

Owen Sound

A small city of 21,753 (from StatCan 2006 census information) in southwestern Ontario, Owen Sound is located at the mouth of the Sydenham River. Named for the inlet of Georgian Bay named Owen Sound, on which it sits, the settlement celebrated its 150th year since incorporation in 2007. Owen Sound has won recognition for its beauty, natural landscape, and strong sense of community.

Once notorious for rowdiness and debauchery, the town lost its status as a major port city after the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway, which allowed shipping directly to the lower lakes and outcompeted trans-shipment via Owen Sound. Its location at the gateway to the Bruce Peninsula and cottage country, and in the heart of Ontario's beef, apple and corn region, means that farming and tourism remain the major engines of the local economy.

In 2004, Owen Sound was named a Cultural Capital of Canada. It hosts several notable cultural events annually, including the Festival of the Sound, the Festival of Northern Lights, and the Summerfolk Music and Crafts Festival. Owen Sound is also home to a good number of museums, cultural attractions and historic sites.

The median age of residents is 40.9 years (males, 38.9; females, 42.7). The median income is \$20,126 per person aged 15 years or older.

On the October 18, 2006 episode of *The Colbert Report*, host Stephen Colbert asked his viewers to send in suggestions for bad things to say about Owen Sound, being unable to think of any himself.

Owen Sound Cultural Master Plan

Although it focuses to an extent on future land use and economic vitality, the Plan also promotes creative and sustainable partnerships between business and the arts, and encourages learning through the arts and heritage.

Owen Sound's vision is "to be a community of choice for all, distinguishable by its authenticity, diversity and unique environment." This vision, established in the City's Strategic Plan in 2005, is to be accomplished through the City's mission statement – to provide infrastructure and services to allow individuals and businesses to prosper in a friendly environment.

The City expects, through seven strategic initiatives, to:

- Emphasize preserving and celebrating the City's unique history.
Examples of proposed actions: Developing, as part of the City's interpretive programs, a systematic and comprehensive "storytelling" experience on cultural-heritage topics such as its Black and First Nations heritage, connections to Tom Thompson and the Women's Rights Movement, and its marine and rail heritage.

- Take a leadership role in cultural development in region.
Examples: Encouraging public-private partnerships to sustain cultural funding and nurture volunteer and business support; forming a cultural advisory committee for the region, including local stakeholders.
- Assume an active role in development, enhancement and promotion of events.
Examples: Continuing to support and subsidize nonprofit public events (e.g., Canada Day/Harbour Nights, Celtic Festival, Festival of Northern Lights) in all seasons; encouraging and enhancing local music initiatives such as the choir, orchestra, Summerfolk, Kiwanis Music Festival, and City Band.
- Support the Tom Thomson Memorial Art Gallery as a national cultural attraction.
Examples: Maintaining the Gallery's endowment fund; promoting Owen Sound as a centre for landscape painting; investigating an artist-in-residence program.
- Promote culture as important element of quality of life.
Examples: Utilizing the Downtown and Main Street as a focus for the City's cultural life (sidewalk cafés, downtown concerts, buskers), and likewise improving waterfront amenities; providing cultural opportunities for youth.
- Support the Owen Sound and North Grey Union Public Library as an educational centre and regional attraction. *Examples:* Supporting literary arts and programming, and continuing support for literacy and life-long learning opportunities; maximizing use of information technology.
- Encouraging diversity and broadening multicultural programs and services.
Examples: Developing, promoting and facilitating more multicultural events in the downtown core and harbourfront, perhaps along the lines of the Native Arts and Celtic festivals).

Culture-related initiatives also exist within other sections of the City's Strategic Plan, such as those discussing tourism, planning and economic development.

The Official Plan binds the City in that no action can be taken by the municipality that is contrary to the Plan. The City's Cultural Master Plan and Cultural Policy must be consistent with the Official Plan.