



City Council Report

REPORT NUMBER 383-2025-Growth-	
DATE PREPARED	November 26, 2025
	FILE
CITY COUNCIL MEETING DATE	December 2, 2025
SUBJECT	Smart Growth Action Plan

RECOMMENDATION TO CITY COUNCIL

WITH RESPECT to Report 383-2025-Growth, we recommend that City Council adopt the Smart Growth Action Plan as presented;

AND THAT Administration report to City Council two times per year on the implementation of the Plan;

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the final Smart Growth Action Plan (Plan) for City Council's consideration and adoption. The Plan is a 10-year roadmap to support sustainable growth in Thunder Bay's population and property tax base, and improving the mix of the tax base through growth in Industrial and Commercial properties. The Plan will guide investment and decision-making across the Corporation and community partners.

The Smart Growth Action Plan sets a clear vision of Thunder Bay as a flourishing city where people choose to live, work, and invest with confidence, supported by three core pillars: Readiness, Attraction, and Talent. The Plan identifies over 100 actions for growth, while maintaining a strong focus on financial sustainability, environmental stewardship, inclusiveness, innovation, and risk management.

The Plan has been informed by extensive community and stakeholder engagement, Task Force Growth, and the Thunder Bay Community Economic Development Commission's (CEDC) recent Economic Growth Assessment and Strategy. Feedback received during the two phases of public engagement has been incorporated into the final plan, including increased focus on the waterfront, climate change, community safety, and implementation and accountability.

Adoption of the Smart Growth Action Plan will provide a unified framework for growth, align municipal and partner efforts, and establish clear performance indicators and reporting commitments to track progress over time.

DISCUSSION

Purpose and Scope of the Plan

The Smart Growth Action Plan coordinates and focuses efforts to grow Thunder Bay's tax base and population in a deliberate, sustainable manner over the next decade. It responds to the City's modest growth trends in recent years and the widening gap between assessment growth and inflation, by setting clear growth targets and actions that support long-term fiscal sustainability, community well-being and competitiveness.

The Plan identifies two overarching growth targets to achieve over the 10-year period:

- Grow the property tax base by 3% annually
- Grow the population by 1% annually

These targets are mutually reinforcing. A growing population supports a stronger tax base, while growing a more balanced tax base supports better employment opportunities and growth in our economy, and reduces the tax burden on residents.

Vision, Mission, and Pillars

The plan is organized around a common vision and mission, shaped by Task Force Growth and community input, and structured under three strategic pillars:

Vision

Thunder Bay is a flourishing city where people choose to live, work, and invest with confidence. With a robust economy, dynamic public spaces, and a strong sense of belonging, it is a place where everyone is valued and can thrive.

Mission

Through collaboration and investment in smart growth, be a healthy and prosperous city.

Pillars

Readiness - Building a Growth Ready City. Focused on the foundational work required to support growth, including shovel-ready lands, resilient infrastructure, streamlined development processes, and growth-ready municipal services and policies.

Attraction - An Inviting Place to Live, Visit, Invest, and Do Business. Focused on making Thunder Bay more vibrant, welcoming, and competitive.

Talent - Developing and Retaining a Skilled and Diverse Workforce. Focused on building a strong, diverse, and future-ready workforce.

Key Considerations and Approach

To balance short-term opportunity and long-term value, the Plan is guided by five key considerations that apply to all actions:

- **Financial Sustainability:** Focuses on long-term value, cost efficiency and responsible investment, so Thunder Bay remains affordable and prosperous.
- **Inclusiveness:** Growth must be accessible to all residents and informed by a diverse set of voices. Equity is essential in planning new neighbourhoods, engaging with communities, and supporting local businesses.
- **Environmental Stewardship:** Prioritizes responsible land use and the protection of natural systems to support long-term climate resilience.
- **Innovation:** Embraces new ideas, digital tools, creative policies, and partnerships. Growth benefits from fresh thinking and cross-sector collaboration. This includes exploring emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), which can help improve service delivery, planning, and decision-making.
- **Risk Management:** Highlights the importance of proactive planning, flexibility, thoughtfully assessing risks, and adjusting course when needed. Growth brings uncertainty, but risk can be managed without losing momentum.

Actions in the Plan are structured as SMART actions - Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time bound. Actions are sequenced over Short-Term (years one to three), Medium-Term (years four to six) and Long-Term (years seven to ten) timeframes. A lead organization is identified for each action, recognizing that implementation will depend on collaboration among multiple partners. The City of Thunder Bay is listed as the default lead on actions where a more suitable lead has not yet been identified. This may evolve as implementation progresses.

Implementation, Measurement, and Reporting

Part Three of the Plan sets out an implementation and measurement framework, including:

- Three Key Performance Indicators (KPI's):
 - Annual population growth
 - Annual property tax base growth
 - Tax Base Balance (Residential vs Commercial/Industrial)

Performance indicators have also been selected to signal progress across areas such as development activity, housing, business investment, labour market, tourism, infrastructure, newcomer services, safety, and quality of life.

The Plan identifies roles for:

- The City of Thunder Bay, in providing policy direction, infrastructure, development approvals, and growth ready services
- The Thunder Bay Community Economic Development Commission, as the lead economic development agency responsible for investment attraction, business support, tourism, and talent attraction
- Task Force Growth, which will continue as a strategic advisory body and champion for implementation

The Plan outlines public reporting and a two-year review cycle to keep the document current and responsive. Consistent with the recommendation in this report, Administration will provide members of Council with two implementation updates per year using the KPIs and performance indicators described in the plan. Details on the progression of individual actions will be included at those times as well.

Finalization of the Plan

Following the presentation of the draft Plan to City Council on October 21, 2025, and to the Growth Standing Committee on October 28, 2025, a second round of public engagement was undertaken. Feedback from this process, as well as from Council and the Growth Standing Committee, informed a number of refinements, including:

- A new action to improve the accuracy of population counts
- A new waterfront plan action
- Stronger and more visible linkages to climate change, climate resilience, and green infrastructure
- Clarified connections to community safety and the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan
- Enhanced emphasis on implementation, performance measurement, and public reporting

The Growth Standing Committee considered an updated version of the Plan and associated report at its meeting on November 25, 2025, and recommended that City Council adopt the Smart Growth Action Plan. Subject to Council approval of the Plan, Administration will proceed with implementation by forming an implementation team, developing annual work plans, and maintaining ongoing engagement with the Growth Standing Committee through regular progress reporting. City Council will receive updates on progress two times per year. The attached plan reflects the changes endorsed through that process and is now presented to City Council for final consideration and approval.

CONSULTATION

Development of the Smart Growth Action Plan has been guided by Task Force Growth, a multi-sector group of approximately 25 community leaders and institutional partners,

including representation from major employers, post-secondary institutions, economic and business development, Indigenous Organizations, and municipal leadership.

Public and stakeholder engagement occurred in two major phases in 2025:

1. Phase 1 - Plan Development (Spring – Summer 2025)
 - Focus groups with businesses, social service providers, young professionals, Indigenous partners, Indigenous Advisory Council
 - Two town halls
 - Targeted stakeholder meetings
 - Online survey

Input from this phase informed the Plan's pillars, growth targets, and initial action list.

2. Phase 2 - Draft Plan Review (Fall 2025)

Following presentation of the draft Plan to City Council (October 21, 2025) and the Growth Standing Committee (October 28, 2025), a second round of engagement was undertaken from October 22, 2025, onward, including:

 - Follow-up meetings with previously convened focus groups
 - Targeted stakeholder meetings
 - Public survey
 - Town Hall
 - Presence at additional public events such as Thunder Bay Talks and pop-up engagements at Goods & Co. and the Thunder Bay Country Market.

Across both phases, several hundred residents and stakeholders participated. Overall feedback was supportive of the Plan's direction and ambition, with many highlighting the value of the coordinated and collaborative approach. Summarized feedback includes:

- A call for more accurate population counts
- A stronger, specific action to support a vision for the waterfront
- Better integration of climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resilient infrastructure
- Addressing community safety and crime
- Leveraging Thunder Bay's potential role in emerging sectors such as the green economy and Artificial Intelligence
- Clear implementation details, accountability, and accessible public reporting and continued community participation

Task Force Growth reviewed the engagement findings and endorsed the refinements incorporated into the final plan. Feedback received from members of City Council at the October 21, 2025 Council meeting and the October 28, 2025 Growth Standing Committee meeting informed both the engagement focus and revisions to the Plan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

Adoption of the Smart Growth Action Plan does not commit City Council to specific capital or operating expenditures or commitments. Rather the Plan provides a strategic framework to guide future budget decisions, project prioritization, and the alignment of corporate and partner resources over the next 10 years.

Funding of the Plan will require a balanced approach that combines municipal commitment with external resources. Many actions are expected to be delivered through partnerships or supported by external funding sources such as:

- Grants and programs from other orders of Government
- Investments from industry, institutions, and community partners
- Existing and future municipal tools (e.g., Community Improvement Plans, financial policies for growth, and development related revenues)

Where actions require new or significant financial commitments from the City, Administration will bring forward project specific reports and/or identify these through the annual budget process for Council's consideration.

Collaboration across sectors will be essential to share costs, align investments, and leverage funding opportunities, recognizing that every action in the Plan is achievable with the ten-year timeframe if momentum is maintained.

BACKGROUND

- February 10, 2025, City Council received the 2025-2027 City Managers Workplan, which identified the development of a Smart Growth Action Plan as a key corporate initiative.
- June 16, 2025, Administration provided an initial presentation on the development of the Smart Growth Action Plan at a Non-Business Meeting of City Council.
- Throughout spring and summer 2025, Phase 1 public and stakeholder engagement was conducted to inform the draft plan
- October 21, 2025, a draft Smart Growth Action Plan was presented to City Council for information.
- October 22, 2025 onward, Phase 2 engagement was undertaken to gather feedback on the draft Plan.
- October 28, 2025, the draft Plan was presented to the Growth Standing Committee, and feedback was provided to proceed with further engagement and refinement.
- November 25, 2025, the Growth Standing Committee considered and updated draft of the Plan and associated report summarizing feedback and changes and recommended that City Council adopt the Smart Growth Action Plan.

REFERENCE MATERIAL ATTACHED

The Smart Growth Action Plan: A 10-Year Roadmap for Sustainable Growth in Thunder Bay

REPORT PREPARED BY

Matt Pearson, Senior Advisor Growth – Growth Department
Ian Kaufman, Policy and Research Analyst – Growth Department

REPORT SIGNED AND VERIFIED BY

Kerri Marshall, Commissioner – Growth Department

Date (11/26/2025)