

# Standing Committee Report

**REPORT NUMBER** 065-2026-Growth-Strategy & Engagement

**DATE**

**PREPARED**

February 10, 2026

**FILE**

**STANDING**

**COMMITTEE**

March 10, 2026

**MEETING DATE**

**SUBJECT**

CityStudio Pilot – Project Summary

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to provide Standing Committee – Quality of Life with a final report and key learnings from the City Studio Thunder Bay (CS Thunder Bay) pilot project.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

CityStudio Thunder Bay (CS Thunder Bay) was launched in 2023 as a three-year community-campus engagement pilot delivered in partnership with the City of Thunder Bay, Lakehead University, Confederation College, and NOSM University. The pilot was supported through external funding and aligned with the City’s Community Safety and Well-Being priorities and advancing collaborative approaches to complex city and social challenges. The initial pilot funding concludes on March 31, 2026.

CS Thunder Bay connected municipal and community priorities with post-secondary teaching, learning, and applied projects through a structured model supported by shared governance and dedicated coordination. Activities included in-class projects, practicums, co-operative placements, independent studies, and applied research.

The pilot established foundational governance and coordination structures to support cross-institutional collaboration, including a multi-institutional Steering Committee, formal partnership agreements, and a dedicated CityStudio Coordinator embedded within the City to support project development, coordination, implementation, and alignment across partners.

## **KEY CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Project Background**

The City is working to build a healthier, more connected, and more equitable community through a coordinated, corporate-wide approach. The Strategy & Engagement Division supports this work, with leadership through Indigenous Relations, Community Safety and Well-Being, the Net-Zero Strategy, the Thunder Bay Drug Strategy, and Encampment Response. This work reflects a focus on longer-term, interconnected priorities that require inclusive and collaborative ways of working.

This collaborative approach is also consistent with the Smart Growth Action Plan's emphasis on readiness, talent development, and cross sector partnerships as foundational elements for sustainable growth.

To support this approach, the City partnered in a Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) funded initiative to pilot CS Thunder Bay, a project-based community-campus engagement model designed to connect municipal priorities with post-secondary teaching, learning, and research. CS Thunder Bay brought together students, faculty, City staff, and community partners to explore community priorities through a civic engagement and learning approach.

The pilot established a multi-institutional Steering Committee to support shared oversight, strategic direction, and decision-making. A dedicated CityStudio Coordinator role was embedded within the Corporation to support coordination, alignment, and continuity across partners. The CityStudio Coordinator was also a part of the CIHR Research Team.

CS Thunder Bay focused intentionally on establishing the foundational conditions required for effective cross-institutional collaboration. Rather than operating as a single program, the pilot emphasized governance, coordination, and shared processes to support sustained engagement across the City, post-secondary institutions, and community partners.

Clear and repeatable pathways were developed within each participating post-secondary institution to support outreach, project intake, and engagement. These pathways enabled consistent mechanisms for project matching, support, and delivery, helping to align academic timelines with municipal and community priorities.

CS Thunder Bay supported visibility and shared learning by showcasing applied projects through academic, community, and municipal forums, including Research and Innovation Week, Academic Showcase, the Northern Health Research Conference, and HUBBUB. A consistent communications presence was maintained through digital platforms and local media to support awareness and transparency.

### **Scale and reach**

Over the pilot period, CS Thunder Bay supported a significant volume of applied, community-focused work across the City and its partners. Activities included a range of

project types, from in-class group work to independent studies, practicums, and applied research placements. Collectively, the pilot engaged post-secondary institutions, City departments, City staff, and community organizations at a scale that demonstrates both interest in and capacity for this model.

Over the pilot period, CityStudio Thunder Bay facilitated a range of applied learning and engagement activities across institutions, City departments, and community organizations. The following metrics provide a factual overview of the scale and reach of the pilot:

- Projects delivered: 172
- Students participating: 1,191
- Faculty engaged (unique): 27
- City departments engaged: 20
- City staff engagement touchpoints (including repeat participation): 87
- Community organization partners engaged (unique): 24

Projects included a range of formats, such as in-class group work, independent studies, practicums, co-operative placements, and applied research activities.

A more detailed summary of participation and activity metrics is provided as Attachment B to this report.

The CS Thunder Bay pilot identified several opportunities to strengthen civic engagement, collaboration, and community-campus partnerships in support of the City's long-term priorities, including:

- Strengthening cross-sector relationships and shared understanding by creating space for students, faculty, City staff, and community partners to work together on shared priorities
- Expanding meaningful civic engagement through applied learning that connects academic work with municipal and community priorities in practical and accessible ways
- Supporting workforce development and local talent retention – a key objective under the Smart Growth Action Plan's Talent Pillar - by providing students with exposure to municipal and community-based work and the development of transferable, career-ready skills
- Advancing Community Safety and Well-Being objectives by strengthening collaborative networks, civic participation, and applied learning related to complex social issues

### **Operational and system-level opportunities**

The pilot identified several operational and system-level opportunities to support future refinement and sustainability. These include improving coordination across institutions through better alignment of academic calendars, timelines, systems, and expectations,

supported by shared planning tools and clearer participation pathways. The pilot also reinforced the value of dedicated coordination, with the embedded CityStudio Coordinator role supporting continuity, relationship management, and knowledge sharing across partners.

At the same time, institutional partnerships have continued to deepen. Formal Memorandums of Understanding have been established with Lakehead University, with a similar agreement approved by Council – but not yet signed - with Confederation College.

CS Thunder Bay also provides practical insight into how community-campus engagement can support implementation of the Smart Growth Action Plan. As an initiative situated within the Growth Department, the pilot offers relevant observations on how applied learning, coordination, and collaboration can contribute to integrated, growth-related objectives.

### Smart Growth Alignment

<b>Smart Growth priority</b>	<b>CS Thunder Bay contribution</b>	<b>Observations from the pilot</b>
<b>Institutional readiness</b>	Governance structures, memoranda of understanding, and a dedicated coordination role	Effective cross-sector collaboration benefits from formal structures and clear coordination
<b>Talent attraction and retention</b>	Applied learning opportunities, co-operative placements, and practicums	Early exposure to local municipal and community work supports student interest in remaining in the region
<b>Innovation and learning</b>	Research-informed and applied projects	Collaboration highlights the importance of shared systems and information-sharing capacity
<b>Community resilience</b>	Projects aligned with Community Safety and Well-Being priorities	Collaborative, cross-sector approaches support more integrated responses
<b>Inclusive growth</b>	Engagement of students, newcomers, and community partners	Inclusive engagement approaches support belonging and civic participation

Strengthening information and knowledge infrastructure considerations include:

- Exploring the potential for a coordinated City data and knowledge hub to support cross-departmental planning, collaboration, and learning
- Clarifying and, where appropriate, developing information-sharing agreements, including data-sharing agreements, research collaboration agreements, and privacy/confidentiality and intellectual property protocols with post-secondary institutions and community partners

- Strengthening internal data governance, access, and stewardship practices to support consistent and responsible use of information across departments
- Supporting clearer processes for accessing, sharing, and using information to inform planning, engagement, and applied learning initiatives

### **Community Benefit**

The CS Thunder Bay pilot demonstrates how community-campus engagement can function as a strategic learning investment for the City. Over the three-year pilot period, the City explored a new way of working that strengthened relationships, clarified governance and coordination requirements, and established conditions that support cross-institutional collaboration.

Beyond individual projects, the pilot resulted in foundational capacity now in place across the City and its partners, including established partnerships, agreements, processes, and institutional relationships. These elements provide a basis for considering how community-campus engagement could be more intentionally embedded within future planning and growth-related work.

As the City advances its Smart Growth priorities, CS Thunder Bay reflects a shift from project-based engagement toward longer-term capacity-building. This experience offers context for how learning, collaboration, and applied partnerships can support a more resilient and connected community.

### **Next Steps**

CityStudio Thunder Bay is gaining strong traction as a collaborative hub connecting the City, post-secondary partners, and community organizations. With nearly 1,200 students involved in over 170 projects, the program is building meaningful relationships and demonstrating clear value to participating institutions.

Next steps include priorities such as planning for long-term sustainability beyond the CIHR grant, strengthening integration with post-secondary partners, expanding the network of community collaborators, and supporting ongoing research to measure impact.

CityStudio Thunder Bay is evolving into a broader civic-innovation platform, and the City's leadership as a convener and connector remains essential to sustaining and growing this model beyond the pilot phase.

### **CONSULTATION**

Consultation for the CS Thunder Bay pilot occurred through the design and delivery of the community-campus engagement model itself. Engagement was integrated

throughout the pilot period through ongoing collaboration with internal City staff, post-secondary institutions, and community partners.

Internal consultation took place through coordination with City departments that participated in or supported CS Thunder Bay projects. This work was facilitated by the CityStudio Coordinator, who served as the primary point of connection between City staff, post-secondary institutions, and community partners. City staff were engaged in project scoping, implementation, and applied learning activities aligned with departmental and corporate priorities, including Community Safety and Well-Being.

External consultation occurred through partnerships with Lakehead University, Confederation College, and NOSM University, supported by regular coordination and shared governance through a multi-institutional Steering Committee. The CityStudio Coordinator supported these partnerships by facilitating communication, coordination, and alignment among post-secondary institutions, community organizations, and the City. Community organizations also participated in applied projects, contributing local knowledge and perspectives to support student learning and community-focused work.

Engagement with partners and participants was iterative and relationship-based, allowing for shared learning, refinement of processes, and alignment over time. Feedback and insights gathered through these interactions informed the ongoing development of the pilot and are reflected in the considerations outlined in this report.

### ***FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS***

There are no immediate financial implications associated with this report, and no new funding approvals are being requested at this time. The CS Thunder Bay pilot was delivered through external funding and existing resources.

### ***BACKGROUND***

CityStudio Thunder Bay was enabled through a Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) - funded research initiative examining the impacts of community-campus engagement (CCE) on population health, with Thunder Bay and Ottawa serving as case study sites. The research supported the City in implementing the CityStudio pilot, while the pilot generated applied, real-world insights that informed both City practice and the broader research agenda.

The Coordinator supported project development, coordination, implementation, and alignment between the Corporation, post-secondary institutions, and community partners, and served as a member of the CIHR research team.

In March 2024, Report 83-2024 (City Manager's Office – Strategic Initiatives & Engagement) was presented, providing a brief overview of CityStudio and highlights from the first year of implementation, for information only.

***REFERENCE MATERIAL ATTACHED***

Attachment A: Community Campus Engagement toward community safety and well-being: reflections on a three-year pilot project (research findings).

Attachment B: CityStudio Pilot Thunder Bay Highlights 2023 - 2026

***REPORT PREPARED BY***

Karen Kerk, CityStudio Coordinator, Strategy & Engagement, Growth

***REPORT SIGNED AND VERIFIED BY***

Kerri Marshall, Commissioner - Growth

Date (03/10/2026)