

Hamilton Tourism Development Corporation Report for Consideration

To: Board of Directors, Hamilton Tourism Development Corporation
Date: May 12, 2025
Report No: HTDC25001
Subject/Title: Tourism Hamilton Project Funding Requests – 2025 Allocation
Ward(s) Affected: City Wide

Recommendations:

- a) That a \$500,000 funding contribution from Hamilton Tourism Development Corporation to the City of Hamilton, to be drawn from the HTDC MAT Reserve Fund, to attract major tourism events, including meetings, conventions, sporting events, and cultural events, based on the information outlined in Appendix A to Report HTDC25001, BE APPROVED;
- b) That a \$200,000 funding contribution from Hamilton Tourism Development Corporation to the City of Hamilton, to be drawn from the HTDC MAT Reserve Fund, to support the development and implementation of a Tourism Product Development Program, based on the information outlined in Appendix B to Report HTDC25001, BE APPROVED;
- c) That, a \$50,000 funding contribution from Hamilton Tourism Development Corporation to the City of Hamilton, to be drawn from the HTDC MAT Reserve Fund, to support the City of Hamilton's application and process to achieve GreenStep Sustainable Tourism Certification, based substantially on the information outlined in Appendix C to Report HTDC25001, BE APPROVED;
- d) That a \$200,000 funding contribution from Hamilton Tourism Development Corporation to the City of Hamilton, to be drawn from the HTDC MAT Reserve Fund, to support the planning and execution of a Downtown Hamilton Nighttime Economy Study, based on the information outlined in Appendix D to Report HTDC25001, BE APPROVED;
- e) That a \$300,000 funding contribution from Hamilton Tourism Development Corporation to the City of Hamilton, to be drawn from the HTDC MAT Reserve Fund, to support destination marketing investments over 2025 and 2026, based on the information outlined in Appendix E to Report HTDC25001, BE APPROVED;

- f) That the President of Hamilton Tourism Development Corporation, or their designate, BE AUTHORIZED AND DIRECTED to execute, on behalf of Hamilton Tourism Development Corporation, all documents and agreements necessary to implement the foregoing funding contributions, with content acceptable to the Vice-President and Treasurer of the Corporation and in a form satisfactory to Hamilton Tourism Development Corporation's solicitor; and
- g) That the Treasurer of Hamilton Tourism Development Corporation BE AUTHORIZED AND DIRECTED to utilize funds from the HTDC MAT Reserve Fund in order to fund the foregoing funding contributions.

Key Facts

- This Report seeks approval for five strategic investments that support Hamilton's 2024–2028 Tourism Strategy.
- Each request directly supports tourism attraction, visitor experience, or destination marketing.
- The proposed projects span event bidding, product development, marketing, nighttime economy planning, and sustainability.
- All requests align with Hamilton Tourism Development Corporation's Reserve Fund Policy and are drawn from the Municipal Accommodation Tax.
- Approval enables timely planning and execution ahead of key RFP deadlines and seasonal marketing windows.

Financial Considerations

The total value of funding requested from Hamilton Tourism Development Corporation is \$1.25 million. These investments will be funded from the Hamilton Tourism Development Corporation Municipal Accommodation Tax Reserve Fund in 2025 and 2026. This funding supports short-term implementation needs and long-term growth in tourism visitation and revenue. If not approved, Hamilton risks losing competitive positioning for major events, marketing reach, and tourism development momentum.

Status Update and Financial Outlook

Hamilton Tourism Development Corporation has made significant progress on previously approved initiatives:

- The 2026 JUNO Awards have been secured, with staff currently finalizing a funding agreement with CARAS;

- A contribution agreement for the 2027 and 2029 Canada-Wide Science Fairs has been executed, with funding to flow in future years;
- The Indigenous Tourism Experiences Study is now complete and fully expended;
- The RFP for the Waterfall Destination Master Plan has closed, and the project is expected to launch in Q2 2025;
- Hamilton Winterfest 2025 included a Placemaking, Activation, and Safety Initiative and a large-scale, temporary public art lighting installation, located at the Jackson Square Rooftop entrances and stairwells at King and James Streets, King and MacNab Streets and James Street North at King William; and,
- Implementation is underway for additional Placemaking and Safety Initiatives, with additional activations planned for 2025 and 2026.

Background

The Hamilton Tourism Development Corporation Board of Directors approved its Reserve Fund Policy in November 2023, requiring a minimum reserve balance of \$2 million. The approved 2024–2028 Tourism Strategy, identifies priority actions in event attraction, product development, destination sustainability, and marketing. The projects in this Report were identified as early implementation priorities requiring investment beginning in 2025.

Analysis

The five initiatives recommended for funding were developed by the Tourism and Culture Division and are directly aligned with the strategic priorities outlined in the approved 2024–2028 Tourism Hamilton Strategy. Collectively, these initiatives advance Hamilton's competitiveness as a destination, support inclusive economic growth, and respond to evolving tourism trends. Each application includes reporting requirements to Hamilton Tourism Development Corporation and clear outcome metrics.

Alignment with the 2024–2028 Tourism Hamilton Strategy:

1) Grow Hamilton's Reputation as a Leading Tourism Destination

Tourism Event Attraction (Appendix A to Report HTDC250512) and Destination Marketing Investments (Appendix E to Report HTDC250512) aim to enhance Hamilton's profile by attracting major events and implementing targeted marketing campaigns. These efforts support the creation of unique experiences in Hamilton's neighbourhoods and natural spaces, fostering collaboration with strategic partners and sustainable tourism practices;

2) Cultivate Vibrant Tourism Districts

The Downtown Nighttime Economy Study (Appendix D to Report HTDC250512) seeks to assess and enhance Hamilton's after-hours economy, identifying opportunities to improve nightlife, public safety, and late-night services. This initiative supports placemaking, programming, and business investment attraction to enhance the vibrancy of key districts;

3) Promote and Support the Sustainability of Natural Assets

The GreenStep Sustainable Tourism Certification project (Appendix C to Report HTDC250512) demonstrates Tourism Hamilton's commitment to creating a safe, inclusive, and environmentally responsible destination. Achieving certification will enhance Hamilton's appeal to eco-conscious travellers and support the sustainability of the city's natural assets; and,

4) Strengthen Hamilton's Major Events and Festival Sector

Tourism Event Attraction (Appendix A to Report HTDC250512) and Destination Marketing Investments (Appendix E to Report HTDC250512) also contribute to strengthening Hamilton's major events and festival sector by supporting event bidding, licensing, marketing, and operational support. These efforts aim to increase attendance at existing venues, drive ticket sales, and boost tourism revenue.

By aligning these initiatives with the strategic priorities of the 2024–2028 Tourism Hamilton Strategy, the City aims to position Hamilton as a dynamic and sustainable tourism destination that drives economic growth and fosters the city's unique identity.

Coordination with City MAT Reserve Requests

In addition to the funding requests presented in this Report, Tourism Hamilton is coordinating several initiatives supported through the City of Hamilton's portion of the Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) Reserve (Policy No: FPAP-RE-004). These investments are complementary to Hamilton Tourism Development Corporation-funded projects and align with the 2024–2028 Tourism Strategy.

City MAT Reserve requests will include:

- Support for cultural initiatives and Indigenous programming;
- Funding for streetscape enhancements and banners in advance of Hamilton's Year of Music Campaign;
- Funding for recreational event hosting (e.g., International and Ontario Summer Games); and,
- Tourism staffing, including the Senior Project Manager, Major Events position (already approved through City of Hamilton's 2025 budget).

Aligning Hamilton Tourism Development Corporation and City MAT investments ensures a unified approach to implementation, maximizes tourism impact, and

reinforces long-term sustainability. For information, a summary of proposed and forecasted City MAT-funded initiatives is included as Appendix F to Report HTDC250512.

Alternatives

Not Applicable.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Sustainable Economic & Ecological Development

- Facilitates growth of key sectors and supports a resilient, year-round visitor economy.
- Positions Hamilton as a sustainable, high-quality destination for domestic and international travellers.

Safe & Thriving Neighbourhoods

- Enhances vibrancy in downtown and cultural districts through nighttime economy activation and placemaking.

Responsiveness & Transparency

- Projects are supported by sector engagement, reporting requirements, and alignment with Hamilton's strategic tourism goals.

Previous Reports Submitted

- Report HTDC240607 – Tourism Hamilton Project Funding Requests (June 7, 2024)

Consultation

The initiatives recommended in this Report are informed by the extensive consultation undertaken as part of the development of the 2024–2028 Tourism Hamilton Strategy. Input was gathered through interviews, workshops, and engagement with tourism operators, cultural organizations, Indigenous partners, residents, and internal City departments.

This cross-sector engagement helped shape the Strategy's priorities, which these initiatives are designed to implement. Ongoing collaboration with the Tourism Investment Advisory Group and sector partners continues to guide project development and delivery.

Appendices and Schedules Attached

Appendix A – Tourism Event Attraction

Appendix B – Tourism Product Development Program

Appendix C – GreenStep Sustainable Tourism Certification

Appendix D – Downtown Nighttime Economy Study

Appendix E – Destination Marketing Investments

Appendix F – City of Hamilton MAT Requests

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