



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

C O U N C I L R E P O R T

June 2, 2025

TO: Mayor Matthew Shoemaker and Members of City Council
AUTHOR: Josh Ingram, Supervisor – Downtown Plaza
DEPARTMENT: Community Development and Enterprise Services
RE: Downtown Plaza Operational Update

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on the utilization of the Sault Ste. Marie Downtown Plaza throughout 2024, as well as to present staff's key performance indicators and strategic plan for programming and operations in 2025.

Background

The Sault Ste. Marie Downtown Plaza officially launched as a public venue on November 16, 2023, in conjunction with the community's annual Moonlight Magic tree lighting event. The Plaza's oversight and programming fall under the Recreation and Culture portfolio.

In early 2024, a full-time intern was appointed through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC) to support Plaza operations. With a full year of programming now complete, staff have compiled benchmark data to establish key performance indicators that will guide planning and decision-making for 2025.

Highlights from the 2024 operational year include:

Utilization:

- 27,300 total visits
- 12,000 skaters
- 16,000 attendees at non-skating events

The Plaza saw the launch of two signature events: Pizzafest and the New Year's Eve Puck Drop, as well as notable partnerships with the Bon Soo Winter Carnival, Poutine Feast, local school boards and academic institutions, and cultural community groups.

In January 2025, a dedicated Supervisor – Downtown Plaza was hired to oversee the venue's daily operations. This was not a new staff complement but a consolidation of duties into one position to optimize performance and efficiency.

This role is responsible for facility maintenance, customer service, coordination of community rentals, and the development and delivery of staff-led events.

Analysis

2025 Key Performance Indicators

Key performance indicators have been established in alignment with the City of Sault Ste. Marie’s Corporate Strategic Plan and informed by the 2024 data. The following outlines operational expectations for 2025 in the areas of events, media engagement, and customer service.

Events	Description	2024	2025
Internal Events	Number of events hosted annually	24 events hosted by municipal staff in 2024	Maintain and elevate 24 events annually
External Programming Rentals	Events that utilize the plaza and involve staff collaboration	17 individual events hosted by outside groups	50% increase over 2024 bookings (26)
Public Utilization	Increase the overall foot traffic of the plaza	Attendance tracker for 2024 = 27,397	A 9.5% increase over 2024 numbers (30,000)
Community Engagement	Description	Current Benchmark	2025
Social Media Growth – Instagram	Increase followers, views and interactions on Instagram	As of Jan 31: Total followers: 560	Increase: Followers: 10% Interactions: 100% Views: 25%
Social Media Growth – Facebook	Increase followers, views, and interactions on Facebook	Total Followers: 664 Total Views: 26,259 Reach: 7,956	Increase: Followers: 5% Views: 25% Interactions: 5%
Customer Service	Description	Target	
Property Standards	Ensure regular maintenance of the plaza to encourage four-season activation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased asset utilization (bonfires, etc.) • Increased snow removal at sitting areas • Increased event signage 	
Customer Service	Design a post-event feedback survey to be given to every third-party booking	Assess satisfaction, identify improvement areas, and better meet community needs and expectations.	

Programming Strategy

The strategy for the Downtown Plaza focuses on establishing it as a dynamic, inclusive, and engaging space through a layered approach to programming. This plan emphasizes a mix of active and passive initiatives designed to foster community connection and maximize the plaza's potential while maintaining high-quality customer service standards.

Categorically, activation of the plaza is delineated by:

- Active internal programming led by plaza staff occurring twice a month;
- Active external programming led by an outside organization, assisting with community buy-in, and diversification of program content;
- Passive programming offering visitors casual and ongoing engagement; and,
- Targeted incentives encouraging residents to follow the plaza on social media and attend events, creating a cycle of visibility and participation.

As of the date of this report, 14 events have been launched via the Sault Downtown Plaza's Facebook page.

Internal Events:

- Queen Street Cruise Promo Day
- Hearts and Horsepower in support of Arch Hospice
- 2nd Annual Pizzafest
- VIVID arts • culture • media
- 705 Sound Live Co Presents: Battle of the Bands
- Chill & Chili an Outdoor Adventure Show
- Screening in Halloweentown: A Nightmare Before Christmas screening
- Moonlight Magic
- New Years Eve Puck Drop

External Programming | Rentals

- SSM Festival of Beer 2025
- Emergency Preparedness Showcase
- Sault Ste. Marie Poutine Feast 2025
- The Reel Film Forum Screening: Indiana Jones and Raiders of the Lost Arc

Passive Programming

- May the 4th Star Wars Movie Marathon
- Martial Arts Mondays
- Kids Obstacle Course

These events are not inclusive of the Sault Downtown Plaza's annual calendar but are in a planning stage where staff are confident in launching save-the-date and teaser content publicly.

The decision to launch all events for the 2025 calendar year is due to:

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- Facebook Events are being searchable by location, date, and category;
- RSVP tracking, which will help staff to make decisions for the 2026 season;
- Built-in sharing and virality; and
- Notifications and reminders.

Financial Implications

This is an operational matter. There are no financial implications.

Strategic Plan / Policy Impact / Climate Impact

This matter is not specifically identified; however, is linked to the following Corporate Strategic Plan Focus Areas:

Focus Area 1: Social Equity – Support programs that foster a safe, welcoming and inclusive Community

Focus Area 2: Vibrant Downtown – Increase participation and grow the number of events in the Downtown year over year

Focus Area 4: Customer Service – Develop new methods of collecting and analyzing customer feedback

Focus Area 4: Community Partnerships – Facilitate collaboration with neighbouring communities and community groups to achieve shared goals.

Recommendation

It is therefore recommended that Council take the following action:

Resolved that the report of the Supervisor, Downtown Plaza dated June 2, 2025, concerning Downtown Plaza Operational Update be received as information.

Respectfully submitted,

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