront area by:

- a) Share the vision of Owen Sound with local developers to achieve maximum redevelopment potential in the Downtown and Harbourfront areas by collaboratively identifying the opportunities presented by each site and working to engage private sector investment, particularly along 1st Ave East.
- b) create and communicate a visual concept plan that illustrates the development potential in these key areas;
- c) implementing naturalized design techniques in all areas of the Harbour and Downtown; and
- d) create linkages from the Downtown to the Harbourfront.

Lead: Community Services and Economic Development (Medium, 2010, Q2)

1.3.1 Invite professional participation in creating concepts and design ideas for the Downtown Planning Area through charrettes, requests for proposals, and design contests. A design charrette is a collaborative session that will allow design, engineering and planning professionals and citizens to gather together and visually articulate (re)development ideas and new streetscape and open space designs. This activity will work to actualize the vision laid out in the Official Plan and the Downtown and Harbourfront Master Plan.

Lead: Community Services & Economic Development,(Medium,2010, Q4)

1.3.2 Inventory and secure the lands and corridors that are vital to the creation of the City's waterfront trail and linkages to the downtown. Attaining the necessary rights to this land may be achieved through acquisition, easements, or land donation. This directive includes the finalization of securement of Transport Canada lands in the Harbour.

Lead: Community Services & Economic Development (On-going, 2009, Q2)

1.3.3 Commission a feasibility study on the development of a marina and other water-based recreation and businesses.

Lead: Economic Development (Medium, 2010, Q4)

1.3.4 Redesign and invigorate areas within the Downtown and along the Harbourfront through capital improvements. This will include the creation of new linkages between the Downtown and Harbourfront. This will be achieved through co-operation with existing land owners and developers.

Lead: Community Services (Medium, 2010, Q4).

1.3.5 Develop a Master Plan for the development of the Kelso Beach waterfront.

Lead: Community Services, (Immediate, 2009, Q3/4),

1.4 Bring tourists, visitors and residents to the Downtown and Harbourfront through programming and scheduling of events in these areas.

1.4.1 Increase the amount of annual open-air and street events held in the Downtown and Harbourfront, as a means of increasing the vibrancy and vitality of these areas and the City as a whole. One event per week should be held from the Victoria Day long weekend to the Labour Day long weekend each year.

Lead: Community Services, (Immediate, 2009, Q2/3)

1.4.2 Create and distribute a request for proposals to initiate boat tours and more water activity along the Owen Sound waterfront and the Sydenham River.

Lead: Tourism, (Longer Term, 2011, Q4)

2.0 RETAIN, EXPAND, AND ATTRACT LOCAL BUSINESSES, INSTITUTIONS, AND PROGRAMS

Strengthen the City's employment and economic base by encouraging the retention, expansion, and attraction of local businesses, public institutions, and social programs.

2.1 Strengthen the City's competitive edge by improving the communities overall economic climate and the availability of development lands, especially for residential, commercial, and institutional uses for long-term success. .

2.1.1 Ensure there is adequate serviced, zoned and marketable land for the creation of new industrial, commercial, and residential development within the City's existing boundaries.

Lead: Community Services, (On-going, 2009, Q2)

2.1.2 Surplus City owned lands and buildings shall be readied for sale and development which may include remediation, site work, concept ideas or market studies. A "green fund" shall be set aside to facilitate these undertakings. The full details of each prepared site shall be made available on the City's Website. [Section 5.1.5]

Lead: Finance, (Medium, 2010, Q1)

2.1.3 Collaborate with private land owners and developers to establish an inventory of properties within the City that may be bought/sold and slated for future development. This directive will also work to build partnerships and align interests between the City and local stakeholders.

Lead: Land Bank Committee, (Immediate, 2009, Q1)

2.1.4 Develop a database to keep taxation information and the City's competitive position up-to-date. Review the competitive advantages of the City as it relates to a number of variables including taxes, especially for commercial and industrial properties.

Lead: Finance, (Immediate, 2009, Q2)

2.1.5 Exploit or fully utilize the policies laid out in the Municipal Act and pursue possibilities for economic development incentives in order to attract new investment and development.

Lead: Corporate Services, Economic Development, Finance and Community Services, (Immediate, 2009, Q4)

- 2.2 Utilize existing infrastructure to increase new and improved transportation opportunities to move goods, people, and information in and out of the City.
- 2.2.1 Collaborate with private partners, neighbouring municipalities and Grey and Bruce Counties to explore the feasibility of re-establishing rail service to the area and into the City, using the former Canadian Pacific Rail Line. This directive must include a strategy for the un-owned portions of the rail corridor.
- Lead: Economic Development, (Medium, 2010, Q2).**
- 2.2.2 Collaborate with private partners, neighbouring municipalities and Grey and Bruce Counties to explore the feasibility of re-establishing Owen Sound as a primary shipping port, using the existing amenities provided by the Owen Sound Harbour. Freight operations within the Harbour must be sought as a source of economic vitality for the City.
- Lead: Economic Development and City Manager, (Longer Term, 2011, Q1)**
- 2.2.3 Evaluate the airport operations as to its on-going contribution to the local economy and evaluate options for service delivery.
- Lead: Operations, (Immediate, 2009, Q1)**
- 2.3 Forge and solidify relationships with the business community as a means of establishing and increasing opportunities for local businesses, institutions, and programs.
- 2.3.1 Design and initiate a formal business retention program (Business Retention and Expansion Program, BR&E), to facilitate regular meetings between City Hall Senior Managers, Mayor and Councilors, Committee Chairs, and Owen Sound’s business community. The objective of this program will be to understand the successes and challenges of area businesses, and to seek out solutions. The BR&E Program shall:
- a) meet regularly and within the business day for convenience;
 - b) document and summarize pertinent information for the benefit of other staff members, Mayor and Council, and boards and committees;
 - c) develop a standard set of questions to contribute to a database for analysis and follow-up; and
 - d) visit all major public and not-for-profit organizations that have an existing employment base within the City, and work to support their growth.
- Lead: Economic Development and Enterprise Centre, (Immediate, 2009, Q1)**
- 2.3.2 Develop and implement a strategy to attract new investment with the objective of creating and expanding the employment base for the small business sector. The strategy will focus on (but is not limited to) the following sectors: advanced

manufacturing; health care and social services; professional, scientific and technical services; information and cultural industries; and small business.

- a) support the attraction and development of small business by promoting the benefits of the City to entrepreneurial minded individuals looking at a second career;
- b) develop marketing and promotional material (including a Community Profile, Relocation Guide, Sector Profiles, and Downtown Brochure), and to develop the same content for the web-site;
- c) continue to support and expand the Enterprise Centre for Small Business as the centre for excellence for small business in the area;
- d) attend sector specific events to learn about competitive advantages and to market the City; and
- e) develop a communication plan to encourage local residents to promote small business opportunities and the success stories of local businesses in order to develop confidence and pride in the small business sector.

Lead: Economic Development, Enterprise Centre & Regional Economic Development Partnership Grey County / Bruce County, (Immediate, 2009, Q3)

2.4 Attract and retain a diverse labour force required by established and prospective local businesses. As a central information portal, the City's Website must be used as a key implementation tool in this directive.

2.4.1 Develop a marketing campaign in partnership with local employers that will promote employment opportunities to potential new residents, including new Canadians. As part of these efforts a relocation package highlighting employment resources will be shared with local businesses. This should also meet the need to assist employers who need to provide support for spousal relocation.

Lead: Economic Development, (Medium, 2010, Q4).

2.4.2 Cement a partnership between the City's High Schools, Georgian College and local employers to educate students about the post-secondary and employment opportunities available within the community.

Lead: Economic Development, (Medium, 2010, Q4).

3.0 STRENGTHEN THE CITY'S PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND SOCIAL NETWORKS TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH AND VITALITY OF THE COMMUNITY

Focus on the creation of a strong infrastructure base within the City, as a means of achieving our social, cultural, economic, and environmental goals. This infrastructure set must be

oriented toward both physical infrastructure and social networks, and be designed to facilitate the pursuit of overall vitality within the City.

Pursue policy updates, new funding strategies, and other means that will facilitate the City's mission to meet essential physical infrastructure needs.

3.1.1 Ensure that new and existing planning policies support smart growth. Smart growth must be pursued through encouraging a mix of uses, increased densities, and directing growth within the City's existing service shed.

Lead: Operations and Community Services (Immediate, 2009, Q1).

3.1.2 Continue to coordinate and obtain infrastructure grants and funding from development charges and Federal and Provincial orders of governments more aggressively.

Lead: Alternative Funding Committee (Immediate, 2009, Q1).

3.1.3 Investigate public/private partnerships that will help build new infrastructure, such as the Waste Water Treatment Plant, and pursue these partnerships with vigor and a clear intent.

Lead: Operations and Community Services (Immediate, 2009, Q3).

3.1.4 Ensure that long-term sustainability and innovation are fundamental priorities of the City in the pursuit of physical infrastructure and the maintenance of existing systems.

Lead: Operations (Immediate, 2009, Q3).

3.1.5 Continuously seek out and integrate new infrastructure technology as a means of achieving long-term sustainability and smart growth goals, pertaining to waste management matters, waste water treatment, water treatment, traffic management, and other areas.

Lead: IT Services and Operations, (Immediate, 2009, Q1).

3.1.6 Increase and Encourage capital investment in recreation and leisure facilities, including walking/biking trails, skateboard parks, bike parks, and other recreational areas. This directive includes investigating untapped sources of recreation and leisure within the City, particularly in the Downtown and Harbour front areas.

Lead: Operations and Community Services (Immediate, 2009, Q3).

3.1.7 Ensure that attracting private sector investment through partnership is considered a key objective in the pursuit of new and upgraded infrastructure projects, like roads, trails, and servicing.

Lead: Operations, (Medium, 2010, Q1).

3.1.8 Provide wireless Internet infrastructure in the Downtown to support local businesses and to draw people into the Downtown.

Lead: Economic Development and IT Services (Long Term, 2011, Q2).

3.2 Profile and develop Owen Sound as a “Healthy City” through social networking, which includes encouraging good education, accessible healthcare, environmental stewardship, social equity, and principles of good governance.

3.2.1 Achieve streamlined and functional cooperation between the government sectors within the City, especially the Grey Bruce Health Unit, the Grey Bruce Regional Health Centre, the Owen Sound family YMCA, the Family Health Team and government and not-for-profits. This directive should be spearheaded with the scheduling of a meeting with all relevant stakeholders to discuss methods of approaching a Healthy City.

Lead: Community Services with community partners, (On-going 2009, Q1).

3.2.2 Promote the City’s achievements in environmental stewardship.

Lead: Community Services with community partners, (Medium, 2010, Q1).

4.0 DISTINGUISH OUR AUTHENTIC SENSE OF PLACE

Identify, develop and celebrate those qualities, including built heritage, landscapes, people, and events that are distinct to Owen Sound, and are a significant source of community pride and character.

4.1 Enrich and expand the local awareness and the experience offered by Owen Sound’s local attractions and businesses.

4.1.1 In partnership with DIA, identify local retail stores and service providers that contribute to Owen Sound’s distinct shopping experience. Highlight and publicize these findings throughout the region and to tourists through print publication and the City’s website.

Lead: Economic Development (Medium, 2010, Q3)

4.1.2 Ensure that provincial and national events organized by local community groups, and the City’s signature events, such as the Salmon Spectacular, Festival of Northern Lights, and Summer Folk are promoted and receive continued support.

Lead: Tourism and Special Events, (Immediate, 2009, Q1)

4.1.3 Collaborating with the Arts Community to create a comprehensive data collection of local artists and gallery contact information. This roster will allow for the increased inclusion of local talent in events and programs, as well as help

bolster support systems within the community. The information may also be used for the creation of a permanent gallery tour detailing where local pieces can be viewed and purchased.

Lead: Tourism and Gallery, (Medium, 2010, Q2)

- 4.1.4 Celebrate the City's provincial, national and international successes in recreational events for individuals and teams.

Lead: Community Services, (Immediate, 2009, Q3)

- 4.1.5 Develop a public art strategy that benefits the community while celebrating the City's achievements in arts and crafts.

Lead: Gallery and Culture Committee, (Medium, 2010, Q2)

- 4.2 Inspire a renewed respect and appreciation for our natural and built heritage among City staff and citizens.

- 4.2.1 Identify sites of natural, cultural or architectural significance that may be added to the City's Heritage Register in a comprehensive review thereof.

Lead: Community Services, (Immediate, 2009, Q2)

- 4.2.2 Investigate the feasibility of recognizing the Downtown core as a heritage district. This recognition shall allow for the creation of a municipal grant program linked to the maintenance and upgrades of heritage buildings.

Lead: Community Services, (Medium, 2010, Q3)

- 4.2.3 Commit increased funds and effort to the Interpretive Plaque Program and the Façade and Structural Façade Grant Program, ensuring ongoing staff and financial support.

Lead: Community Services, (Immediate, 2009, Q2)

- 4.2.4 Commission the design of a revitalized and more user-friendly Civic Square and Farmers' Market.

Lead: City Manager's Office, (Longer Term, 2011, Q1)

- 4.2.5 Recognize the importance of Owen Sound's setting on Georgian Bay and on the Niagara Escarpment by increasing connectivity between points of natural interest. Information on the City's parks, trails, and natural amenities must be widespread using new and existing marketing initiatives. This directive will be heightened with the implementation of the City's Harbourfront Trail.

Lead: Community Services, and Operations (Longer Term, 2011, Q1)

5.0 **MARKETING THE CITY**

Develop a renewed and revitalized corporate image for the City, as well as a marketing and promotional strategy to communicate the vision of this Economic Development Action Plan.

5.1 Develop a new marketing and branding strategy for the City that is oriented toward the accomplishment of the directives laid out in this plan. The brand must be multi-faceted and bold, but specific and achievable.

5.1.1 Commission a design firm to create a new corporate logo and image, and develop a timeline to transition to the new logo.

Lead: Economic Development and City Manager, (Immediate, 2009, Q4)

5.1.2 Develop a Tourism Action Plan to attract new visitors to the City and Region, and to provide enhanced customer service to all tourism stakeholders, and tourists.

Lead: Tourism, (Immediate, 2009, Q1)

5.1.3 Develop a marketing strategy to communicate key economic development messages and to reinforce the new corporate image. This marketing plan shall target key stakeholders within the City, as well as external stakeholders and investors.

Lead: Economic Development and City Manager, (Immediate, 2009, Q3)

5.1.4 Increase the City's active participation in conferences and events. The City shall use these regional and provincial events to share its corporate voice.

Lead: City Manager, (Immediate, 2009, Q1)

5.1.5 Advance and refine the City's presence on the World Wide Web. The City's website should be diversified so that it can function as a community portal for business, visitor, and citizens.

Lead: IT Services, (Immediate, 2009, Q1)

5.1.6 Create a training program for City staff so that employees in all departments are confident in acting as City Ambassadors. The Ambassador Program must be maintained through ongoing information sessions and updates.

Lead: Corporate Services, (Medium, 2010, Q1)

5.1.7 Publish a Downtown and Harbourfront investment package that effectively communicates the City's vision, including the specific outcome of the Harbourfront Design charrette. This directive must accompany the inception of the Waterfront Trail and the revitalized Harbourfront design.

Lead: Economic Development in partnership with DIA, (Medium, 2010, Q1)

- 5.2 Share the intent and contents for this Action Plan with current and potential partners and the public, to establish a common understanding of the Plan's intended benefits to ensure that the Plan is well understood.
- 5.2.1 Catalogue the City's most significant or promising partnerships, as a means of enabling streamlined communication with stakeholders. This catalogue can also be used in the Business Retention and Expansion Program. [Section 2.3.1]
- Lead: Economic Development and City Manager's Office, (Immediate, 2009, Q1, on-going)**
- 5.2.2 Discover innovative ways for the City to collaborate with its partners, so that new projects can be pursued and realized.
- Lead: Economic Development and City Manager's Office, (Immediate, 2009, Q3, on-going)**
- 5.2.3 Strengthen the current partnerships that exist between the City and key public stake holders including; the business community, Georgian College, Grey Bruce Health Unit, Grey Bruce Regional Health Centre, the Owen Sound YMCA, Bluewater School Board, and the Catholic School Board.
- Lead: Economic Development and City Manager's Office, (Immediate, 2009, Q1, on-going)**

6.0 **INNOVATING CITY HALL**

Continue to support the evolution in the culture at City Hall so that innovation and entrepreneurialism become key motivators. This shift shall inspire new ways of seeing and problem solving for City staff, and shall consequently effect City operation, governance, and decision making.

- 6.1 Align City staff's outlook for innovation and success with the mission of this Action Plan.
- 6.1.1 Schedule brainstorming and training sessions to motivate and challenge staff in seeking and applying new approaches to problem solving, team work and efficient decision making. The City's customer service training program will also be integrated into this directive.
- Lead: Corporate Services, (Immediate, 2009, Q2)**
- 6.1.2 Allocate sufficient resources to the execution of the directives laid out in this Action Plan, and refine the professional appeal of the economic marketing plans associate therewith.
- Lead: City Manager's Office, (Immediate, 2009, Q1)**
- 6.1.3 Foster open communication within the corporation and the community to promote a City image that welcomes community and staff input and ideas.

Lead: City Manager's Office, (Immediate, 2009, Q3)

- 6.1.4 Publish a regular report that discloses the City's accomplishments and upcoming projects, and circulate to the local and regional community.

Lead: City Manager's Office, (Immediate, 2009, Q3)

- 6.1.5 Review and pin-point how internal efficiencies can be improved through process mapping. The effective use of technology and interpersonal communication may be the best way to achieve this refinement and will allow City Staff to "work smarter."

Lead: City Manager's Office, (Immediate, 2009, Q4)

- 6.1.6 Inspire change through Managers' engagement in open discussion regarding public health, planning, economic development, finance, and organizational behaviour, as a means of inspiring change, conversation, and new perspectives for City Staff.

Lead: City Manager's Office, (Immediate, 2009, Q1)

7.0 REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Encourage and support regional partnership between the City and Grey and Bruce Counties to achieve our economic development objectives.

- 7.1 Support and encourage the creation of a new regional economic development partnership that promotes Grey Bruce Owen Sound to outside investors and supports the retention and expansion of existing businesses.

- 7.1.1 Contribute staff time and expertise to the formation and support to a regional economic development group.

Lead: Economic Development, (Immediate, 2009, Q1)

- 7.1.2 Continue to support the efforts and marketing initiatives of the Regional Tourism Marketing Partnership.

Lead: Economic Development and Tourism (Immediate, 2009, Q1)

- 7.1.3 Support economic research on a Grey Bruce level in order to identify, document, and communicate the economic climate of the City and surrounding region to existing and potential investors and the community. [Section 2.1.4] The Grey Bruce Regional Economic Development Partnership should be encouraged to;

- a) continuously track and report on local, regional, and global trends that may effect business and life within the City;

- b) maintain a database of economic development statistics, such as market information, labour rates, and rental/ lease information;
- c) develop and support a community profile that communicates local statistics as well as the unique business and community stories that demonstrate Owen Sound's vitality
- d) launch and update an on-line regional business directory; and
- e) communicate findings primarily via electronic media.

Lead: Grey Bruce Regional Economic Development partnership, with support from City Economic Development, (Medium, 2010, Q2).

8.0 SKILL ENHANCEMENT

Bolster support to institutions, such as Georgian College and other training institutions to encourage youth and new trainees to establish roots in the City.

- 8.1 Collaborate with Georgian College and other post secondary institutions to offer university degree courses and programs in the City for the benefit of the residents of Grey and Bruce Counties.

Lead: Economic Development, (Immediate, 2009, Q2)

- 8.2 Continue to support the expansion and vitality of the Owen Sound Georgian College campus through initiatives, such as encouragement of a campus residence and new programs.

Lead: Economic Development, (Immediate, 2009, 1)

- 8.3 Collaborate with training organizations, like the Grey Bruce Huron Perth Training Board to improve access to local training opportunities, such as trades apprenticeships in demand by local businesses.

Lead: Economic Development, (Immediate, 2009, Q1, on-going)