

Growth is the Future

We need to stop waiting for growth and start pursuing it. Without growth, the same group of taxpayers must finance every increase in the city budget. I will ask council to use targeted development charge incentives to get projects built, restore a dedicated economic development function to actively recruit investment, and transform tourism into an economic development business that brings new people and money into Owen Sound. Every decision will have the same objective. More investment, more jobs, more attainable housing and a larger assessment base to help ease the burden on existing taxpayers.

Here are some of my ideas for building our assessment base.

Turn Development Charges into an Investment Tool

It's time to stop thinking of development charges as a fee. **They are a lever which will allow us to develop the kind of development we actually need.**

Rather than another blanket development charge holiday, I propose introducing a targeted growth development charge program. Here's an example of how we might help projects that align with our goals:

Purpose-built rental	no reduction
Affordable rental units	100% reduction
Downtown residential conversion	100% reduction
New industrial construction	100% reduction
Major industrial expansion	100% reduction
Hotel development	75–100% reduction
Mixed-use River District development	50–100% reduction
Standard market single-detached housing	Normal charge

The underlying principle is straightforward: if a development creates jobs, housing, visitors, or new assessment, we should make it easier for developers to build.

Every incentive will come with conditions, including timelines for planning approvals and the start of construction. This will prevent incentives from becoming giveaways.

Re-establish a dedicated economic development department.

Owen Sound has an External Relations and Investment Attraction plan, but we need to go further. I will ask council to establish an Economic Development and Investment Department, including tourism, a much-overlooked area of economic development. Initially, this department would be small and results-driven.

The Manager of Economic Development would be responsible for strategy, major employers, business retention, government relations, and investment recruitment.

The Investment and Business Development Officer is responsible for prospects, existing business expansion, development facilitation, and other tasks as required. This person would also act as an Investment Concierge, providing developers with a single point of contact across all city departments.

The Tourism and Destination Development Officer would be responsible for attracting visitors, developing tourism products, marketing the destination, and mentoring new or emerging tourism events as required.

This department would build a prospect list instead of waiting for the telephone to ring. It should identify at least 100 companies that could locate or expand here, and actively approach them.

The City's existing strategy identifies clean energy, health care and life sciences, advanced manufacturing and marine innovation as industries to pursue.

I think we could add the Bruce Power supply chain, health care businesses, food processing businesses, small manufacturers, and remote professional businesses to that list. The economic development staff should also recruit new tourism businesses including boutique hotels, restaurants, outfitters, boat excursions, kayak/canoe rentals, heritage experiences, and culinary attractions.

The City's harbour and river district should be viewed as a primary investment zone.

The department's mandate would not be to write plans. It would be to **bring investment and people into Owen Sound.**

Use Tourism as an Economic Development Strategy

In municipalities around Owen Sound, tourism is a major industry that brings new money and people into the community. Owen Sound has treated tourism primarily as promotion, when it should be treating it as economic development.

When someone from another community comes here and spends \$500, they bring money into the local economy. Hotels, restaurants, stores, and other businesses then spend that money locally, spreading the wealth. Imagine the impact if we could multiply that by one hundred? Or a thousand?

Owen Sound already has a 4% Municipal Accommodation Tax, which I brought to the table. The nearly \$500,000 that comes into the community is split between the city and the independent Owen Sound Tourism Development Fund to attract visitors, increase overnight stays, and support tourism infrastructure and amenities.

Several years ago, a Bruce County Municipality positioned itself as the base camp for the Bruce Peninsula. Owen Sound is rightfully the base camp for all north Grey and Bruce tourist areas, including the Bruce Peninsula, Sauble Beach, Blue Mountain and Georgian Bay. Cyclists, hikers, boaters, and anglers should consider Owen Sound the hub for exploring Grey-Bruce.

We have hotels, restaurants, shopping, music, theatre, movies, galleries, museums, the harbour and waterfront and all of the services they might need: gas, groceries, and banks.

We should change our thinking from “**How many people visited Owen Sound**” to “**How much money did visitors leave in Owen Sound?**”

Growth is not just about building houses or attracting tourists. It’s about deliberately expanding Owen Sound’s tax base so a larger economy shares the cost of running the city.