



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

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

August 11, 2025

TO: Mayor Matthew Shoemaker and Members of City Council

AUTHOR: Travis Anderson, Director of Tourism and Community
Development

DEPARTMENT: Community Development and Enterprise Services

RE: Tourism Development Fund Applications – August 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.

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

At the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors' meeting held on June 17, 2025, three applications were reviewed with the following recommendations:

1. Superfly Racing Epic 8 – \$5,000
2. Bawating Babes Pride Cruise and After Party – \$4,500

Superfly Racing Epic 8

On August 23, 2025, organizers will reintroduce a classic endurance mountain biking event to Sault Ste. Marie with a refreshed name and expanded appeal. The Epic 8 is part of a well-established series of 8-hour relay races that have taken place across Ontario since 2000. Superfly Racing, a key partner in the Epic 8 series and host of the biannual Crank the Shield race, is supporting the event. Superfly is providing equipment and technical expertise to help deliver a high-calibre experience for participants and spectators alike. With their strong network and reputation in Southern Ontario's cycling community, organizers anticipate more than 200 participants. The full-day festival will include the endurance relay race, a youth ride, a community BBQ, entertainment for spectators, and an after-party to celebrate the day's achievements.

Previous Tourism Development Fund (TDF) Support

2022 and 2024 – Superfly Racing received \$5,500 in both 2022 and 2024 to host Crank the Shield Mountain Bike stage race. Both events were held successfully.

Visitor Projections and Economic Impact

The 2025 event Epic 8 is anticipated to attract:

225 local participants

110 Ontario participants

20 US participants

130 out of town visitors (participants) x 2 days x \$175pp/pd = \$45,500

Recommendation

The return of the Epic 8 revives a legacy event, aligning well with the City's investment in trail-based tourism. The event benefits from strong industry recognition, which is expected to support marketing efforts and drive participation.

Importantly, the event strategically uses the Hiawatha trail network, reinforcing the value of recent tourism investments aimed at positioning Sault Ste. Marie as a premier mountain biking destination. Its timing adds to a robust summer race calendar, with one mountain biking event per month from June through August, helping to maintain momentum and grow interest in the sport locally and regionally.

In support of the Epic 8, 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 8 Hours of Epic Superior Singletrack to be hosted August 23 2025 and that a report be submitted to City Council for consideration and approval.”

Pride Cruise and After Party

Now in its third year, the Pride Cruise and After Party has become a standout event in Sault Ste. Marie’s 2SLGBTQIA+ and Indigenous cultural calendar. Hosted by the Bawating Babes, the 2Spirit Organizing Committee of Bawating, and community partners, this unique celebration takes place aboard the Miss Marie tour boat over Labour Day weekend. The highlight of the evening is a drag show performed on the water, as guests cruise along the scenic St. Marys River. After the cruise, the celebration continues with a high-energy two-hour drag show and after party – this year at the Delta Waterfront Hotel. The event will feature four celebrated Indigenous Canadian drag artists performing either on the boat, at the after party, or both.

In response to growing attendance and enthusiasm, organizers are introducing a VIP experience and incorporating more Indigenous-led contributions in the event’s décor, catering, and entertainment. The Pride Cruise and After Party continues to draw strong support from the local and regional 2SLGBTQIA+, drag, and Indigenous communities, and is proudly establishing itself as a must-attend event in Sault Ste. Marie. The goal is to continue to grow this event and attract increased attendance from across the North.

Visitor Projections and Economic Impact

Based on 2024 attendance, the following projections are estimated

81 Local participants

35 Regional visitors

21 from across Ontario

4 from other parts of Canada

15 from the United States

85 out of town visitors x 2 days x \$175= \$29,750

Recommendation

The Pride Cruise and After Party is a growing, culturally significant event that celebrates the 2SLGBTQIA+ and Indigenous communities in Sault Ste. Marie. Now in its third year, the event is expanding in scope and impact, introducing a VIP experience and enhancing Indigenous-led contributions in décor, catering, and entertainment. The event is expected to attract over 150 attendees, including 85 out-of-town visitors, resulting in an estimated economic impact of nearly \$30,000.

Its unique format—a drag show aboard the Miss Marie tour boat followed by a high-energy after-party at the Delta Hotel—creates a memorable experience that highlights the City’s waterfront assets. The event has demonstrated year-over-year

growth and has garnered financial support from multiple organizations beyond the Tourism Development Fund. Supporting this event helps position Sault Ste. Marie as an inclusive and vibrant cultural destination while generating tourism and economic benefits for the city.

In support of the Pride Cruise, 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 \$4,500 through the Tourism Development Fund – Conferences and Special Events Stream to support the Pride Cruise to be hosted August 29, 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 \$728,065 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 August 11, 2025 concerning Tourism Development Fund Applications – August 2025 be received and that the recommendation of the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors to allocate \$9500 as detailed below be approved.

1. Epic 8 – \$5,000
2. Pride Cruise and Afterparty – \$4,500

Respectfully submitted,

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