

Future Owen Sound Vision 2050



A LONG-TERM STRATEGIC PLAN
FOR THE CITY OF OWEN SOUND

Message from Mayor Boddy

It is my pleasure to introduce *Future Owen Sound: Vision 2050*, our community's long-term strategic plan. This is more than a document; it's a shared vision of what Owen Sound can become over the next quarter-century.

A long-term vision is not a rigid blueprint. Instead, it is a pathway—a guide to help us navigate the years ahead, adapt to change, and seize new opportunities as they arise. *Vision 2050* is designed to be both inspirational and practical. It outlines where we want to go as a city and sets the foundation for future Councils to make thoughtful, strategic choices. Like any journey, the road will have its curves, but our destination is clear: a vibrant, welcoming, and connected Owen Sound

The strength of this plan comes from the people who shaped it. Residents, community groups, businesses, and partners all shared their perspectives and aspirations. This engagement wasn't about listening once—it was about building together. The community is woven into this plan as a collaborator, with opportunities for everyone to continue contributing in the years ahead.

Vision 2050 will serve as a crucial tool for the City. It will guide budgets, decisions, and daily work, while ensuring departments, Council, and partners are working in alignment. Above all, it provides a framework for continued collaboration between the City and the people we serve.

On behalf of City Council, I extend my sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to this plan—our residents and community participants, the Strategic Plan Ad Hoc Committee, City staff, and our consultant, Jay Pitter, whose insight and expertise helped guide us through this process with care and creativity.

The work ahead will take dedication, collaboration, and patience, but if we continue to move forward together, listening and learning as we go, the Owen Sound we envision for 2050 is one we can build, step by step, starting today.



Ian Boddy, Mayor, City of Owen Sound



Moving Forward Together

Located in the eastern region of Saugeen Ojibway Nation Territory (Saukiing Anishnaabekiing), Owen Sound is a lower-tier municipality within Grey County. This is the ancestral and treaty lands and territories of the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation and the Saugeen First Nation, together known as the Saugeen Ojibway Nation (SON). The City of Owen Sound acknowledges that it lies within this Territory and commits to early engagement and coordination with SON in order to facilitate knowledge-sharing, support consideration of SON interests in land use decision-making and support the identification of potential impacts of decisions on the exercise of Aboriginal or treaty rights. Vision 2050 recognizes SON as rights-holders of Saukiing Anishnaabekiing.

Principles

The principles guiding the Strategic Plan are as follows:

ACCESSIBILITY

Owen Sound is a city that strives to be physically, socially and financially accessible so that everyone has opportunities to connect, contribute and thrive.

COMMUNITY CARE & COMPASSION

Owen Sound is a city that strives to address challenges, differences and individuals experiencing difficulties with compassionate community care.

ACCOUNTABILITY & TRANSPARENCY

Owen Sound is a city that strives to be transparent and accountable in a manner that creates space for grace, learning and collective problem-solving.

RESILIENCE

Owen Sound is a city that strives to be resilient in the face of environmental, economic and social change while celebrating its multiple strengths and attributes.

TRUST BUILDING & COLLABORATION

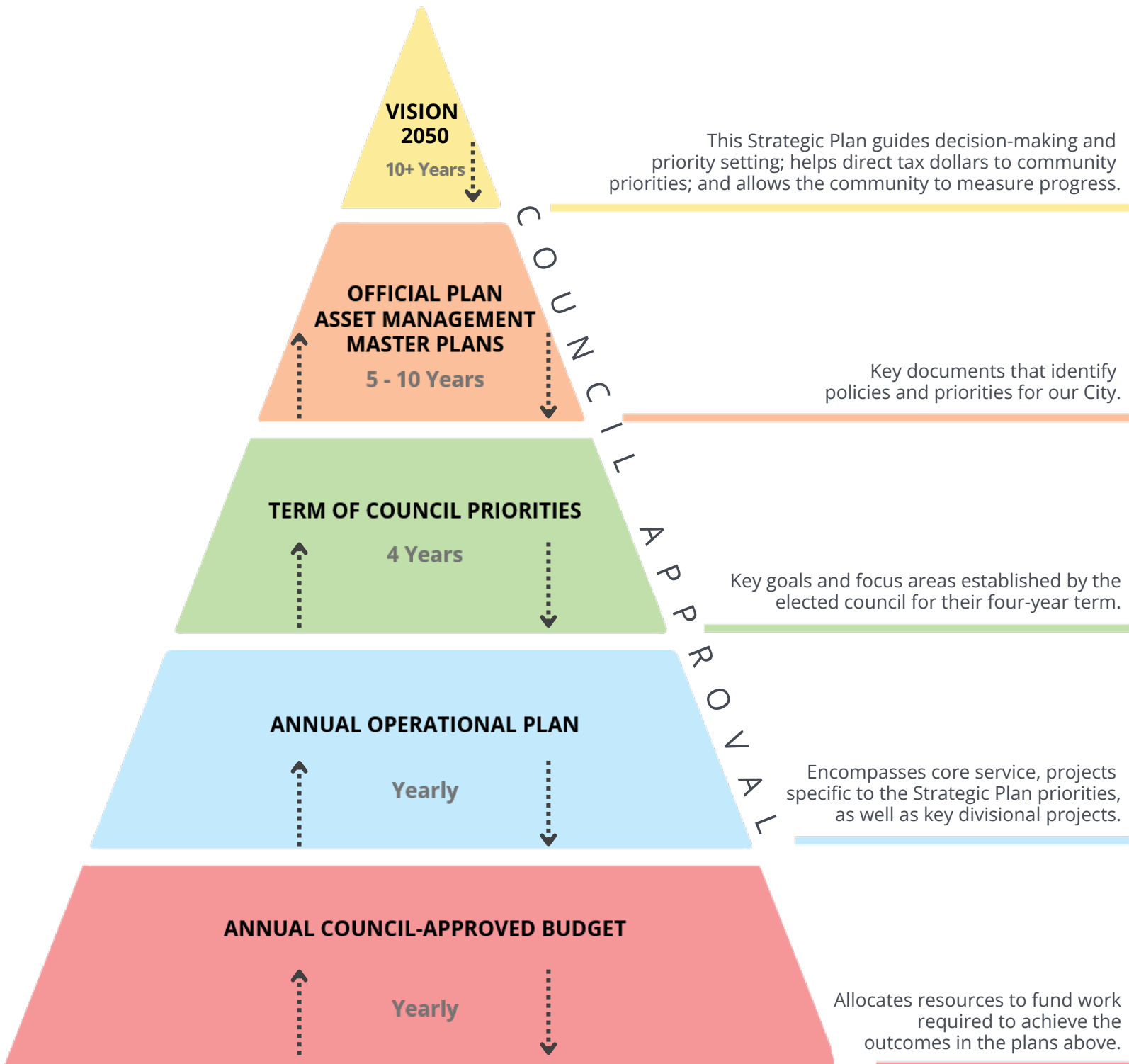
Owen Sound is a city that strives to build a culture of trust and collaboration between City staff, elected officials and community stakeholder groups—extending beyond familiar social networks and echo chambers.

COURAGE

Owen Sound is a city that strives to courageously try new approaches, acknowledge when there is room for improvement and embrace big opportunities.

Why A Strategic Plan?

The Future Owen Sound: Vision 2050 Strategic Plan helps guide as follows:



Themes

The themes guiding the Strategic Plan actions are as follows:



Prosperous City

"In my dream version of Owen Sound, I don't have to worry if my paycheque will pay the bills, and I can eventually afford to retire. I can take a bus to work and back, or just to a show. My kids have career opportunities that pay more than minimum wage and live nearby, so they can help me out in my decline."
– Survey Respondent

Definition: Supporting initiatives that increase competitive economic advantages for current and new businesses and their employees. Also, addressing other aspects of prosperity, such as contributing to a good quality of life for all and recognizing the experience of elders, the potential of youth and collective community knowledge and precious local resources.

By 2050, Owen Sound will attract a highly skilled, inter-generational workforce and work in close partnership with existing sectors such as agriculture, healthcare, and tourism and culture—as well as newer industries, particularly in future-focused sectors such as technology and sustainability.

METRICS:



Net increase in the number of businesses by 50 with every Census cycle



Increase square footage of ICI (Industrial, Commercial, Institutional) by 25,000 square feet every year



Decrease the square footage vacancy rate of commercial/retail in the River District by 5% every year

Prosperous City

Existing Plans and/or Potential Collaborators

- Georgian College Strategic Plan 2025–2030
- Georgian College Student Housing Strategy
- Owen Sound's Official Plan
- Owen Sound Community Improvement Plan
- Grey County Economic Development, Tourism and Culture Master Plan (2023)
- Owen Sound and Area District Chamber of Commerce (*collaborator*)

Community Engagement Summary

Community members highlighted the importance of retaining existing employment opportunities as well as attracting new employers through diversifying the local economy, specifically within the tourism, healthcare, technology, advanced manufacturing and sustainability sectors. People also wanted to see the City better leverage current cultural and natural assets, such as the waterfront area, for both the enjoyment of existing residents and tourism potential. Additionally, to support the local economy, there was a desire to provide more support to small businesses and entrepreneurs, particularly downtown. Finally, people wanted to see specific actions for youth, seniors, Indigenous Peoples and newcomers that help foster a more inclusive and supported community.



Green & Resilient City

"I see a city that is built around and encourages outdoor and open-air living with more visible green spaces that encourage family gatherings and safe walking trails/bike lanes in the city centre to enhance physical (and mental) well-being."
– Survey Respondent

Definition: Strengthening the city's environmental, social and economic ability to mitigate and adapt to the climate crisis. Also, leveraging the city's natural resources and infrastructure to support healthy lifestyles.

By 2050, Owen Sound will be a city with a wide range of resilient and sustainable practices that protect the planet, people and economy.

METRICS:



Reduce corporate (Co.) and community (Cm.) emissions as follows:
2026: 15% Cm. 20% Co. | 2030: 30% Cm. 35% Co. | 2035: 50% both
2040: 60% Cm. 65% Co. | 2045: 75% Cm. 80% Co. | 2050: Net zero (Cm. & Co.)



Increase satisfaction with Green City Services (parks and trails, drinking water, garbage and recycling collection) by 5% each survey cycle until a satisfaction score of 80 is reached and then maintain at 80 or greater

Green & Resilient City

Existing Plans and/or Potential Collaborators

All plans below are City of Owen Sound plans.

- Climate Action Strategy (2023)
- Climate Mitigation Plan (2023)
- Climate Change Adaptation Plan (2021) (including Climate Change Risk Analysis, completed in 2019)
- Tree inventory project
- Boulevard planting programs
- Emerald Ash Borer Management Plan (2014)
- Recreation, Parks and Facilities Master Plan (2018–2028)
- Official Plan
- Climate Action Owen Sound and The Sustainability Project (*collaborators*)

Community Engagement Summary

Community members highlighted the importance of implementing the City's current Climate Action Strategy. They also wanted more opportunities for community engagement and stewardship opportunities. Specifically, people wanted to see: more attention paid to tree planting; naturalization with native/resilient species; green infrastructure development; energy efficiency and the switch to renewable energy; and transportation-related elements like expanding transit service and promoting walking and cycling.



Celebrating & Embracing Culture

"Owen Sound is a vibrant community that emphasizes its connection to the water by creating safe, comfortable parks, streets and public spaces that are easily walkable; where a strong history of arts & culture is celebrated, our agricultural roots are valued, new residents are welcomed; diverse business owners are embraced, and development is harnessed for the betterment of the future."
- Survey Respondent

Definition: Uplifting all aspects of the city's local culture, including Indigenous Peoples' cultural histories and practices, the cultural histories and practices of all residents, and formal institutional arts and culture expressions. Also, contributing to creating an inclusive, welcoming and prosperous culture that creates the conditions for harmonious demographic and economic growth.

By 2050, Owen Sound will be a city that supports and celebrates the long-standing cultural knowledge and expressions of Indigenous Peoples, its rich local cultural resources – from artists to growers to storied sites – while also embracing contributions from new populations.

METRICS:



Increase in economic impact by increasing the employment number in the arts, heritage, and cultural sectors by 20% every Census cycle and then maintain at 3% or greater



Increase in those that agree and strongly agree that the City is a welcoming and inclusive community by 2% each survey cycle until the percentage that agree or strongly agree is 80% and then maintain at 80 or greater

Celebrating & Embracing Culture

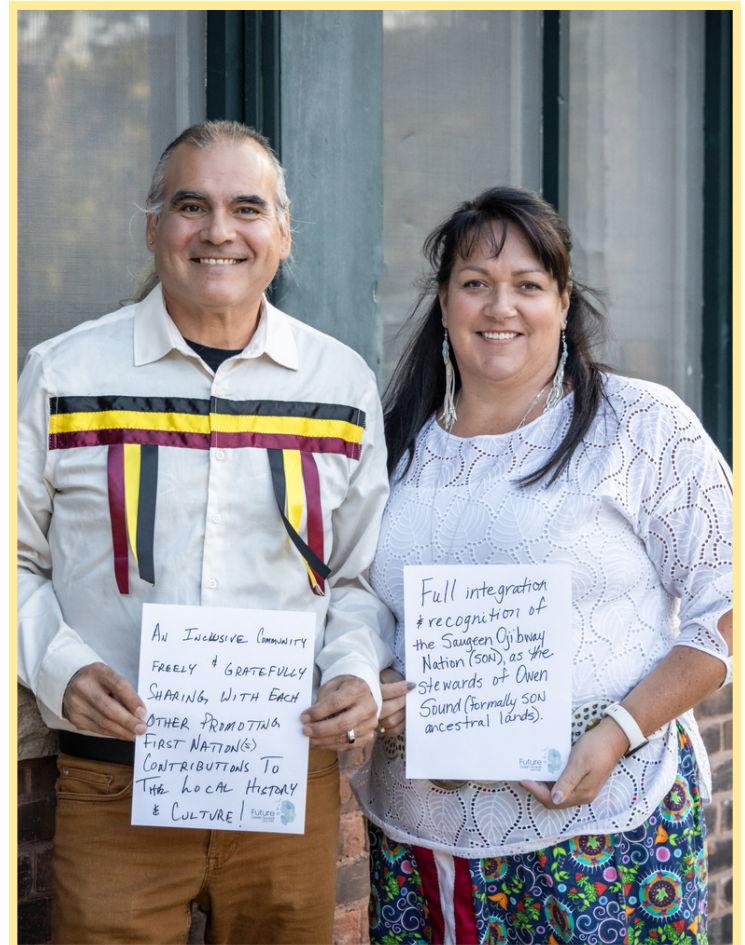
Existing Plans and/or Potential Collaborators

All plans below are City of Owen Sound plans.

- Cultural Master Plan (2012)
- Tourism Action Plan (2025)
- River District Action Plan (2025)
- Inclusion Strategy 2023–2028
- YMCA Settlement and Language Services and Welcoming Communities Grey Bruce (*collaborators*)

Community Engagement Summary

Community members highlighted the need to better support existing arts and culture within the city by providing more funding for arts-related activities, spaces for arts activities and amplification of their practices. Specifically, community stakeholders wanted to see the establishment of an advisory committee or arts council to help resource their work and they wanted to be better integrated into larger cultural plans.



City Building

"My ideal Owen Sound provides an opportunity to rent a two- or three-bedroom place for me and my two kids that won't cost me twice as much as I make in a month, a city that has a modern and robust urban transit system with inter-township/ interprovince bus service, a place where my kids can grow up and want to put down roots."
– Survey Respondent

Definition: Enhancing urban development, planning and place-making processes to create places and spaces that contribute to complete communities for existing residents, future residents and tourists.

By 2050, Owen Sound will be a city whose infrastructure, community amenities and housing stock are well maintained, accessible and responsive to the evolving requirements of community stakeholders and visitors.

METRICS:



Increase satisfaction with City Building Services (library, TTAG, recreation facilities, recreation programming) by 5% each survey cycle until a satisfaction score of 80 is reached and then maintain at 80 or greater



Increase satisfaction with Revitalization of the Downtown Area by 5% each survey cycle until a satisfaction score of 80 is reached and then maintain at 80 or greater.

City Building

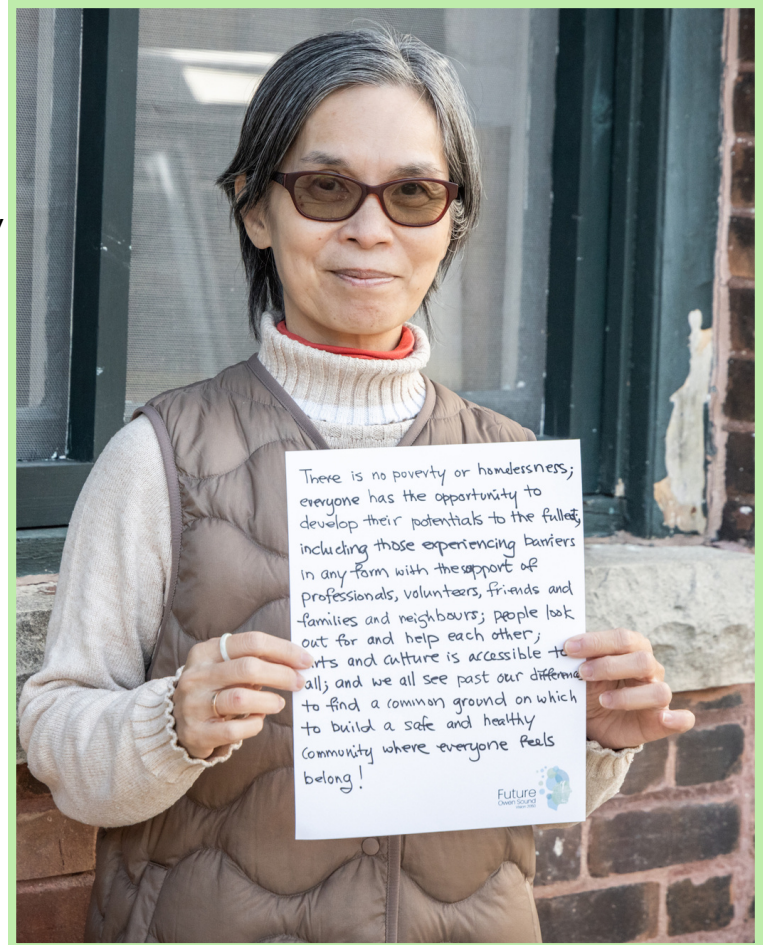
Existing Plans and/or Potential Collaborators

All plans below are City of Owen Sound plans.

- Building Condition Assessment (2024–2025)
- Parks Asset Assessment (2025)
- Asset Management Levels of Service (2025)
- Asset Management Lifecycle Management Profiles (2025)
- Asset Management Policy Update (2025)
- Community Improvement Plan
- Official Plan

Community Engagement Summary

Community members highlighted the importance of ensuring city infrastructure (transportation, public space, water and waste) is well-maintained, sustainable and contributes to a more connected city, and that new developments are planned with increased community participation. Specifically, people wanted to see more public space projects, revitalization of the waterfront and downtown, more public washroom access, better heritage retention and reuse, and incentives for affordable housing development.



A City That Moves

"One of the ways this goal can be achieved is by focusing on creating an accessible pedestrian environment. By focusing on pedestrian users, the City will become accessible to users of all ages and abilities, which is key for our aging community. An objective for the City should be to ensure that residents can access all parts of the City by transit, active trails, and sidewalks. The lack of a personal vehicle should not be a barrier to accessing parts of the City."
- Survey Respondent

Definition: Facilitating sustainable transportation options and creating community connectivity. Also, this entails ensuring that everyone experiences dignity and accessibility while travelling and recognizing that movement throughout a city is not simply about moving people from point A to point B. It is also about ensuring that everyone is able to access things they need, community connection and opportunities.

By 2050, Owen Sound will be connected by a comprehensive transportation network, accommodating multiple types of sustainable and accessible ways of travelling through the city.

METRICS:



Improve walk score by 10 points every 5 years



Increase satisfaction with City That Moves Services (parking, roads and sidewalks, transit, winter maintenance-roads, winter maintenance- sidewalks) by 5% each survey cycle until a satisfaction score of 80 is reached and then maintain at 80 or greater

A City That Moves

Existing Plans and/or Potential Collaborators

All plans below are City of Owen Sound plans.

- Transportation Master Plan (2010)
- Route Optimization Study (2021)
- Recreation Trails Master Plan (2012)
- Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2024–2028
- Transit Accessibility Plan (2014)

Community Engagement Summary

Community members highlighted the importance of ensuring roads, trails/pathways, sidewalks, bike lanes and other transportation infrastructure are accessible, well-maintained, well-lit and connected. Specifically, people wanted to see a transportation plan that addresses network and service gaps, expansion of bike lanes and sidewalks, promotion of sustainable transit (e.g., electric buses, cycling) and exploration of alternative transit models (e.g., bus dispatching service), and a plan that ensures public transit, which is a significant pain point, is accessible and equitable.



Safe City

"A safe community where people have places to go and connect, and homelessness is decreased."
– Survey Respondent

Definition: Contributing to inclusivity, diversity and accessibility in our community and participating in initiatives focused on a range of long-term, systemic safety solutions that respond to current and future residents.

By 2050, Owen Sound will be regarded as a city that acknowledges multiple factors—physical, psychological, historical, etc.—that impact a sense of security, and where institutions and community members are committed to protecting each other's safety.

METRICS:



Increase satisfaction with Safe City Services (police, fire, by-law) by 5% each survey cycle until a satisfaction score of 80 is reached and then maintain at 80 or greater



Increase in those that agree and strongly agree that the City is an accessible city by 2% each survey cycle until the percentage that agree or strongly agree is 80% and then maintain at 80 or greater



Increase percentage of residents that have not encountered a barrier to access a city owned facility, program or activity by 2% each survey cycle until a satisfaction score of 80 is reached and then maintain at 80 or greater

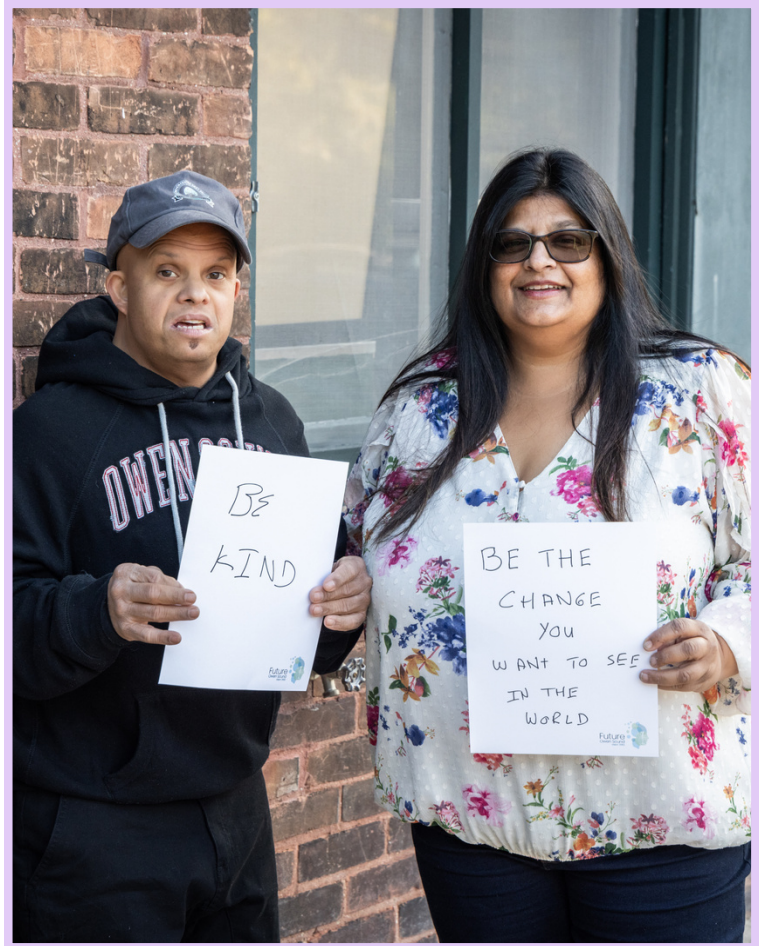
Safe City

Existing Plans and/or Potential Collaborators

- Owen Sound's River District Action Plan (2020)
- Bruce Grey's Community Safety and Well-Being Planning
- Owen Sound Police Service Operations Plan 2023–2026
- Mobile Mental Health and Addiction Response Team (MMHART), Brightshores Wellness and Recovery Centre and Supportive Outreach Services (S.O.S.) (*collaborators*)

Community Engagement Summary

Community members highlighted the importance of addressing homelessness, drug addiction and mental health through increased social support and better coordination with existing non-profit organizations and social service providers. They also highlighted the need for strategies for youth, Indigenous and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals. Many community stakeholders wanted to see the implementation of more safe consumption sites to encourage a harm reduction approach. Broad public education campaigns and better relationship-building with Indigenous communities were also suggested to reduce the stigmatization of individuals experiencing challenges and/or engaging in risky or unsafe behaviours in public spaces. Organizations addressing issues such as homelessness and harm reduction requested greater support from the City in terms of extending beyond their stated scope of responsibility to collaborate on fundraising and advocacy initiatives, and by extending municipal spaces to support their work.



Fostering Mutually Beneficial & Respectful Relationships

"Embrace diversity, learn from those who are different and go with the flow. Change is always positive."
– Survey Respondent

Definition: Establishing, reconciling and continually nurturing relationships that result in mutual benefit, trust and shared understanding.

By 2050, Owen Sound will build bridges of mutual respect and trust across multiple stakeholder groups to collaboratively advance productive democratic processes and to develop a more relational, front-line presence.

METRICS:



Increase the percentage of residents who indicate satisfaction with the quality of their most recent interaction with a City staff by 2% each survey cycle until a satisfaction score of 80 is reached, and then maintain at 80 or greater



Increase Net Promoter Score by two points each survey cycle until a score is at or above the average for Canadian municipalities with a population less than 250,000

Fostering Mutually Beneficial & Respectful Relationships

Existing Plans and/or Potential Collaborators

- Owen Sound's Agreement Development Policy (2024)
- Community Engagement Policy and Community Engagement Toolkit (set for review in 2028).

Community Engagement Summary

Community members highlighted the importance of increased transparency and accountability at city hall as well as more opportunities for community involvement, especially creative engagement opportunities. Specifically, people wanted to see more educational resources/guides on how the city works, better coordination of individuals and groups who could work together with the city towards locally made solutions, and partnerships with other municipalities to address complex issues, such as mental health, addiction and homelessness. Additionally, it was noted that community members could also amend their approach to voicing concerns and ideas in a more solutions-oriented, collaborative manner to assist in building better relationships with City staff and elected officials.



CONCLUSION

Future Owen Sound: Vision 2050 is a pathway, not a fixed blueprint. It is designed to guide our community forward, adapt to change, and set the stage for planning and priority setting by future City Councils.

Implementation will be monitored and reported regularly. As specific actions move forward, individual reports will go to the appropriate standing committee outlining timelines, tasks, and how funding will be used, where applicable. Additionally, overall progress updates on actions will be presented to City Council each year.

The success of *Vision 2050* depends on collaboration. The community is a key partner, with opportunities for residents, businesses, non-profits, institutions, and other levels of government to work alongside the City in achieving shared goals.

This is the start of a long journey, one that will have twists and turns, but also moments of progress worth celebrating. By staying engaged, working together, and keeping our shared vision in focus, we can build the vibrant, connected Owen Sound we all imagine for 2050.



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