



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

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

September 22, 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 – September
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 SSM.

Upon receipt of a TDF application, Tourism staff review it for eligibility and assessment criteria, and make 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.

Tourism Development Fund Applications – September 2025

September 22, 2025

Page 2.

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 August 19, 2025, three applications were reviewed with the following recommendations:

1. Henderson Metal Fall Classic – \$10,000
2. Northeastern Ontario Regional Swim Meet – \$2,000
3. Conference Bid #2025-001 – \$10,000

Henderson Metal Fall Classic- Soo Curlers Association

The Henderson Metal Fall Classic is a premier international curling event proudly hosted in Sault Ste. Marie. Founded in 2023 by Olympic champion Ryan Harnden and Al Harnden of the Soo Curlers Association, the event has quickly established itself as a world-class competition that attracts global attention.

The 3rd annual Classic will take place October 23–26, 2025, bringing 24 elite men's curling teams from Canada, the USA, Italy, Switzerland, Sweden, Scotland, Korea, and Japan. With a \$100,000 prize purse—the largest non-Grand Slam payout in the sport—the event is a significant draw for top curling talent.

Supported by Tourism Development Fund investments in 2023, the YNCU Curling Centre completed technical upgrades, including professional live-streaming capabilities, placing the facility among an exclusive group of world-class curling venues. In 2024, the event achieved over 428,000 online views, further elevating its profile and reach.

Previous Tourism Development Fund Support

- 2023 (\$53,000) – TDF funds were allocated to purchase and install 24 high-definition cameras and associated live streaming infrastructure.
- 2024 (\$7,612.39) – TDF funds were allocated to update the in-house PA system.

Visitor Projections and Economic Impact

- 800-1000 Local Spectators
- 200 Regional Spectators
- 130 Ontario Spectators
- 66 from across Canada (spectators/participants)
- 12 USA (spectators/participants)
- 35 International (spectators/participants)

Economic Impact

~250 out of town visitors x 4 days x \$175 per person/per day = \$157,500

Recommendation

Tourism Sault Ste. Marie and staff recommend continued support for the Henderson Metal Fall Classic, a premier international curling event that delivers significant reputational and economic value for the community.

Established in 2023, the event has quickly grown into a world-class competition that attracts elite international teams. With one of the largest prize purses outside of the Grand Slam series (funded through sponsorship outside of the Tourism Development Fund), the Classic positions Sault Ste. Marie as a leading host city on the global curling stage.

The event is organized by a highly reputable and proven local committee. Investments in technology and facility upgrades at the YNCU Curling Centre have elevated the venue to international standards, with the event now enjoying a strong global following through live streaming and media coverage.

This continued success demonstrates strong community appeal, builds international profile, and reinforces the City's reputation as a capable host of high-calibre sporting events. For these reasons, including its homegrown origins, proven success, reputational benefits, and strong organizational leadership, Tourism Sault Ste. Marie and staff strongly support ongoing investment in the Henderson Metal Fall Classic.

In support of the Henderson Metal Fall Classic 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 2025 Henderson Metal Fall Classic to be hosted Oct 23-26, 2025, and that a report be submitted to City Council for consideration and approval.”

Northeastern Ontario Region Swim Meet (NEOR)- Sault Surge

The Northeastern Ontario Region (NEOR) Swim Meet will take place October 25–26, 2025, at the John Rhodes Community Centre in Sault Ste. Marie. As a Swim Ontario–sanctioned regional competition, the event will welcome up to 225 youth athletes from across Northeastern Ontario. Many out-of-town participants and their families are expected to arrive on Friday and stay for two nights, generating a positive economic impact for the community. The meet is designed to support high-level athlete development and provide swimmers with opportunities to achieve Swim Ontario qualifying times.

Previous Tourism Development Fund Support

- 2023 (\$2,000) to support the NEOR Swim Meet (venue rental, Swim Ontario Fees, marketing and promotion)
- 2024 (\$2,375) to support the Spring Invitational Swim Meet (venue rental, Swim Ontario fees, marketing and promotion)

- 2025 (\$8,000) to support the purchase of the Myrtha Backstroke system (infrastructure)

Visitor Projections and Economic Impact

Based on 2024 attendance, the following projections are estimated

- 416 local participants/ spectators
- 470 Ontario participants/spectators

Economic Impact

470 out of town visitors x 2 days x \$175 per person per day = \$164,500

Recommendation

Tourism Sault Ste. Marie and staff recommend supporting the Northeastern Ontario Region (NEOR) Swim Meet with a Tourism Development Fund contribution of \$2,000 to assist with venue rental, Swim Ontario fees, and marketing. Hosting this event provides local athletes with access to high-level competition, generates significant economic benefits through visitor spending, and positions Sault Ste. Marie as a leading destination for swimming events in Northern Ontario. Successful delivery of this meet will also strengthen the city's ability to secure future competitions.

In support of Sault Surge Swim Club and their hosting of the Northeastern Ontario Swim Meet, 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 \$2,000 through the Tourism Development Fund- Conferences and Special Events Stream to support the 2025 Northeastern Ontario Region (NEOR) Swim Meet to be hosted Oct 25-26, 2025 and that a report be submitted to City Council for consideration and approval.”

Conference Bid #2025-001

Conference Bid #2025-001 represents an opportunity for Sault Ste. Marie to bid to host a high-profile provincial conference. Funding support is required as an element of the bid submission. If successful in the bid, the conference will attract business leaders and delegates from across the province and beyond in 2027, providing valuable networking and professional development opportunities while providing an opportunity to showcase the host community to business leaders.

As part of the bid process, prospective host communities are required to outline and commit to delivering two signature events: a reveal event in 2026 and a marquee event during the 2027 conference in Sault Ste. Marie. These events form a critical component of the selection process, as they demonstrate the host community's ability to showcase its strengths, invest in creating a unique delegate

experience, and enhance the overall profile of the conference. The proposed investment in these activities will strengthen Sault Ste. Marie's bid and help position the City as the preferred host location.

The conference is projected to attract approximately 240 attendees, generating significant economic impact for local hotels, restaurants, and cultural attractions. It has been over 10 years since Sault Ste. Marie has hosted this conference.

Visitor Projections (based on previous host communities)

- 50 Local attendees
- 20 Regional attendees
- 150 Ontario attendees
- 25 USA attendees

Economic Impact

175 out of town visitors x 3 days x \$150 per person/ per day = \$91,875

Previous Tourism Development Fund Support

Not applicable

Recommendation

Meetings and Conventions business is identified as a tourism priority sector for Sault Ste. Marie, though it remains one of the slower segments to recover following the pandemic due to the ease and prevalence of virtual events. Supporting Conference Bid #2025-001 represents an opportunity to bring a reputable, high-profile in-person provincial conference to our community in 2027, which would attract approximately 240 delegates from across Ontario, the U.S., and locally. The projected direct economic impact is estimated at over \$90,000, with further benefits from exposure and positioning Sault Ste. Marie as a competitive destination for meetings and conventions.

This bid is a collaborative effort between the host organizing committee and the City of Sault Ste. Marie, with Tourism staff assisting in the development and submission process. Should Sault Ste. Marie not be awarded the conference, the TDF funds will not be expensed.

In support of Conference Bid #2025-001, 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 Conference Bid #2025-001 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 \$718,565 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 September 22, 2025 concerning Tourism Development Fund Applications – September 2025 be received and that the recommendation of the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors to allocate \$22,000 as detailed below be approved.

1. Henderson Metal Fall Classic – \$10,000
2. Northeastern Ontario Regional Swim Meet – \$2,000
3. Conference Bid #2025-001 – \$10,000

Respectfully submitted,

Travis Anderson
Director, Tourism and Community Development
705.989.7915
t.anderson@cityssm.on.ca