



The Corporation of the
City of Sault Ste. Marie

COUNCIL REPORT

June 2, 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 – May 2025

Purpose

This 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 SSM.

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.

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The recipient expenses the funds and claims them through the Tourism Development Fund after the event is completed.

At the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Director's meeting held on April 15, 2025, three applications were reviewed with the following recommendations:

1. Coppa Giovanni Soccer Tournament (\$7,300)
2. Salty Marie Trails Festival (\$10,000)
3. International Karate Daigaku Canadian Nationals (\$5,000)

At the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors meeting held May 13, 2025, two applications were reviewed with the following recommendations:

1. Northern Region Women in Corrections (\$2,500)
2. Giovanni's Italian Festival (\$10,000)

Coppa Giovanni Soccer Tournament

The third annual Coppa Giovanni Soccer Tournament will take place from July 4–6, 2024, at the Strathclair Sports Complex. Following a successful 2023 event that featured a men's division and drew over 200 out-of-town players, the 2025 tournament will expand to include three new divisions, including women's divisions. Organizers expect to host more than twelve out-of-town teams and welcome over 500 visitors to the city.

The event is anticipated to generate a tourism impact of approximately \$243,000 in local spending, benefiting hotels, restaurants, and local businesses. In addition to competitive soccer matches, the tournament will feature family-friendly attractions such as inflatable play areas, face painting, henna tattoos, foam soccer, a dunk tank, food vendors, beer gardens, and live entertainment. The Coppa Giovanni Soccer Tournament aligns with the timing of Giovanni's Italian Festival, providing a weekend of entertainment and festivities for soccer players and visiting families.

Looking ahead, organizers aim to double attendance in 2025 and increase sponsorship by 40%. Their long-term goal is to position the event as the largest adult soccer tournament in Ontario and a premier tourism draw for Northern Ontario.

Previous Tourism Development Fund (TDF) Support

2023: \$9,800 (combined with the Italian Festival) – Supported marketing, officiating, and venue costs

2024: \$5,000 – Approved to assist with joint marketing and promotion for the Italian Festival and the soccer tournament.

Visitor Projections and Economic Impact

The 2025 event is expected to attract approximately 575 visitors, as well as 1,640 local participants. Visitors are expected to travel from:

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500 from across Ontario
75 from the United States

575 out of town visitors (participants + family members) x 3 days x \$175pp/pd =
\$301,875

Recommendation

Given its demonstrated growth, positive economic impact, and strong alignment with community and tourism goals, the Coppa Giovanni Soccer Tournament is a valuable initiative for continued support. As the only annual soccer tournament in Sault Ste. Marie, it has shown clear potential for expansion through added divisions, growing participation, and enhanced family-friendly programming.

In recognition of the Coppa Giovanni Soccer Tournament's positive impact on the sports tourism sector, the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors recommends support and passed the following resolution “Be it resolved that the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors recommends a contribution of \$7,300 through the Tourism Development Fund- Conferences and Special Events Stream to support the 2025 Coppa Giovanni Soccer Tournament to be hosted July 4-6, 2025, and that a report be submitted to City Council for consideration and approval.”

Salty Marie Trails Festival

The Salty Marie Trails Fest, now in its third year, is a trail-focused festival held in Sault Ste. Marie, hosted by Red Pine Tours Canada. The event celebrates the region's growing trail infrastructure, particularly developments at the Hiawatha Highlands.

The festival caters to both competitive and recreational riders, offering a range of races and trail activities. It also features an expo with local vendors, food and drink offerings, artisan products, and live entertainment, making it a broad community event with appeal beyond just cycling enthusiasts.

New for 2025 is the introduction of a 200km Ultra-Distance Race, targeting experienced endurance athletes. This race starts at the Downtown Plaza in Sault Ste. Marie and travels through key locations in the Algoma region, including the Red Rock Foothills, Goulais River, Bellevue Valley, Stokely Creek, Wabos, Searchmont, Reserve, and Crystal Lake areas. It concludes via the Hiawatha Highlands singletrack system.

The new ultra-distance race aims to highlight the region's natural terrain while supporting local tourism and economic development through enhanced trail connectivity.

Previous Tourism Development Fund (TDF) Support
2023: \$3,500 to support marketing

2024: \$5,000 to support entertainment and marketing

Visitor Projections and Economic Impact

The 2025 event is expected to attract approximately 1000 attendees:

740 local participants

75 regional visitors

60 from across Ontario

25 from other parts of Canada

80 from the United States

165 out of town visitors x 2 days x \$175= \$57,750

Recommendation

The Salty Marie Trails Fest has demonstrated steady growth since its launch in 2023, positioning itself as a flagship event that supports trail development and community engagement in Sault Ste. Marie. Participation continues to rise, including increased interest from the U.S. market, which highlights the region's appeal as a trail tourism destination. In 2025, the addition of a 200km Ultra Distance race is expected to attract elite endurance athletes while showcasing the Algoma region's rugged terrain and drawing attention to the downtown core. Overall, it plays a key role in establishing Sault Ste. Marie as a leading hub for trail-based tourism.

In recognition of the above, the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors passed the following resolution: "Be it resolved that the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors recommends a contribution of \$10,000 through the Tourism Development Fund- Conferences and Special Events Stream to support the Salty Marie Trails Fest to be hosted July 26, 2025, and that a report be submitted to City Council for consideration and approval."

International Karate Daigaku Canadian Nationals

Sault Ste. Marie will host the IKD National Karate Tournament on October 18–19, 2025, following a successful bid through a competitive selection process. As a rotating annual event hosted across Canada, this tournament presents an opportunity to position the city for future provincial and national-level IKD events. The tournament will bring over 200 participants (60+ local, 150+ from across Canada) and an estimated 350 spectators, generating more than 1,000 hotel nights during the shoulder season.

Participants, aged 8 to 60+, will compete in a range of sanctioned events including sparring, katas, enbu, team bunkai, and team kata.

Visitor Projections and Economic Impact

The 2025 event is expected to attract close to 600 participants, including:

254 local participants

350 from across Canada

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

Recommendation

This annual, rotating tournament aligns with Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's Strategic Plan to bid and host sporting events and was awarded through a competitive bid process, reflecting the city's growing reputation as a host for national events. The tournament is expected to generate over 1,000 hotel nights and attract participants and spectators from across Canada, providing significant tourism and economic benefits. The requested funding will help offset venue and equipment rentals and marketing costs, supporting a well-organized event with a strong potential for long-term impact.

In recognition of the positive impact of the International Karate Daigaku Canadian Nationals, the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors approved 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 International Karate Daigaku Canadian Nationals to be hosted October 18-19, 2025 and that a report be submitted to City Council for consideration and approval."

Northern Region Women in Corrections

The Northern Region Women in Corrections Networking Event will take place on October 21, 2025. This long-standing annual event brings together women employed in the Ministry of the Solicitor General, Correctional Services Division, to engage in professional networking, skill-building workshops, and wellness activities. With over a decade of history, the event fosters personal and professional development while strengthening the community within the sector. Hosting the event in Northern Ontario, specifically Sault Ste. Marie, ensures accessibility for northern staff and supports regional equity. The City's willingness to assist with venue costs is critical, as without this support, the event would likely be relocated to a ministry facility in Toronto. Through TDF support, the event can stay in Northern Ontario and provide direct benefits to Sault Ste. Marie to host.

Visitor Projections and Economic Impact

10 local participants

10 regional visitors

100 from across Ontario

0 from other parts of Canada

0 from the United States

Economic Impact

100 out of town visitors x 2 days x \$175 = \$35,000

Recommendation

Securing and supporting meetings and conventions is a key pillar of tourism, and this event aligns with that goal. Without financial support, government restrictions around venue payments will likely force the event to return to the GTA, resulting in a loss of valuable economic impact for our community. Hosting it in Sault Ste. Marie not only brings direct benefits to local hotels and service providers, particularly in the slower period following peak tourism season, but also demonstrates our commitment to regional equity.

In recognition of the above, 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 \$2,500 through the Tourism Development Fund- Conferences and Special Events Stream to support the Northern Region Women in Corrections networking Event to be hosted October 21, 2025 and that a report be submitted to City Council for consideration and approval.”

Giovanni’s Italian Festival

The Giovanni’s Italian Festival is a vibrant, homegrown celebration of Italian culture held annually at the Roberta Bondar Pavilion. Now in its seventh year, the festival has grown into a large-scale event that attracts both locals and visitors for a day of food, entertainment, and cultural pride. Centered at the Roberta Bondar Pavilion, it features live music, fireworks, vendors, a kids’ fun zone, and prizes—all designed to create a welcoming, family-friendly atmosphere.

The festival highlights authentic Italian cuisine, including porchetta, pizza, sausages, desserts, local craft beer, and Ontario wines. It promotes local businesses and vendors, supports the regional economy, and fosters strong community engagement. An important partner event is the Coppa Soccer Tournament, which adds to the festival’s appeal for families and helps draw even more visitors to the area.

Previous Funding through the Tourism Development Fund

In previous years, the Coppa Giovanni Soccer Tournament and Giovanni’s Italian Festival submitted joint applications. While the two events complement each other and are held on the same weekend, they are independently organized, and each has its own budget. As such, they have submitted separate applications.

Previous Tourism Development Fund Support

2023: \$10,000 to support sound rental, inflatables, event Insurance, soccer balls, venue rental, marketing

2024: \$5000 to support marketing, sound rental, and security for the Italian Festival

Visitor Projections and Economic Impact

10,000 local participants

100 regional visitors

100 from across Ontario

0 from other parts of Canada

50 from the United States

Economic Impact

150 people x 2 days x \$175 = \$45,000

Recommendation

The Italian Festival is a well-loved cultural event in Sault Ste. Marie continues to demonstrate its value as both a community celebration and a growing tourism draw. Attendance tracking at the main entrance during last year's event confirmed that while the majority of attendees were local, the festival attracted visitors from across Ontario and the United States, most notably from Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, as well as friends and family members returning home to take part in the festivities.

This festival celebrates the rich Italian heritage that plays a vital role in the fabric of the community. Large-scale events like the Italian Festival are widely recognized as an effective and accessible way to attract tourists, showcasing Sault Ste. Marie as a vibrant, welcoming city that embraces its cultural diversity. The festival's positive impact was further highlighted by coverage from CTV Northern Ontario, which helped elevate the city's profile across the region. To support continued growth, staff recommend a funding allocation of \$10,000. The funding will be used to enhance marketing efforts in Ontario and Michigan and promote Sault Ste. Marie as a culturally dynamic destination (\$7,500) and to support entertainment costs for out-of-town performers who will help elevate the festival's profile and experience (\$2,500).

In support of the above recommendation, the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors passed the following resolution "Be it resolved that the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors recommends a contribution of \$10,000 through the Tourism Development Fund- Conferences and Special Events Stream to support the Giovanni's Italian Festival to be hosted July 6, 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 \$761,645 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 June 2, 2025 concerning May 2025 Tourism Development Fund Applications be received and that the recommendation of the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors to allocate \$34,800 as detailed below be approved:

1. Coppa Giovanni Soccer Tournament (\$7,300);
2. Salty Marie Trails Festival (\$10,000);
3. International Karate Daigaku Canadian Nationals (\$5,000);
4. Northern Region Women in Corrections (\$2500); and
5. Giovanni's Italian Festival (\$10,000).

Respectfully submitted,

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