Staff Report

Report To: City Council

Report From: Pamela Coulter, Director of Community Services

Meeting Date: November 30, 2026

Report Code: CS-26-097

Subject: Owen Sound 170 Celebration: Many Stories. One City.

Recommendations:

THAT in consideration of Staff Report CS-26-097 respecting the Owen Sound 170 Celebration, City Council:

1. Endorses the campaign theme: "*Many Stories. One City.*"; and
2. Requests the project budget of $50,000 funded from the Events Reserve be considered as part of the Mayor's 2027 budget.

Highlights:

- A year to celebrate: 2027 will mark Owen Sound's 170th anniversary through a year-long, community-wide celebration.
- One shared identity: "Owen Sound 170: Many Stories. One City." will connect City and community activities under one campaign.
- Build on what we do well: Existing events will be enhanced alongside new cultural, heritage, and storytelling initiatives.
- A targeted investment: $50,000 from the Events Reserve is proposed, leveraging existing budgets, community partnerships, and sponsorships.

Vision 2050 - Strategic Plan Alignment:

Strategic Plan Priority: Celebrating and Embracing Culture - Uplifting all aspects of the City's local culture, including Indigenous Peoples' cultural histories and practices, the cultural histories and practices of all residents, and formal institutional arts and culture.

Previous Report/Authority:

None.

Background:

The City of Owen Sound will celebrate its 170th anniversary in 2027. The anniversary presents an opportunity to strengthen community pride, recognize local history and accomplishments, increase participation in community events, support cultural tourism, and create meaningful legacies.

Within the City, there are several milestones including:

City Celebration	Milestone
City of Owen Sound	170 years
Tom Thomson	150 years
Tom Thomson Art Gallery	60 years
Harrison Park	115 years
Harbour Nights	25 years
Hockey Fest	5 years
Owen Sound Fire Department	120 years
Owen Sound Police Service	170 years

A number of organizations and community partners are also expected to observe notable anniversaries or milestones in 2027. These include, among others:

Potential Partner Celebration	Milestone
OSCVI	170 years
Emancipation Festival	165 years
Owen Sound Grey's Memorial Cup Championship/Owen Sound Attack Centennial Celebration	100 years
YMCA	150 years

Georgian College Campus	60 years
Georgian Bay Symphony	55 years
Owen Sound Minor Soccer	50 years
Owen Sound Aquatic Club	60 years
Owen Sound Agricultural Society	175 years
Festival of Northern Lights	40 years
Grey Roots/Grey County	175 years
Billy Bishop-related Heritage Milestones	40 years and 110 years in wartime, subject to confirmation of specific commemoration descriptions

*Note: this is not a complete list and there will be more partners identified through the public call for partners.

The City will issue an open call inviting community organizations celebrating milestone anniversaries in 2027 to participate. The City will also contact organizations it is already aware of directly.

The proposed approach recognizes that community organizations will retain responsibility for their individual anniversaries and events, with Owen Sound 170 offering a shared framework for promotion, coordination, municipal support, storytelling, and partnership development.

Analysis and Options:

Proposed Concept – Campaign Identity

The proposed campaign identity is: *Owen Sound 170: Many Stories. One City.*

The campaign branding guidelines are included in the attachment to the report.

The campaign will be designed to be adaptable for use by City departments, community organizations, event organizers, schools, cultural institutions, sponsors, and tourism partners. Participating organizations will be encouraged to use the Owen Sound 170 visual identity alongside their own organizational brands. There will be a dedicated page on the Tourism website

and a social media campaign to support the celebration of these many milestones.

Project Objectives

- Create a unified celebration identity that partners can adopt alongside their own brands.
- Recognize major anniversaries and milestones in a balanced, inclusive, and respectful way.
- Coordinate a public calendar of events to maximize participation, visibility, and operational coordination.
- Support community-led programming through a clear partnership model, promotional tools, and defined municipal supports.
- Deliver one or more signature civic celebrations, including enhanced Canada Day programming.
- Encourage community participation and civic pride across neighbourhoods, generations, and communities.
- Strengthen cultural tourism and local economic activity by promoting Owen Sound as a destination for events and experiences throughout 2027.

Celebration Model

The celebration would consist of two interconnected streams:

1. City-Led Events and Projects

Existing City events enhanced with anniversary programming, including Canada Day, Harbour Nights, and other civic activities.

The year will begin with a New Year's Eve Mayor's Levee with the Mayor and Council attending the New Year's Eve Family Celebration at the Julie McArthur Regional Recreation Centre.

Enhanced plans for Canada Day may include the 170 stories as an exhibit, a customized drone show, 170 voices community performance, a time capsule, and a community photo at Kelso Beach at Nawash Park.

As part of Owen Sound's 170th anniversary celebrations in 2027, staff are exploring the installation of an illuminated "OWEN SOUND" marquee sign as a legacy project that would celebrate the City's identity and foster community pride. The sign would serve as a recognizable landmark and an interactive photo opportunity for residents and visitors, enhancing the City's tourism appeal and encouraging organic promotion through social media. The installation could feature customizable lighting to recognize special

events, holidays, and community initiatives throughout the year. Strategically positioned in a prominent location, the marquee sign would provide a lasting and visually engaging attraction that extends the impact of the anniversary celebrations well beyond 2027.

Activities that engage residents in sharing community histories, recognizing local contributions, and looking toward the future.

As part of the "Many Stories. One City." campaign, the City will invite residents, past and present, to share 170 stories that reflect the people, experiences, places, and events that have shaped Owen Sound. The initiative will celebrate the City's diverse histories and community contributions while providing an opportunity to reflect on the City's evolution and aspirations for the future. Stories may be shared through written submissions, photographs, video, and other creative formats, with selected stories featured through the City's website, social media, and anniversary celebrations.

While recognizing the people, places, and events that have shaped Owen Sound, the 170th anniversary will also provide an opportunity to look ahead. Through community engagement and storytelling, the celebration will encourage residents to reflect on the City's future, what makes it a place they are proud to call home, and the legacy they hope to leave for future generations.

<u>Tom Thomson Art Gallery</u>

Plans for celebrating 150 years of Tom Thomson alongside the Gallery's 60th anniversary include:

- Exhibitions that explore the history of the Gallery's Tom Thomson collection through acquisitions.
- A signature fundraising calendar featuring Tom Thomson works from the Gallery's collection which is already distributed and selling at over 40 regional retail locations.
- A special celebratory event based on the success of recent Palette to Palate evenings.
- A key collaboration with Algonquin Outfitters at Canoe Lake for the creation and installation of a Tom Thomson-inspired mural at that location (where Thomson famously passed away), which also promotes the Art Gallery in Owen Sound, as well as new custom merchandise created in partnership with Algonquin Outfitters and sold at the Gallery as well as at the Canoe Lake store; and a series of talks that focus on Tom Thomson's legacy.

- The Gallery will be celebrating the return of Tom Thomson's painter's palette, which has been gone for several years as it undergoes conservation treatment and study at the Canadian Conservation Institute.
- The OPEN Team will work collaboratively to develop an exhibition comprised of historic images of Owen Sound by J. James alongside artefacts from the collections of the Billy Bishop Museum, the Community Waterfront Heritage Centre, and the Owen Sound and North Grey Union Public Library at City Hall to be installed in May and to continue through the rest of the year.

The Tom Thomson Art Gallery staff will plan, fund, coordinate, and deliver these events.

170 Trees

Staff is beginning to investigate the opportunity to plan and develop an initiative to have donations or a program to plant 170 trees. Further information will be forthcoming on this component of the celebration.

2. Community-Led Celebrations

Events organized independently by community organizations and participating partners, supported through the Owen Sound 170 partnership framework.

The City has developed a project logo and theme. This will give all events, (both City and partner-led events) a common visual identity, co-branding, and joint marketing across the City's communication platform including website, social media, etc.

Staff will invite organizations to participate in the campaign through a clear partnership-benefits framework. Potential partnership benefits may include:

- Inclusion in the official Owen Sound 170 calendar and communications;
- Access to campaign branding and promotional materials;
- Coordinated media, social media, web, and tourism promotion;
- Support from the City Special Event Activation Team (SEAT); and
- Opportunities for joint promotions, and cross-event programming.

Consolidated 2027 Virtual Calendar

A centralized public calendar will identify City-led, City-supported, and community partner celebrations. The calendar will help residents and visitors

plan participation, support coordination among organizers, and reduce avoidable scheduling conflicts.

Resource Alignment:

Financial Resources

A total project budget of $50,000 is proposed for Owen Sound 170.

The proposed budget is intended to support the coordination and added-value elements required for a cohesive City-wide campaign including the potential purchase and installation of an Owen Sound marquee. Existing funds allocated to eligible 2027 City events would continue to support those approved events and may be leveraged where anniversary branding, programming enhancements, shared promotion, or operational coordination are appropriate.

Final allocations of funding will be refined as event planning and partner engagement is completed.

Staff will be developing a complete sponsorship package for the City-led events for 2027.

Council is requested to approve an allocation from the Events Reserve to the Owen Sound 170 Celebration. This is requested in advance of the overall budget deliberation to allow event planning to be initiated with some certainty.

Human Resources

The staff effort to support, plan, and deliver this yearlong celebration that is extended to community partners is significant and will be supported by the existing staffing plan.

The Project Charter for this project outlines the staff support and roles for each. The Director of Community Services is the Project Sponsor with the Director and Chief Curator of the Art Gallery, Culture, and Tourism as the Project Lead. The project team includes:

- Tim Simmonds, City Manager
- Jennifer Wright, Events and Activations Coordinator
- Melissa Crannie, Tourism and Marketing Coordinator
- Viveca Gravel, River District Coordinator
- Andy O’Leary, Facilities Booking Coordinator
- Kate Mosher, Communications Advisor

- Hailey Thomson, Communications Advisor
- Matt Given, Owen Sound Fire
- Jason Crannie, Owen Sound Police Service

Time and Scheduling

This initiative will require significant effort from staff that are part of the project team as well as support from Parks and Facilities staff.

Technology and Infrastructure

The project will utilize the City's existing online infrastructure including a dedicated webpage on both the City and Tourism sites.

Climate and Environmental Impacts:

There are no anticipated climate or environmental impacts.

Communication and Engagement:

The project will include a major communication effort from the call for community partners to the development of a webpage, consolidated calendar, marketing and promotion.

This project will provide an opportunity to work with community partner organizations throughout the City, and engage in new ways with community members through a shared celebration and pride for our City.

Staff has emailed the SON EO to request a meeting regarding how they may want to participate and be included in the year-long celebration.

Report Developed in Consultation With:

Aidan Ware, Director and Chief Curator – Art Gallery, Culture, Tourism
Jennifer Wright, Events and Activations Coordinator

Attachments:

Owen Sound 170 Branding Guidelines

Submission approved by:
Tim Simmonds, City Manager

For more information on this report, please contact Pamela Coulter, Director of Community Services at pcoulter@owensound.ca or 519-376-4440 ext. 1252.