

Growth Standing Committee Report

REPORT NUMBER 377-2025-Growth-		
DATE		
PREPARED	November 14, 2025	FILE
STANDING		
COMMITTEE	November 28, 2025	
MEETING DATE		
SUBJECT	Presentation of updated Smart Growth Action Plan	

PURPOSE – To seek endorsement of the Growth Standing Committee for the updated Smart Growth Action Plan.

WITH RESPECT to Report 377-2025, we recommend endorsement of the Standing Committee to forward the following recommendations to City Council;

WE RECOMMEND THAT City Council adopt the Smart Growth Action Plan as presented;

AND THAT any necessary by-laws be presented to City Council for ratification.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents an updated version of the draft Smart Growth Action Plan (Plan), outlining the feedback received during the second phase of public engagement on the Plan and suggested changes made in response to that feedback.

Feedback on the Plan was positive overall, with residents expressing enthusiasm for Thunder Bay’s potential for sustainable, inclusive growth and welcoming a stronger focus on collaboration to support it.

The hundreds of residents and stakeholder groups who provided feedback during this second phase of engagement called for more attention to a few themes in the Plan. These include the city’s waterfront, climate change, and community safety.

In addition, residents expressed interest in how the Plan will be implemented and how they can remain engaged in supporting it. Many citizens and community groups

expressed a desire to contribute to achieving the Plan's Actions – along with an expectation of regular public reporting, and clear metrics to track progress and measure success.

The changes to the Plan outlined in this report reflect the efforts of Administration, guided by Task Force Growth, to respond meaningfully to that feedback.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The following table summarizes significant changes to the draft Smart Growth Action Plan since presentation to the Growth Standing Committee on October 28, 2025:

Section	Updated Content
Integrating Environmental Stewardship	• The feature on Integrating Environmental Stewardship into the Plan on page 17 now specifically mentions the City's Climate Adaptation Strategy in addition to the Net Zero Strategy.
Readiness Pillar	• Addition of new Action, "Improved Accuracy of Population Counts"
	• "Building Infrastructure for Growth" Spotlight updated to explicitly mention climate goals as a consideration for infrastructure planning.
Attraction Pillar	• Addition of new Action, "Overall Waterfront Plan"
	• Action A8 updated to address climate risk reduction, including reference to green infrastructure.

A number of minor updates have also been made to address design, grammatical changes and improve clarity.

CONSULTATION

Summary of Public Engagement

A second round of public engagement on the Smart Growth Action Plan began on October 22, 2025, seeking feedback on the draft Plan presented to City Council the previous day. Several hundred residents participated in this process through a variety of engagement opportunities, including:

- Follow-up meetings with four Focus Groups
- Eight targeted stakeholder meetings
- Public survey (55 completed surveys)
- November 3, 2025 Town Hall Meeting
- Public Information Tables at three additional public events

The City's Growth team heard from young professionals, local businesses and business associations, the City's Indigenous Advisory Council, newcomer support staff, social services, law enforcement, and other groups.

The feedback received through this process was reviewed by Task Force Growth, which endorsed the recommended updates to the Plan outlined in this report.

This second round of engagement built on the first phase conducted in spring-summer 2025 that informed initial development of the Plan. Feedback received from members of City Council at the October 21, 2025 Council meeting and October 28, 2025 Growth Standing Committee meeting were also considered.

Feedback Themes

Public feedback on the Plan was generally positive, though residents and stakeholder groups raised some questions and suggested additional emphasis on a number of issues. High level themes of feedback received include:

- **Population Level**

The Growth Standing Committee raised the importance of establishing an accurate estimate of Thunder Bay's population, responding to documented concerns that current Statistics Canada estimates may fall significantly short.

Having an accurate population estimate is important for decision making and can impact levels of funding from other orders of government.

The updated draft Plan includes a new Action ("Improved Accuracy of Population Counts") responding to this feedback.

- **Waterfront Vision**

Respondents expressed the importance of expanding public access to Thunder Bay's waterfront. This included calls to include plans for a waterfront trail in the Plan, to unlock underused sites along the waterfront for public use, and to recognize cultural sites as anchors of waterfront development.

The updated draft Plan includes a new Action ("Overall Waterfront Plan") responding to this feedback.

- **Climate Change**

A desire for clearer articulation of how the Plan responds to climate change was expressed by some residents. This feedback linked climate readiness, infrastructure resilience and asset management, and modern urban standards to the City's investment readiness and long-term financial sustainability.

The updated draft Plan includes some modifications to address this feedback (see table above).

This feedback will be considered in future public communications about the Plan, highlighting the numerous Actions that support climate change mitigation and adaptation, including but not limited to: transforming transit, expanding active transportation, local green-energy generation, green-economy training, encouraging greater density through infill and downtown housing, green development standards, brownfield remediation, a city-wide retrofit program, and the repurposing of underutilized urban lands.

- **Community Safety & Well-Being**

Respondents stated strongly the need to address crime rates, and issues related to substance use in order to achieve Thunder Bay's potential for growth.

In addition to the existing Community Safety and Well-Being Plan and the Thunder Bay Drug Strategy, the Plan includes an Action related to updating the City's Community Safety & Well-Being Plan and a section exploring that work in greater detail, while several Attraction Pillar Actions (A2-A6, A8-A10) target the issues that shape perceptions of crime and disorder.

- **A.I. & Technology**

Thunder Bay's potential ability to play a role in the burgeoning field of Artificial Intelligence was raised. Several Actions under the Talent Pillar position the city for high-value sectors, while the "Artificial Intelligence" Action (R37) signals an openness to innovation in municipal government, developing a framework to strategically adopt A.I. solutions across City operations.

- **Implementation & Accountability**

Respondents wanted to know how the Plan will be funded and implemented, and how they can keep track of that implementation and evaluate its success.

To address this feedback, Administration will create a public dashboard tracking progress on the Plan and its performance indicators. A broader communications plan encouraging ongoing public engagement with the Plan is also being developed for the implementation phase.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

Funding the Smart Growth Action Plan will require a balanced approach that combines municipal commitment with external resources. The precise share of municipal contributions is not yet known, as many actions will be delivered through partnerships or supported by external funding sources, rather than funded directly by the City.

Wherever possible, the City will leverage grants and programs from other orders of government, as well as investments from industry and community partners, to maximize impact and reduce the local burden. Collaboration will be key, sharing costs, aligning resources, and pooling expertise to advance projects that benefit the whole community.

Although every action in this Plan is achievable within the ten-year timeframe, success will depend on working together across sectors to sustain momentum and bring this shared vision to life.

BACKGROUND

The Smart Growth Action Plan was included in the 2025-2027 City Manager's Workplan presented to City Council on February 10, 2025.

An initial presentation on the development of the Smart Growth Action Plan was delivered in a Non-Business Meeting on June 16, 2025.

A draft of the Plan was presented to City Council for information on October 21, 2025, and to the Growth Standing Committee on October 28, 2025.

REFERENCE MATERIAL ATTACHED

Updated draft Smart Growth Action Plan

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Date (11/18/2025)