



**The Corporation of the
City of Sault Ste. Marie**

COUNCIL REPORT

April 7, 2025

TO: Mayor Matthew Shoemaker and Members of City Council
AUTHOR: Travis Anderson, Director Tourism and Community Development
DEPARTMENT: Community Development and Enterprise Services
RE: Tourism Development Fund Applications – March 2025

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide recommendations to Council from City staff and the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors for the distribution of Tourism Development Funds.

Background

The Tourism Development Fund (TDF) was implemented on June 1, 2021 to provide financial support to the broader tourism sector in two different streams – Festivals and Special Events and Attractions and Product Development. The funds for both streams of the TDF are generated from revenue collected by the Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT).

Consideration is given to support initiatives that produce positive results in at least one of the following criteria:

- Development of quality tourism products and events;
- Increase in overnight stays and visitor spending in Sault Ste. Marie;
- Enhancement of the Sault’s tourism product offerings;
- Support of the city’s reputation and position as a first-rate visitor destination;
- Fulfill a gap in the tourism visitor experience landscape; and
- Encourage private sector tourism investment in Sault Ste. Marie.

Upon receipt of a TDF application, Tourism staff review it for eligibility and assessment criteria and makes recommendations to the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors. The Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors further evaluates the applications and makes recommendations to Council for distribution of grant funds.

Analysis

Tourism Development Fund applications are permitted on an ongoing intake and are reviewed monthly at the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors meetings.

After completing the event, the recipient expenses the funds and claims them through the Tourism Development Fund.

At the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board meeting held on March 18, 2025, five applications were reviewed with the following recommendations:

1. Community Strong Race Weekend (\$4,000);
2. Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association AGM (\$2,000);
3. Sault Cycling Club Ontario Cup Mountain Bike Race (\$10,000);
4. Queen Street Cruise (\$5,000);
5. Warhammer Battle at the Bridge 40K (\$2,000).

Community Strong Race Weekend

Summary

Community Strong Race Weekend is a premier running event in Sault Ste. Marie designed to promote physical and mental well-being while raising essential funds for local health initiatives. The event features various races over two days, June 21-22, 2025, including a marathon, half-marathon, 10km race, 5km colour run, and a kids' fun run.

Significantly, the Community Strong Marathon is the only Boston Marathon qualifier in Sault Ste. Marie, making it a key attraction for competitive runners and an opportunity to enhance the city's reputation as a destination for endurance events.

As an event with strong potential for growth, the Community Strong Race Weekend aims to attract local, regional, and out-of-town participants, increasing economic impact and community engagement. The previous funding allocation of \$5,000 in 2024 and \$5,000 in 2023 was effectively utilized for marketing and promotion, and further investment will help expand outreach, enhance event logistics, and increase participation in future editions.

Visitor Projections and Economic Impact

The 2025 event is expected to attract approximately 553 attendees, including:

455 local participants

42 regional visitors

30 from across Ontario

10 from other parts of Canada

16 from the United States

98 out of town visitors x 3 days x \$175/pp/pd= \$51,450

Recommendation

The Community Strong Festival aligns with Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's priority sector of sports tourism. With the prestigious Boston Marathon designation, the

event has strengthened its brand, expanded its reach, and enhanced marketing efforts. To maximize growth and long-term success, staff encourage organizers to accelerate planning, particularly in promotion and marketing. With strategic support and timely action, the festival has strong potential to expand its impact.

In recognition of the positive impact of the Community Strong Race Weekend and the opportunity to grow and enhance Sault Ste. Marie's only Boston Marathon qualifier, the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors recommended a contribution of \$4,000 and passed the following resolution: "Be it resolved that the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors recommended a contribution of \$4,000 through the Tourism Development Fund – Conferences and Special Events Stream to support the Community Strong Race Weekend to be hosted June 21 & 22, 2025, and that a report be submitted to City Council for consideration and approval."

Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association AGM

Summary

The Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA) holds an Annual General Meeting (AGM) each June, bringing together the 10 District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) and the City of Greater Sudbury. Collectively, NOSDA represents all 144 municipalities in Northern Ontario, overseeing services related to social assistance, childcare, paramedic services, homelessness, and community housing. These services support a population of 789,519 people across 806,708 square kilometers.

The AGM serves as a key forum for discussion and collaboration, attracting Members of Parliament (MPs), Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs), mayors, local municipal councils, and federal and provincial officials responsible for delivering critical community services. It allows communities to connect, share best practices, and explore innovations in service delivery, particularly in supporting Indigenous, racialized, and at-risk populations. The AGM also highlights advancements in frontline health care, including the expansion of community paramedicine programs.

Visitor Projections and Economic Impact

The 2025 event is expected to attract approximately 426 attendees, including:

24 local participants

20 regional visitors

160 from across Ontario

0 from other parts of Canada

0 from the United States

180 visitors x 4 days x \$175 pp/pd = \$126,000

Recommendation

The Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association is an annual conference that rotates across northern communities. With a reputable history of successful attendance and participation, staff is confident that this conference will attract projected registrations.

In recognition of the positive impact of the meetings and convention sector, Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors recommends a \$2,000 contribution to support the 2025 Service Deliverers Association of Ontario AGM and passed the following resolution: “Be it resolved that the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors recommend a contribution of \$2,000 through the Tourism Development Fund- Conferences and Special Events Stream to support the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association Annual General Meeting on June 3-5, 2025 and that a report be submitted to City Council for consideration and approval.”

Sault Cycling Club Ontario Cup Mountain Bike Race- Skeeter Slam

Summary

The Ontario Cycling Association (OCA) MTB OCup is a provincially sanctioned mountain bike racing event that will take place on the recently constructed trail network in Hiawatha Highlands June 28-29, 2025. This marks the second time the event has been hosted in Sault Ste. Marie, reinforcing the city's commitment to expanding its mountain biking infrastructure and establishing itself as a premier destination for competitive cycling events. The event received \$10,000 from the Tourism Development Fund in 2024.

The event spans two days and features a series of races for participants aged nine and older, covering various categories and disciplines. Hosting the OCup reflects the City's investment in trail development and highlights the strong partnership with the Sault Cycling Club. Comprised of dedicated volunteers, the club plays a key role in maintaining the trails to ensure they are safe and accessible.

Securing this event contributes to the City's growing reputation as a host for high-profile competitions, strengthening its ability to attract future cycling events. The sanctioned nature of the OCup enhances the credibility of Sault Ste. Marie as a competitive mountain biking destination that draws participants and visitors from across Ontario.

Visitor Projections and Economic Impact

The 2025 event is expected to attract approximately 600 attendees, including:

252 local participants

100 regional visitors

210 from across Ontario

0 from other parts of Canada

40 from the United States

350 visitors x 3 days x \$175 pp/pd = \$183,750

Recommendation

The Ontario Cycling Association (OCA) MTB OCup presents a unique opportunity for Sault Ste. Marie to solidify its reputation as a premiere mountain biking destination. With an expected 600 attendees, including 350 out-of-town visitors, the event will generate a significant economic impact.

This event aligns closely with the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's strategic plan, reinforces the city's investment in trail infrastructure and increases the City's ability to attract future high-profile cycling events. In recognition of this, the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors passed the following resolution: "Be it resolved that the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors recommend a contribution of \$10,000 through the Tourism Development Fund – Conferences and Special Events Stream to support the Sault Cycling Club OCup (Skeeter Slam) to be hosted June 28-29, 2025 and that a report be submitted to City Council for consideration and approval."

Queen Street Cruise

Summary

Queen Street Cruise is a celebrated annual event in Sault Ste. Marie, drawing car enthusiasts and community members to the downtown waterfront. Scheduled for June 20-21, 2025, the event will showcase over 350 vehicles, including classic cars, trucks, motorcycles, and more. Festivities encompass food vendors, alcohol tents, live music, and family-friendly activities, fostering a vibrant community atmosphere.

In 2023, the event was relocated to the Roberta Bondar Pavilion, utilizing the north parking lot at the Civic Centre. This move allowed for themed vehicle displays and expanded food and alcohol vending options, enhancing the overall attendee experience. For 2025, organizers plan to integrate the classic car showcase with Habitat for Humanity's annual Touch-a-Truck event, broadening the event's appeal and community engagement.

Queen Street Cruise has received support from the Tourism Development Fund (TDF) for out-of-town marketing and promotion:

- 2021: \$5,000
- 2022: \$5,000
- 2023: \$5,000
- 2024: \$5,000

Visitor Projections and Economic Impact

The 2025 event is expected to attract over 9,000 attendees, including:

9,962 local participants

250 from across Ontario

200 from the United States

400 visitors x 2 days x \$175 pp/pd = \$140,000

Recommendation

The Queen Street Cruise is a well-established annual event that brings a festival atmosphere to downtown Sault Ste. Marie. While it primarily attracts local car enthusiasts, the event also serves as a unique addition to the city's weekend tourism offerings, drawing visitors from across Ontario and the United States. By combining a classic car showcase with live entertainment, food and alcohol vendors, and family-friendly activities, the Queen Street Cruise enhances the city's reputation as a vibrant destination for event hosting.

In recognition of the positive impact of festivals and events, the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors passed the following resolution: "Be it resolved that the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors recommend a contribution of \$5,000 through the Tourism Development Fund – Conferences and Special Events Stream to support the Queen Street Cruise to be hosted June 20-21, 2025 and that a report be submitted to City Council for consideration and approval."

Battle at the Bridge

Summary

Battle at the Bridge is a competitive tabletop miniature tournament based on Games Workshop's Warhammer 40K. The event is structured as a team-based competition, where five-player teams compete in a series of one-on-one matches over two days. Points are accumulated, and teams are ranked, culminating in awards for the top three teams. Battle at the Bridge is scheduled for July 12-13, 2025.

The tournament aims to bring together Warhammer players from Ontario and the U.S., fostering community engagement, tourism, and awareness of the game. The event also seeks to establish itself as a recognized tournament on Games Workshop's national event calendar, which could further boost participation and tourism in the Sault.

Many participants viewed 2024 as a trial experience and expressed strong interest in returning with additional teams. The event received \$1,500 in support from the TDF in 2024.

Visitor Projections and Economic Impact

The 2025 event is expected to attract approximately 151 attendees, including:

68 local participants

68 from across Ontario

15 from the United States

83 visitors x 3 days x \$175 pp/pd = \$43,575

Recommendation

The Battle at the Bridge tournament presents a strategic opportunity to diversify our city's event portfolio and tap into the expanding tabletop gaming market. Warhammer 40K, akin to Dungeons & Dragons and World of Warcraft, boasts a

dedicated and passionate following. Hosting such a niche yet rapidly growing event can position our community as a host destination for enthusiasts as the event continues to grow annually.

In recognition of the positive impact festivals and events have on the tourism sector, the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors passed the following resolution: “Be it resolved that the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors recommend a contribution of \$2,000 through the Tourism Development Fund – Conferences and Special Events Stream to support the Warhammer: Battle at the Bridge to be hosted July 12-13, 2025 and that a report be submitted to City Council for consideration and approval.”

Financial Implications

No new funds would be required. The Tourism Development Fund currently has \$782,645 uncommitted for the purposes of financial assistance within the tourism sector.

Strategic Plan / Policy Impact / Climate Impact

This item supports the Corporate Strategic Plans Focus Area:

- Community Development and Partnership focus of Maximizing Economic Development and Investment with the commitment to maintain financial viability.
- Community Development - Develop partnerships with key stakeholders and reconciliation.

There are no climate change-related impacts associated with this report.

Recommendation

It is therefore recommended that Council take the following action:

Resolved that the report of the Director of Tourism and Community Development dated April 7, 2025, be received and that the recommendation of the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors to allocate \$23,000 as detailed below be approved:

1. Community Strong Race Weekend (\$4,000);
2. Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association AGM (\$2,000);
3. Sault Cycling Club Ontario Cup Mountain Bike Race (\$10,000);
4. Queen Street Cruise (\$5,000);
5. Warhammer Battle at the Bridge 40K (\$2,000).

Respectfully submitted,

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