



**owen  
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# Intergovernmental Relations **Action Plan**

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### 1. BACKGROUND

In April 2021, Council approved a refreshed Strategic Plan that bridges the term of 2021 to 2023. The plan clearly identifies seven priorities of Council, which are supported by the corporate priorities of Service Excellence and Clear Direction. One of the Key Results identified within the plan is “Implement a Government Relations plan by December 2021”. This Key Result is fundamental to the work the City is undertaking to cultivate and support a common understanding of where the organization is headed.

While all City divisions engage in a range of ‘ad hoc’ intergovernmental activities (responding to policy consultations, developing funding applications, participating in municipal associations, etc.) this work can be enriched through a coordinated and strategic approach. Stronger results will be achieved through the development of both consistent messages and a comprehensive approach to articulating City priorities and concerns to provincial and federal governments.

The current municipal state of affairs presents a range of challenges:

- Increased competition for tax dollars combined with fiscal constraint at provincial and federal levels;
- Encouraging growth and development in the context of infrastructure deficits, the COVID-19 pandemic, and environmental issues;
- Changing demographics, service delivery pressures and public demands for lower taxes; and
- Citizen expectations for transparency, accountability and engagement.

Municipalities can no longer address these issues in isolation. It is increasingly important to build partnerships, alliances and shared priorities across the public, community and business sectors in order to influence agendas and help shape directions.

Communication and relationships are foundational elements of Intergovernmental Relations. The long-term outcome of this focus will be that Owen Sound is better positioned to assert its interests to other levels of government and a wider range of partners.

All areas of municipal operations are impacted by the policy, service, and program decisions of other levels of government. These decisions also impact the lives of residents and can have significant financial implications. A coordinated and strategic approach to intergovernmental relations will help position Owen Sound as a ‘municipality of influence’ within the county, provincial and federal contexts, improving our ability to advocate effectively on behalf of our residents and businesses. A key component of the Intergovernmental Relations Action Plan is to promote this work and leverage it to build partnerships with other levels of government and stakeholders and to advance policies and support opportunities.



## 2. LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

### Federal

Owen Sound is represented in the House of Commons by the Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound riding / constituency. The 2021 election, which saw the re-election of a minority federal Liberal government led by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, also saw the re-election of Conservative Alex Ruff for the Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound riding. Alex Ruff is not a member of the federal cabinet. He currently serves as a member of the following:

- Canada-Ireland Interparliamentary Group
- Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association
- Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group

### Provincial

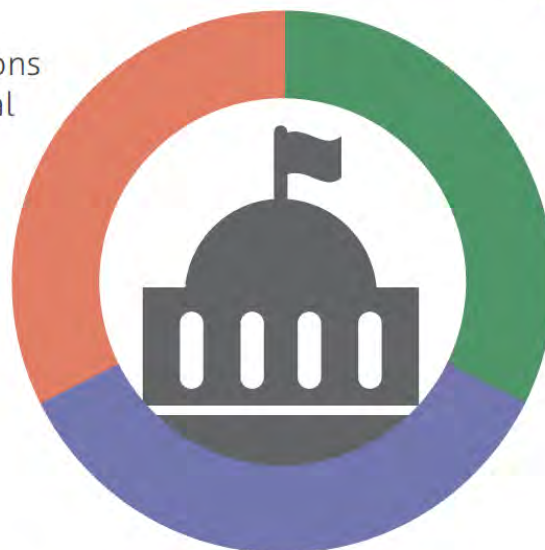
Provincially, Owen Sound is represented in the Ontario Legislature by the riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound which is held by Progressive Conservative, Deputy Speaker Bill Walker.

### County

Owen Sound is represented on the 18 member Grey County Council by the Mayor and Deputy Mayor. Grey County uses a Committee of the Whole governance structure.

### Federal

- Senate
- House of Commons
- Governor General
- Prime Minister
- Cabinet
- Ministries



### Provincial

- Legislative Assembly
- Lieutenant Governor
- Premier
- Cabinet
- Ministries

### County

- County Council
- Mayors and Deputy Mayors
- Committee of the Whole

### 3. 2022-2023 ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

The City of Owen Sound undertook a Citizen Satisfaction survey in the summer of 2021 to better understand citizen needs and expectations. The goal of the survey was to effectively prioritize and implement improvements with respect to delivery of services and the citizen experience. The Citizen Satisfaction Survey also collected data on topics that are beyond the sole responsibility of Owen Sound's municipal government. As reflected in the survey findings, some of the most important issues facing Owen Sound today require a concerted community-wide response and are not the sole purview of one organization or level of government. The identified topics were:

- Affordable housing, cost of living, homelessness;
- COVID-19;
- Health, public health, mental health;
- Employment and workforce development; and
- Climate action

In addition to the information garnered from the Citizen Satisfaction Survey, in May 2021, Council approved the Corporate Climate Change Adaptation Plan. Grey County, a key partner to the City, is leading the development of a County climate change action plan. By adding climate change to the advocacy topics, it enables the City and the County to cooperatively make progression on this topic that has no geographic boundaries.

In June 2021, Council approved the following topics for delegation requests at the annual Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) Conference:

- Escalating municipal government liability and insurance costs;
- Sustainable funding to offset the true cost of providing court security;
- Stable funding for municipalities;
- Development of a Regional Comprehensive Transportation Plan for Georgian Bay and the Bruce Peninsula; and
- Awarding of grants that align with the municipal budget process and the provision of longer timelines to complete construction work.

Combined, these topics will be the advocacy priorities for 2022 to 2023.

## 4. CORE ACTIVITIES

The Intergovernmental Relations Action Plan provides a comprehensive approach for improving the coordination and effectiveness of the City's intergovernmental relations efforts, while building the relationships and partnerships necessary to influence policies and decisions. The core activities of the Action Plan focus on **ACE**: Advocacy, Collaboration and Education.

 **A**dvocacy  
..... for policy and issue-specific priorities and needs.

 **C**ollaboration  
..... with local and regional partners and municipal networks to build broad support for addressing issues and creating change.

 **E**ducation  
..... for policy makers on issues, needs, and community impacts of government policy and programs.

### Advocacy

While Owen Sound has its own unique character, challenges, and needs, it competes with many other small population centres for the attention and resources of senior levels of government.

Notwithstanding this competition, Owen Sound has fared well in terms of its ability to secure federal and provincial investments into infrastructure projects such as the: 10<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge Replacement, Shoreline Restoration, Downtown River Precinct and the 16<sup>th</sup> Street East Rehabilitation. Any one of these projects on their own would be considered significant; in aggregate, they represent considerable investments by senior levels of government.

Small municipalities across Ontario and Canada share common concerns. On some of these issues, it is most effective for municipalities to speak with a united voice. The City of Owen Sound primarily works with two municipal advocacy organizations: the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO).

### Advocacy Actions:

- Set short and longer-term corporate/council intergovernmental relations advocacy and policy priorities (i.e. annual and term of council).
- Develop and implement annual and priority-specific advocacy action plans including:
  - Semi-annual MP & MPP meetings;
  - Biennial Queens Park Days & Parliament Days – in collaboration with local municipalities and/or County or other stakeholders;
  - Federal and Provincial budget cycle submissions;
  - Provincial/Federal election strategies – highlight advocacy positions to candidates and party leaders; and
  - AMO & FCM conference participation and delegations.
- Establish an annual Council Outreach Plan including:
  - Annual Council/MP & MPP joint session;
  - Requesting the Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound MP and MPP, whenever possible, to provide early warning to Owen Sound on any issues and/or federal initiatives that may be of interest to the City. In this respect, the City Manager position will serve as the contact person for the MPs and their staffs, and that contact information will be provided to the MPs.
  - Invitations to the Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound MP to milestone and other special events, such as ground breakings, and ribbon cuttings.

### Collaboration

**Federal:** Under the Constitution of Canada, municipalities are “creatures” of the provinces; no formally mandated relationship exists between municipal governments and the Government of Canada. In real and practical terms, the Federal government is very urban and suburban in its makeup. Few Liberals were elected in primarily rural areas.

**Beyond Our Borders:** The City of Owen Sound has, in various ways, undertaken initiatives to establish or enhance relationships with governments outside of Ontario and Canada. Owen Sound has friendship and twinning agreements with three “sister” municipalities internationally (Dayi County, China; Miamisburg, Ohio, USA; and St. Ann’s Bay/Ocho Rios, Jamaica).

From an intergovernmental relations perspective, twinning arrangements are useful in finding cities around the world with whom Owen Sound shares common characteristics. These may include population size, employment types, the presence of educational institutions, etc. Relationships that are less formal than twinning arrangements can be sought out with such cities. It is useful to meet with municipal officials in cities like this to discuss common issues, and successful strategies for dealing with them.

Outreach to other cities, especially in North America, should be considered strategically. For example, Owen Sound would benefit from meeting with and talking to officials from cities that have historically struggled to achieve population growth and are now starting to see results.

It would be beneficial and appropriate for Owen Sound officials to meet with the leadership in these cities to learn: how they are focusing on growth; what are the growth sectors; what economic development strategies and techniques did these cities employ; what physical infrastructure do they offer; what role if any did colleges and universities play in fostering growth; what are the local taxation levels and how important are those levels in driving growth; and any other information that Owen Sound officials can obtain and employ in helping to grow the City.

### Collaboration Actions

- Identify key strategic partnerships & collaboration opportunities.
- Develop a stakeholder/ partnerships map.
- Identify ongoing strategic external partnerships and relationships, assess gaps/duplication in service provision
- Schedule regular meetings with local and regional stakeholders/partners.
- Identify and support council and staff leads for key associations.



### Education

As federal decision makers consider investments in transit, housing, and other infrastructure, there is, inevitably, opportunities for consultation and other inputs. Owen Sound would benefit from being engaged in opportunities to participate in federal policy making. Too often, municipalities rely upon third parties, such as FCM, to carry their messages forward on their behalf. While there is some benefit in this, FCM must represent all of its members; therefore, its ability to advocate on behalf of one specific municipality is limited. For example, the Standing Committee on Finance conducts pre-budget consultations, where they receive presentations from interested parties.

When advantageous, Owen Sound should partner with other municipalities within Grey County to advance a common agenda with the federal government. Other than the biggest cities in Canada, federal decision makers tend to think provincially and regionally.

### Education Actions

- Identify and publish key council endorsed policy & issue position statements. Highlight policy positions and publicly report on initiatives undertaken by the City to communicate and address the needs of citizens and businesses with other levels of government.
- Review Grey County Committee and Council Agendas and Reports and prepare key messages for Mayor and Councillors.
- Establish a frequency-specific and issue-specific reporting function for council, the senior leadership team and staff.
- Establish regular mechanisms for providing input to provincial and federal policymakers.
- Outreach to host Ministerial, Deputy Minister and staff visits on identified topics.
- Establish regular standing meetings with provincial and federal officials (key staff) on priority areas.



## 5. COMMUNICATION THEMES

In addition to issue or policy-specific content, the following themes should be recurring, underlying messages:

- With a population of 21,000 Owen Sound is the largest urban community in Grey and Bruce Counties.
- Owen Sound is located on the southern shore of Georgian Bay offering a high quality of life for residents.
- As Owen Sound continues to be growth ready, Owen Sound is also a mature city, that will face the same social and economic challenges as other cities.
- Owen Sound believes that partnerships with other levels of government are essential for the benefit of its residents, businesses, and social service providers.
- As the senior levels of government contemplate infrastructure investments, their urban/rural strategies, and economic development, Owen Sound has an important role to play and wants to contribute.





## 6. CONCLUSION AND ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

The following are the anticipated corporate and community outcomes that will form the basis for reporting on the success of the Action Plan and for development of Key Results (KRs):

The City:

- Has success in influencing provincial and federal agendas that affect the local community;
- Is better informed and positioned to take advantage of funding opportunities;
- Effectively communicates local interests and needs, which are well understood by other orders of government; and
- Is prepared and positioned to work with other orders of government; the private sector and the community to achieve mutual benefits in a proactive manner.

While the City Manager provides leadership and coordination for intergovernmental relations and advocacy, staff from across the organization will work collaboratively to address identified priorities and collectively achieve successful outcomes.

Owen Sound has much to offer as a place to live, work, and do business. By developing and executing an effective intergovernmental relations plan, that is strategic in nature, the City of Owen Sound will complement the good work that is already taking place within its boundaries.

