




**CITY OF HAMILTON**  
**PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**  
**TOURISM AND CULTURE**

<b>TO:</b>	Mayor and Members General Issues Committee
<b>COMMITTEE DATE:</b>	December 4, 2024
<b>SUBJECT/REPORT NO:</b>	2024-2028 Tourism Strategy (PED24046(b)) (City Wide)
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	City Wide
<b>PREPARED BY:</b>	Ryan McHugh (905) 546-2424 Ext. 4132
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Lisa Abbott Acting Director, Tourism and Culture Planning and Economic Development Department
<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	

## RECOMMENDATION

- a) That the City of Hamilton “2024-2028 Tourism Strategy”, attached as Appendix “A” to Report PED24046(b), be approved; and,
- b) That staff be directed and authorized to implement the Strategic Actions contained within the 2024-2028 Tourism Strategy.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The draft 2024-2028 Tourism Strategy was completed in June 2024. Since that time, staff have done in-depth consultation on the draft and have incorporated the insights and feedback into the final 2024-2028 Tourism Strategy (Appendix A), including featuring and supporting music more prominently as per Council direction.

Hamilton's Tourism 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:** This priority focuses on supporting industry partners, welcoming visitors, and supporting the creation of unique experiences in Hamilton’s neighbourhoods and natural spaces. These actions

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will be achieved through collaboration with strategic partners, sustainable tourism practices, and a commitment to supporting Indigenous tourism experiences. A 'whole city' approach using a lens of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) ensures alignment with broader city initiatives, fostering collaboration across departments and partner groups to drive tourism growth.

**2. Cultivate Vibrant Tourism Districts:** Vibrant tourism districts reflect and nurture a community's authentic identity. They entice visitors and offer high-quality experiences that are unique to the destination. This priority aims to foster a true 'sense of place' in Hamilton's neighbourhoods, for both residents and visitors. Initiatives such as placemaking, programming, and business investment attraction enhance the overall vibrancy of key districts, in alignment with the City's efforts to revitalize neighbourhoods and improve safety and cleanliness.

**3. Promote and Support the Sustainability of Natural Assets:** Recognizing Hamilton's abundant natural assets, this priority emphasizes the importance of thoughtful planning and infrastructure improvements to enhance visitor experiences while preserving the environment. Initiatives include developing a Waterfall Destination Master Plan, facilitating recreational waterfront activities, and leveraging federal funding for trail enhancements. The strategy aligns with broader city plans focused on greenspace protection and waterfront access, ensuring a cohesive approach to stewarding Hamilton's natural assets.

**4. Strengthen Hamilton's Major Events and Festival Sector:** Hosting major events and festivals is crucial for attracting visitors and enhancing Hamilton's reputation as a destination. This priority focuses on securing investments in event infrastructure, leveraging new funding sources for event attraction, and implementing strategies to manage the impact of major events on local communities. There is additional opportunity to actively seek out and support major festivals geared towards equity deserving groups that expand the diversity of audiences as well as supporting cultural development (such as music, arts, theatre). The strategy aligns with Council priorities for enhancing the city's reputation as a centre of culture, sport, and tourism, and integrates with economic development goals to attract investment and stimulate year-round vibrancy.

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 regenerative 'whole city' approach ensures alignment with broader city initiatives and leverages collaboration across departments and partners to achieve shared goals.

### **Alternatives for Consideration – Not Applicable**

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## **FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

**Financial:** All recommended Strategic Actions identified in the proposed 2024-2028 Tourism Strategy will either be managed within the existing budget allocations or will be contingent upon securing the necessary financial resources.

Wherever possible, tourism staff will look to leverage Municipal Accommodation Tax funds or other non-levy sources to achieve new initiatives identified within this strategy. Any requests for funding will continue to go through the appropriate processes.

In the Strategy's Implementation Plan (Appendix A), staff have indicated the proposed funding sources for each action, however there are no new net-levy impacts from this strategy.

**Staffing:** Additional resources will be required in years 2 to 4 of the strategy. Where possible, these positions will be funded through MAT.

**Legal:** Where appropriate, Legal will be engaged in implementing the action items of the 2024-2028 Tourism Strategy. The strategy itself has no Legal ramifications.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

In September 2016, the City of Hamilton adopted the 2016-2026 Strategic Plan to support the Our Future Hamilton long-term community vision. The 10-year City of Hamilton Strategic Plan and its seven identified priorities is supported by short- and medium-term plans from various City of Hamilton Departments and Divisions, one of which is the 2021-2026 Economic Development Action Plan (EDAP). In October 2021, Hamilton City Council approved the 2021-2026 Plan. Action 21 in the Plan was "Complete and implement a Tourism Strategy."

In 2023, the new term of Council established their Term of Council Priorities, which serve as a guiding framework for municipal decision-making and resource allocation. These priorities reflect the Council's commitment to addressing the community's most pressing issues and advancing key initiatives over their term. As such, the Tourism Strategy aligns closely with these priorities by contributing to the economic prosperity of Hamilton, enhancing its reputation as a desirable destination, and fostering community vibrancy. By supporting and complementing the Term of Council Priorities, the Tourism Strategy ensures that tourism development remains a central focus of municipal efforts and reinforces Council's commitment to driving positive change and growth in the city.

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## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS**

This strategy supports and is supported by numerous City plans, policies, and strategies as well as those from the tourism industry, including but not limited to:

- Council Priorities, Outcomes and Measures of Success (2023)
- Economic Development Action Plan 2021-2025 (2021)
- Downtown Office Report (PED2301, 2023)
- Workforce Strategy (2023)
- Hamilton Civic Museum Strategy (2022-2030)
- Hamilton Urban Indigenous Strategy and Implementation Plan (2019)
- Hamilton Climate Action Strategy (2022)
- Hamilton Parks Master Plan (2022)
- Hamilton Recreation Master Plan (2022)
- West Harbour Recreation Master Plan (2010)
- Hamilton's Cycling Master Plan (2019)
- Transportation Master Plan: City in Motion (2018)
- Accelerated Active Transportation Implementation Plan (2023)
- Hamilton's Strategic Music Business Plan (2021)

## **RELEVANT CONSULTATION**

During the creation of the 2021-2026 Economic Development Action Plan and the 2024-2028 Draft Tourism Strategy, Economic Development and Tourism and Culture staff engaged with numerous partners to understand their experiences and incorporate their input into this strategic document. The engagement process involved a significant effort to capture the voices and thoughts of business partners and the public.

Understanding the vital role industry partners play in creating a thriving tourism destination, staff sought input from tourism partners through quarterly Team Hamilton Tourism meetings, one-on-one meetings, roundtable-style discussions prior to drafting the strategy.

Once the strategy was drafted, staff undertook extensive consultation, including:

- Industry consultation with over 80 industry partners, through several one-on-one meetings and 5 virtual group feedback sessions.
- Public consultation through the online Engage Hamilton platform and in-person at the Visitor Experience Centre.
- Presented to Open for Business Subcommittee for feedback (PED24046) (City Wide), July 15, 2024

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- Presented to Council at General Issues Committee: 2024-2028 Tourism Strategy (PED24046(a)) (City Wide), September 18, 2024
- Tourism staff also met individually with Councilors and the Mayor to gather feedback.
- Tourism staff also met with staff across the City, including the Indigenous Relations Division, Parks, Recreation, Corporate Communication, Active Transportation, Hamilton Street Rail (HSR), Economic Development, Real Estate, and others.

Staff have incorporated the insights and feedback from all consultation into the final 2024-2028 Tourism Strategy (Appendix A).

## **ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION**

Nationally, the tourism industry is not only an economic driver—as one of Canada’s top service exports—but also a tool for fostering social cohesion. Tourism is also a job-creator, supporting one in every ten jobs in the country. In 2023, visitors spent an estimated \$775 million in the city.

Hamilton’s 2024-2028 Tourism Strategy lays a solid foundation to position the city as a vibrant, sustainable, and inclusive destination. The strategy leverages Hamilton’s strengths in cultural, outdoor, music, culinary, events, and sport tourism while addressing emerging demands for curated experiences, Indigenous tourism, and sustainability.

The development of burgeoning tourism districts, such as the entertainment and waterfront areas, provides a promising base for attracting tourists. Hamilton’s growing music scene and capacity for hosting large concerts can bolster Hamilton’s status as a unique destination with a “music city” appeal. Further investment in Indigenous tourism experiences presents an opportunity for Indigenous businesses and operators, tapping into both national priorities and the growing interest in Indigenous culture and truth and reconciliation.

The strategy also proposes maximizing the Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT), generating dedicated tourism revenue. This funding will be crucial for developing the infrastructure needed to support these major events, enhance wayfinding, and elevate digital resources, such as an updated website and improved digital wayfinding, both of which will better meet visitor expectations and integrate real-time transportation and event information.

While Hamilton boasts an extensive list of cultural and natural assets, it currently lacks a cohesive identity in the global tourism market. The strategy emphasizes enhancing Hamilton’s international profile through robust branding, leveraging digital channels, and

capitalizing on its central location between Toronto and Niagara. However, the gaps in family friendly attractions, luxury hotels, and visitor infrastructure are limitations. As the Municipal Accommodation Tax generates revenue, it could be allocated to encourage private investment in these gaps, creating a more comprehensive visitor experience.

Safety and vibrancy in Hamilton's downtown are critical to attracting visitors and improving resident sentiment. The strategy includes plans to improve safety and cleanliness, especially in the downtown core, and recommends policies to support a robust night-time economy.

In light of climate change and rising visitor interest in sustainable travel, the strategy takes a proactive approach by incorporating sustainable tourism options, including low-impact transit and infrastructure for outdoor activities. To ensure these natural assets are maintained and resilient, the strategy recommends investment in preserving Hamilton's trails, waterfront, waterfalls, and other ecologically sensitive areas.

### **ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION**

Not Applicable.

### **APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED**

Appendix "A" to Report PED24046(b) – 2024-2028 Tourism Strategy