




COMMUNICATION UPDATE

TO:	Mayor and Council
DATE:	December 19, 2025
SUBJECT:	2024-2028 Tourism Strategy Annual Update 2025 (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
SUBMITTED BY:	Lisa Abbott Director, Tourism & Culture Planning & Economic Development Department
SIGNATURE:	

This communication update will provide information regarding the annual update on the 2024 – 2028 Tourism Strategy (the Strategy).

Background

The 2024 – 2028 Tourism Strategy was ratified by council in December 2024 and included a commitment to provide an annual informational update to Council in order to remain transparent and collaborative.

The Strategy is rooted in a vision to become a top Canadian destination celebrated for its vibrant tourism districts, captivating nature-based activities, and authentic and sustainable experiences. Embracing a ‘whole city’ approach, the strategy revolves around four strategic priorities:

1. Grow Hamilton's Reputation as Leading Tourism Destination
2. Cultivate Vibrant Tourism Districts
3. Promote and Support the Sustainability of Natural Assets
4. Strengthen Hamilton's Major Events and Festival Sector

Through these strategic priorities, Tourism Hamilton aims to position the city as a dynamic and sustainable tourism destination that drives economic growth, fosters Hamilton's unique identity, and enriches the overall destination. The ‘whole city’ approach ensures alignment with broader city initiatives and leverages collaboration across departments and partners to achieve shared goals.

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2025 Highlights

The Strategy includes a four-year implementation plan, outlining the timeline for each of the 32 Actions in the plan.

For this annual informational update, staff have provided the progress of each action to date below.

Key project highlights include:

- **Actions #2:** Indigenous Tourism Development Strategy and corresponding Implementation Plan completed.
- **Action #11 & 12:** Tourism & Culture staff worked to animate the West Harbour and Downtown tourism districts through placemaking and public art, e.g. Pier 8 Poet in Place installation, Halloween and Holiday programming at the waterfront, King William pedestrianization and activation during the summer.
- **Action #14:** Staff hired to lead Night-Time Economy initiatives and pilot initiatives planned for 2026 JUNOS (March).
- **Action #18:** Waterfall Destination Master Plan is underway and scheduled for completion mid-way through 2026.
- **Action #22:** Staff are exploring several on-water attraction opportunities for 2026.
- **Action #27:** Tourism & Culture staff supported Indigenous Relations Division on programming and event planning for National Indigenous Peoples Day
- **Action #29:** Major events secured through MAT funding include JUNOS 2026, Canadian Society of Association Executives Conference 2027, and Canada Wide Science Fair 2027 & 2029.
- **Action #30:** MAT funding supported cultural development such as Supercrawl, Fringe on the Streets festival on King William, and Hess Winter Village Market.

Staff are pleased with the progress to date and thankful for the collaborative support of colleagues embracing the whole-city approach to tourism within Hamilton.

For the 2024-2028 Tourism Strategy Document: please visit the [Tourism Strategy webpage](#).

Appendices and Schedules Attached

Implementation Plan & Status

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Contact

If you require any further information on this matter, please contact Ryan McHugh, Manager Tourism & Events, Planning & Economic Development Division by email at Ryan.McHugh@hamilton.ca.

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Implementation Plan & Status

Priority	Action	Status
Grow Hamilton's Reputation as a Leading Tourism Destination		
1	Develop and implement a Tourism Product Development Program, cultivating authentic experiences to showcase the city's diverse cultural, heritage, music, culinary, and natural assets.	In Progress
2	Complete and adopt the Indigenous Tourism Experiences Study by 2024.	Completed
3	Following recommendations from the Indigenous Tourism Experiences Study, support new and existing Indigenous tourism operators in developing authentic Indigenous tourism experiences.	In Progress
4	Work with Corporate Communications, HSR, Metrolinx, and other partners to identify and support the promotion of sustainable, destination-focused transportation options for tourists visiting and navigating the city.	In Progress
5	Redevelop the Tourism Hamilton website and complete a digital review project to identify and meet visitors' current and future needs.	2026 Action Item
6	Working Corporate Communications, Economic Development, and industry partners, foster local pride in place encouraging permanent and temporary residents to explore their own city and invite friends and relatives to visit.	In Progress
7	Leverage Tourism Hamilton's brand, social channels, and in-kind partnerships to develop lure campaigns targeting leisure visitors and promote the city as an attractive destination.	In Progress
8	To lead by example, identify priority areas to implement visitor servicing in French and other popular visitor languages, including website, signage and wayfinding, and tools for staff.	2026 Action Item
9	To lead by example, Tourism Hamilton will obtain a GreenStep Sustainable Tourism Certification, which encompasses efforts in responsible tourism, environmental stewardship, accessibility, and diversity and equity. Greenstep has made significant changes to their program, staff are working to honour spirit of the action but may seek an alternate designation.	In Progress
10	Create a Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) Advisory Group of tourism industry partners by the mid-2025 to collaborate in a transparent manner on MAT spending.	In Progress

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Cultivate Vibrant Tourism Districts		
11	Through the Downtown West Harbourfront Coordinating Committee, implement safety, cleanliness, and activation initiatives in the Downtown and West Harbourfront areas, focusing on programming, placemaking, and strategic investments to enhance vibrancy and cocreate an authentic 'sense of place.'	In Progress
12	Enhance key tourism locations like the West Harbour and Downtown Entertainment Precinct through urban design and public art	In Progress
13	Create and implement a four-year exhibition and community program to use the Visitor Experience Centre as a year-round central hub that also connects to major hosted events	2026 Action Item
14	Establish a Night-Time Economy initiative by the end of 2025 to review City policies and bylaws to remove barriers and encourage operators and community organizations to create a healthy and safe night-time economy	In Progress
15	Conduct a review of City of Hamilton tourism-related wayfinding signage and implement a program to update with current branding and digital technologies, to be completed by 2028	Ahead of schedule, 2026 Action Item
16	Execute a tourism business attraction strategy to secure business investments that enhance Hamilton's destination offerings by filling identified gaps in accommodations, attractions, and cultural venues	In Progress
17	For identified tourism districts, work with local businesses, BIAs, organizations, and regional partners to co-create curated experiences and authentic itineraries that entice visitors and reflect the district's unique identity	In Progress

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Promote and Support the Sustainability of Natural Assets		
18	Complete a Waterfall Destination Master Plan by 2028 to facilitate the safe and environmentally friendly enjoyment of Hamilton's waterfalls and to identify long-term opportunities to improve visitor capacity at Hamilton's waterfalls	In Progress
19	Work with Climate Office, Active Transportation, Corporate Communications, and industry partners to identify and support the promotion of eco-tourism, environmental rehabilitation efforts, and responsible enjoyment of Hamilton's natural assets (i.e., trails, cycling, eco-parks, on-water activities)	In Progress, 2026 Action Item
20	With Planning and Economic Development partners, investigate tourism opportunities for the redevelopment of Wild Waterworks and surrounding Confederation Beach Park lands as a top destination, to have a plan to Council by 2028	2026 Action Item
21	Leverage federal and provincial programs as they become available to accelerate capital investments to enhance Hamilton's trail systems and natural assets by 2028 (waterfalls, trails, escarpment, rural agritourism, waterfront, bike racks at tourism assets) Aligned to Waterfall Destination Masterplan; staff are monitoring.	2026 Action Item
22	Work with the Land Development Office to establish the physical infrastructure (e.g., docks) and governance structure to facilitate additional recreational and leisure water-based activities and on-water operators at the waterfront by 2026	In Progress

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Strengthen Hamilton's Major Events and Festival Sector		
23	Implement sales campaigns to secure sporting and cultural tourism events that leverage investments in Hamilton's entertainment assets and other public spaces	In Progress
24	In line with the Federal Tourism Strategy, implement a sales campaign to secure international, national, and provincial meetings and conventions that provide year-round activity for industry partners	In Progress
25	Work with appropriate partners to leverage federal and provincial programs, as they become available, to accelerate capital investments in event and festival infrastructure in public spaces (enhance power, washrooms, lighting, connectivity to airport/transit, etc.)	Based on availability, staff are monitoring.
26	Work with local Indigenous communities to host major sports events for Indigenous athletes (Urban Indigenous Strategy Item #35)	In Progress
27	Working with Indigenous Relations Department and Indigenous communities, support and promote National Indigenous Peoples Day (June 21st) (Urban Indigenous Strategy Item #20)	In Progress
28	Enter a memorandum of understanding with the Hamilton Sports Group (Tiger-Cats) by the end of 2025 to formalize a partnership to increase the number of sports, culture, and community events and activations hosted at Tim Hortons Field	In Progress
29	Utilize a portion of the Municipal Accommodation Tax and other non-levy funding sources for bid fees for securing and executing major events, in collaboration with industry Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) Advisory Group	In Progress
30	Utilize a portion of the City's Municipal Accommodation Tax funds to support cultural development (such as growing festivals and event infrastructure), in collaboration with industry Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) Advisory Group	In Progress
31	Implement tailored neighbourhood strategies for communities heavily impacted by major events (e.g., Stipley during the Grey Cup) to mitigate effects on residents through effective communication and coordination of essential City services	In Progress, event-based
32	Working with Parks, Recreation, and Real Estate, undertake an analysis and policy review for hosting and infrastructure needs on city properties (power, facilities, venue mix, policing, etc.)	In Progress

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