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Jonathan Altenberg
President & CEO

November 17, 2025

The Honourable Hilda MacDonald, Warden
County of Essex

Dear Warden MacDonald:

This year, the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative launched its [Action Plan](#) to transform our region's economy and build the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor – from Lake Superior to the Gulf of the St. Lawrence, spanning our two provinces and eight States. This economic vision pairs ambitious goals to make the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region the fastest growing economy in North America, while protecting the lakes and rivers that are the foundation of our region's success.

Although the last twelve months have presented serious challenges to our region, our organization demonstrated a resolve to lead by presenting solutions, strengthening relationships, and delivering results. Through our Great Lakes–St. Lawrence Strong efforts, we united mayors, First Nation and Tribal leaders, and partners around a shared vision for cross-border collaboration and environmental stewardship.

In Ontario, we launched the first annual Great Lakes Coastal Cleanup, supported by the Government of Ontario, engaging over 400 volunteers across 11 sites along Lakes Superior, Huron, Erie, and Ontario to remove 1,600 kg of litter from 100 hectares of shoreline. Further, thanks to funding from the new Canada Water Agency, we will also be launching the 4R Waters pilot project in Niagara Region in 2026 that will apply cutting edge satellite-based remote sensing data and leverage citizen engagement and on-the-ground research to improve the health of Lake Ontario. And with the launch of our Economic Transformation Action Plan, we are making a big bet on our region's untapped potential. We invite you to join us in building the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor as we pursue this important work in 2026.

As a coalition of local government leaders, we offer a unique model of cross-border collaboration, thought leadership married with action, and the opportunity for local government leaders from a diverse array of communities to learn from each other. With more than 400 communities now represented by the Cities Initiative, our growth is a testament to the power and the ability to effect change as a lean organization that has not increased membership contributions throughout a time of rapid inflation.

We invite you to review our accomplishments in our **2025 annual report**. You will also find your invoice for your 2026 annual membership contribution to the Cities Initiative.

Finally, we encourage you to **join us in Hamilton, Ontario from May 6-8, 2026, for our next Annual Conference**. We will be gathering around the theme ***The Fresh Coast Economic Corridor: Advancing Our Journey to Prosperity***. Registration for the Annual Conference is now open – [visit the Cities Initiative's website](#), find out more and register.

If you have any questions, please contact our Chief Operating Officer | Canadian Managing Director , Phil Murphy-Rhéaume at phillipe.murphy-rheaume@glslcities.org. We look forward to continuing our work with you and your community in 2026.

Sincerely,

Ryan Sorenson
Co-Chair
Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative
Mayor, Sheboygan, WI

Mat Siscoe
Co-Chair
Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative
Mayor, St. Catharines, ON

Annual Report 2025

Building the Fresh Coast
Economic Corridor™



Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative

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GREAT LAKES AND ST. LAWRENCE
CITIES INITIATIVE
L'ALLIANCE DES VILLES
DES GRANDS LACS ET DU SAINT-LAURENT



The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative stands at a defining moment in its history. The progress we made in 2025 reflects not only the strength of our network, but also the growing recognition across both the U.S. and Canada that local leadership is essential to solving the challenges of our time.

As President and CEO, I've had the privilege of witnessing firsthand the incredible dedication of our municipal, First Nation, and Tribal government executives, Allies, and partners.

Together, we launched our Economic Transformation Action Plan, advanced the Brandon Road Interbasin Project, and expanded our reach through new partnerships with the Canada Water Agency and Government of Ontario. We were honored to receive the 2025 U.S. Water Prize, recognizing our multinational leadership in advancing equitable access to clean and affordable water for all. These milestones are not just accomplishments; they are the foundation for what comes next.

Our coalition has grown fourfold in the last five years and I'm proud to announce that we have now reached a new milestone of over 400 communities represented by our membership this fall. We've seen large counties and regional municipalities join our group, as well as once again expanding our reach to the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Freshwater communities across our region have a new sense of purpose and our coming together to shine light on our issues, including ones that cut across our borders.

Looking ahead to 2026, our focus is clear: implementation of our Economic Transformation Action Plan and expansion of our coalition.

We will look to scale up successful programs like the Great Lakes Coastal Cleanup, which supported community engagement to raise awareness of plastic pollution in our waters to more than eleven sites across six communities in Ontario. We will launch the 4R Waters Project in partnership with the Canada Water Agency, using satellite remote sensing data to monitor and improve water quality. Our new First Nation and Tribal Engagement Committee will strengthen relationships and co-develop initiatives rooted in respect and shared responsibility.

We also aim to expand technical assistance and funding access for member cities to address critical issues such as lead service line replacement, coastal protection, and economic transformation. Most importantly, we will continue driving our efforts to strengthen the economic growth of our region—from Lake Superior to the Gulf of the St. Lawrence—as we enter the new year. Every initiative we pursue in the coming year will be grounded in a single mission to protect, restore, and sustain the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor™, our new brand for the entire Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region.

The challenges ahead, rising temperatures, increasing water shortages, aging infrastructure, and economic uncertainty are complex. The Cities Initiative is stronger than ever because of you, our Members. On behalf of our team, thank you for your trust, your leadership, and your partnership. Together, we are securing the future of the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor™ and shaping a legacy that will endure generations.

Jon Altenberg, CEO/President
Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative

The Executive Summary

A Year of Transformation

2025 marked a defining chapter for the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative—a year of bold action, cross-border collaboration, and tangible results that strengthened our shared commitment to advance economic prosperity and protect and restore the world's largest freshwater ecosystem.

Driving Economic Transformation

Through the launch of the Economic Transformation Action Plan, we are betting that our region will be the fastest growing area in North America over the next ten years. Our [Action Plan](#) establishes a decade-long roadmap for sustainable growth, attracting new industries, creating jobs, and advancing the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor™ as a model for water-based prosperity.

Strengthening Coastal Communities

From the Resilient Coastal Projects Initiative to the Great Lakes Coastal Cleanup, member cities and partners worked together to restore shorelines, reduce flooding and erosion risks, and reduce plastic waste ending up in our lakes and rivers.

Expanding Our Coalition

Our membership grew to cover over 400 communities, representing millions of residents across the region. Together, our unified voice continues to shape the policies, partnerships, and investments that sustain our freshwater future. We also built partnerships with regional organizations, such as the Eastern Ontario Wardens Caucus.

Building Alliances for Lasting Impact

This year, we launched the Allies Program and Industry Leaders Circle to strengthen collaboration among municipalities, nonprofits, academia, and companies in our region. Our inaugural Allies, Georgian Bay Forever, The Nuclear Innovation Institute, The Armateurs du Saint-Laurent / St. Lawrence Ship Operators, and Ontario Big City Mayors, embody the shared vision driving innovation, environmental protection, and growth across our region.

Building Global Influence

Our leadership extended far beyond the region, including Climate Week in NYC and Great Lakes Day in Washington, D.C., along with representation at the U.N. COP in Brazil. We have also forged new partnerships with the Canada Water Agency, Government of Ontario, and Biinaagami.





Letter from Our Co-Chairs

Dear Members,

This past year has been nothing short of transformational for the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Region. Together, we've strengthened our collective voice, expanded our coalition to over 400 communities, and made remarkable progress toward building a future defined by collaboration, resilience, and shared prosperity.

Across our region, from the shores of Lake Superior to the Gulf of the St. Lawrence, local leaders have taken bold steps to protect our freshwater resources, strengthen our infrastructure, and create new opportunities for the people we serve. This year, we celebrated the launch of the Economic Transformation Action Plan, a landmark roadmap that positions our region to be the fastest growing in North America, while ensuring our freshwater wealth is preserved. The plan outlines practical strategies to attract investment, create good jobs, and protect the natural systems that sustain us. All while reinforcing the identity of our region as the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor™.

We also witnessed the power of unity in action. More than 35 communities received engineering and design support through our coastal resilience programs, helping protect thousands of residents from flooding and erosion. In Ontario, we proudly launched the first-ever Great Lakes Coastal Cleanup, engaging hundreds of volunteers who together removed over 1,600 kilograms of litter from our waterways. These tangible actions demonstrate that when we work together, we can make measurable progress for our environment and our people.

Beyond the projects and numbers, what truly defines our organization is a shared purpose. Whether we are U.S. or Canadian mayors, leaders of small towns or large cities, county and regional officials, or representatives of tribal and First Nations communities across the Great Lakes—St. Lawrence River Region, we are united by a single goal: advancing economic prosperity while protecting our lakes and rivers for generations to come.

As Co-Chairs, we are inspired by your leadership, your passion, and your unwavering commitment to protecting what makes this region special. We are grateful for the collaboration, friendship, and creativity that each of you brings to our coalition.

Thank you for another extraordinary year of impact. We look forward to the work ahead, with optimism, determination, and a deep belief in what we can achieve together.



Mayor Ryan Sorenson, Co-Chair
Sheboygan, WI



Mayor Mat Siscoe, Co-Chair
St. Catharines, ON

Key Deliverables Achieved

Released the **Economic Transformation Action Plan: A Blueprint for Economic Growth and Freshwater Stewardship** in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region, which includes 17 strategies, 76 actions, and 12 program concepts to advance region-wide economic transformation and build the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor™ over the next decade.

Helped maintain **bipartisan Congressional support for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI)**, including advocacy for the reauthorization of the program through the GLRI Act of 2025 and \$375M in funding through the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 appropriations process.

Advocated for the U.S. Congress to **maintain robust funding for both the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds** as part of the FY26 appropriations process, as well as reauthorize the SRFs to ensure continued support for water-infrastructure projects across our region.

Met with the White House to stress the critical importance of **advancing the Brandon Road Interbasin Project to combat the spread of invasive carp into the Great Lakes**. This effort, in conjunction with years of Cities Initiative advocacy and a major push from Governor Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan, resulted in a Presidential Memoranda directing U.S. agencies to expedite implementation of the project in May 2025.

Secured **new partnerships with the Government of Ontario and the Canada Water Agency** to deliver freshwater protection programs to members across Ontario's Great Lakes.

Sent a letter signed by eight Members in Ontario and Québec to the federal Ministers of Transport and Public Safety **expressing support for a renewed Canadian trade and transport strategy** that harnesses the full economic and logistical potential of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway. This letter calls for the Canada Border Services Agency to be fully resourced and empowered to facilitate trade through enhanced customs clearance capacity along the Seaway—with promising commitments made in this year's federal Budget.



Coastal and Climate Resilience

US PROGRAMMING

36

Supported a total of **36 communities** with engineering and design for projects that will protect coastal communities from flooding and erosion

75

Continued to provide project planning and grant support through the Resilient Coastal Projects Initiative, which has reached a total of **75 communities**

\$515M

Helped secure nearly **\$20M** in total funding for an estimated total project value of **\$515M** in partnership with cities and project stakeholders to advance coastal resilience projects to final design and construction

150

Hosted listening sessions and workshops with approximately **150 members and partners** on implementing economic transformation programs that would expand jobs and commerce across the region

Great Lakes Coastal Cleanup

ONTARIO PROGRAMMING

over
400

Hosted the first annual basin-wide Great Lakes Coastal Cleanup, which brought over **400 volunteers** together to clean up our lakes and rivers. Funding for this project was provided by the Government of Ontario

1,600 kg

Great Lakes Coastal Clean project:

- Removed **1,600 kg of litter**, including **20,000 pieces** of plastic like cigarette butts, soda bottles and grocery bags
- Cleaned **100 hectares** (250 acres) of shoreline
- Collaborated across **11 sites** across Lake Superior, Lake Ontario, Lake Erie and Lake Huron in Ontario

20,000

Convened the inaugural Local Government Resilience Champions Working Group which will serve as a vehicle for cross-community collaboration around implementing local best practices for coastal resilience, in partnership with Conservation Ontario

International Cooperation and Influence

Organized a delegation of 29 members—led by **Mayor Valérie Plante** of Montréal and **Mayor Bruno Marchand** of Québec City—to attend Great Lakes Day in Washington, D.C. and advocate for our organization's policy priorities in two dozen meetings with the U.S. Congress, the White House, and other key stakeholders. Our delegation also participated in a press conference expressing our strong opposition to broad U.S. tariffs on Canadian imports and a roundtable on the U.S.-Canada trade relationship with industry leaders.

Joined **Mayor Bruno Marchand** and **Deputy Mayor Catherine Vallières-Roland** of Québec City at the 2025 Leadership Summit of the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers to initiate discussions with state and provincial officials on supporting implementation of our Economic Transformation Action Plan, with **Mayor Ryan Sorenson** of Sheboygan, WI and **Warden Andrea Matrosovs** of Grey County, ON participating in our delegation.

Convened the **Mayors Transition Team** to provide strategic guidance to the organization as we navigated federal government transitions in both Canada and the United States, with one of the main outputs being a letter to President Trump highlighting our federal priorities and seeking to maintain bipartisan support for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, the Brandon Road Interbasin Project, and other essential federal programs.

Signed a Memorandum of Understanding with:

- The **Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Legislative Caucus (GLCC)** to support the development of our Economic Transformation Action Plan, building on similar agreement with the Council of the Great Lakes Region and paving the way for GLCC to support the Action Plan's implementation as an Implementing Partner.

- Biinaagami—a project supported by Canadian Geographic and Swim Drink Fish—to host Honouring Our Water events and build knowledge of Indigenous history in our region. The Cities Initiative hosted the Biinaagami Shared Circle and map at our 2025 Annual Conference in Milwaukee, WI, and the 2025 Ontario Water Leaders Summit.
- The Eastern Ontario Wardens Caucus around shared priorities for economic transformation and ongoing trade negotiations. A similar MOU is being pursued with the Western Ontario Wardens Caucus.

Led a delegation of members to attend the Local Leaders Forum in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in advance of the 30th United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP). Delegates included **Mayor Shawyn Patterson-Howard** of Mount Vernon, NY, **County Executive Chris Ronayne** of Cuyahoga County, OH, **Chairman Joey Awonohopay** of the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin and **Sarah O'Keeffe**, **Director of Sustainability and Climate Justice**, of Cleveland, OH and **Angela Tovar** Chief Sustainability Officer and Department of Environment Commissioner, City of Chicago, IL.



2025 Highlights

FINANCIAL AND FUNDING OVERVIEW



Economic Transformation Action Plan

Released our Economic Transformation Action Plan to build the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor™ in September 2025 during Climate Week NYC, which was developed by our Mayors Commission on Economic Transformation over the past year with support from various regional stakeholders. The Action Plan seeks to bring half a million water-responsible companies to our region while creating more than 18 million jobs and protecting our freshwater resources. The launch event was attended by 16 of our members and included visionary remarks from **Mayor Brandon Johnson** of Chicago, **Mayor Valérie Plante** of Montréal, **Mayor Justin Bibb** of Cleveland, and **Deputy Mayor Paul Ainslie** of Toronto.



2025 U.S. Water Prize

Received the 2025 U.S. Water Prize from the U.S. Water Alliance for our groundbreaking leadership to expand equitable access to clean, safe and affordable water for all residents of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region. The U.S. leaders of our Mayors Commission on Water Access—**Mayor Cavalier Johnson** of Milwaukee and **Mayor Shawyn Patterson-Howard** of Mount Vernon—joined us at the 2025 One Water Summit in Pittsburgh to accept this prestigious award and Mayor Patterson-Howard delivered a keynote address at the Summit's closing ceremony.





2025 Annual Conference

Held our largest and most successful Annual Conference to date, with nearly 300 local elected leaders, First Nation and Tribal community leaders, and business, government, and non-profit representatives joining us in Milwaukee to learn about *The Future of Fresh Water* and build on strong regional collaboration to address water consumption, protection, and resilience. In Milwaukee, we also convened our Mayors Commissions on Economic Transformation, Water Access, and Community Resilience and advanced 11 member resolutions plus a declaration entitled “Preserving the U.S.-Canada Relationship to Protect Our Prosperous Regional Economy and Our Precious Freshwater Resources.”

Governor Tony Evers of Wisconsin delivered a keynote address during our event.

First Nation and Tribal Engagement Committee

Established at the 2025 Annual Conference in Milwaukee, the First Nation and Tribal Engagement Committee was formed to better understand joint priorities and identify opportunities for collaboration between First Nations and Tribes and municipalities in protecting our shared waters and otherwise advancing the organization’s strategic pillars. The Committee will focus on the areas of reconciliation, collaboration, and recruitment of First Nation and Tribal communities, presenting a report with recommendations to the Board of Directors at our 2026 Annual Conference in Hamilton.



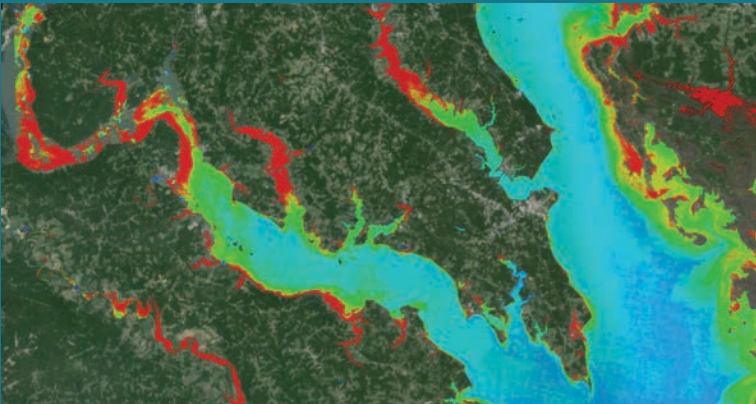
Looking Ahead

Launch the new **4R Waters Project** which will use satellite remote sensing data to develop water quality improvement actions in the Niagara Region. Funding for this project is provided by the Canada Water Agency

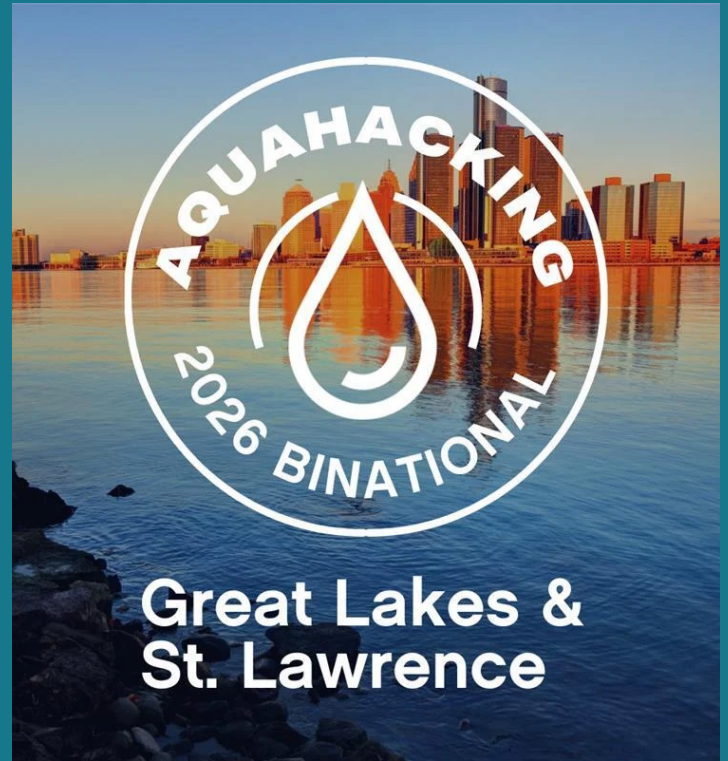
Expand the **Great Lakes Coastal Cleanup** across the region to a dozen or more new communities in 2026

Implement **pilot programs to support members** with economic transformation, clean water, and flood protection.

Advance up to **10 additional projects** through design and/or construction through our U.S. coastal programs



Deepen our partnership with AquaAction by co-delivering the **2026 AquaHacking Binational Challenge**, a cross-border initiative designed to accelerate innovative solutions to the region's most pressing water challenges.





**GREAT LAKES AND
ST. LAWRENCE**
CITIES INITIATIVE



FRESH COAST
ECONOMIC CORRIDOR
ADVANCING OUR JOURNEY
TO PROSPERITY

2026 Annual Conference

More than 300 attendees, including municipal and Indigenous leaders, government officials, and industry leaders from across the region, will come together in Hamilton, Ontario to share solutions and innovative ways in which they are working to transform our region's economy and build opportunities for sustainable prosperity for their communities.

In September 2025, the Cities Initiative launched its Economic Transformation Action Plan: A Blueprint for Economic Growth and Freshwater Stewardship in the Great Lakes & St. Lawrence River Region. The Action Plan presents a vision for developing the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor that unites efforts for economic development from Lake Superior to the Gulf of the St. Lawrence.

REGISTER TODAY!

Book early to save 25% on the regular rate and maximize your 2025 budget.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR NOW FOR
MAY 6-8, 2026 – HAMILTON, ON

Member Rate

First Access (25% off)
750 CA\$ / \$550 USD

Until February 15

Non-Member Rate (Nonprofit and Government)

First Access (25% off)
900 CA\$ / \$650 USD

Until February 15

Non-Member Rate (Corporate)

First Access (25% off)
1,750 CA\$ / \$1,250 USD

Until February 15

