



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



FRESH COAST
ECONOMIC CORRIDOR
ADVANCING OUR JOURNEY
TO PROSPERITY

GREAT LAKES AND ST. LAWRENCE CITIES INITIATIVE 2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Hamilton, ON | May 6–8, 2026
Hamilton Convention Centre | 1 Summers Lane

Preliminary Program

Subject to change

All sessions and activities will take place at the Hamilton Convention Centre, unless otherwise noted ()*

TUESDAY, MAY 5

4:00 PM – 8:00 PM	Registration desk open
8:00 PM – 10:00 PM	Welcome Reception <i>Presented by Ramboll</i> <i>In collaboration with:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• OPTERRA Energy Services• OEC

WEDNESDAY, MAY 6

8:00 AM – 5:00 PM	Registration desk open
8:00 AM – 9:00 AM	Breakfast service <i>Presented by the Chamber of Marine Commerce</i>
9:00 AM – 12:15 PM	Nexus H2O – Innovating for Water <i>Presented by AquaAction</i> <i>In collaboration with Veolia Canada</i> Advancing new approaches to water management is essential to keeping rates affordable for residents and businesses alike, while ensuring our water systems can support long-term economic transformation across the region. Nexus H2O will focus on cutting-edge



water innovation, featuring the second edition of Pitch2O, a friendly competition for municipal innovators and water-tech start-ups. We will also highlight Cities Initiative programs in Ontario and feature insights from municipal and private-sector leaders driving smarter, more efficient, and more effective water systems.

Speakers:

- **Mark Fisher**, President, Canada Water Agency

9:00 AM – 12:15 PM	Members' Annual General Meeting (<i>reserved for Cities Initiative members</i>) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mayors Commission Meetings• Annual Member Meeting
1:30 PM – 2:20 PM	Welcome Ceremony <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mayor Andrea Howarth, City of Hamilton• Kanahsohon Kevin Deer, Elder, Kahnawà:ke Mohawk Territory
2:20 PM – 3:20 PM	Cities Initiative Annual Declaration Plenary Session <i>Presented by HOPA Ports</i> <i>Unlocking the Inland Advantage: The Critical Role of Big Cities in Attracting New Businesses, Driving Job Creation, and Increasing Maritime Commerce</i> <i>The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative's Economic Transformation Action Plan calls for attracting 500,000 new, water-centered industries, creating more than 18 million jobs, and increasing maritime commerce on the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway by 30% over the next decade to create the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor and reinforce our CA\$12.72 (US\$9.3 trillion) regional economy. This plenary session will bring together big-city mayors to sign a declaration and highlight the critical role of our region's large metropolitan areas in spurring economic growth and strengthening regional competitiveness while safeguarding our precious freshwater resources.</i>



Speakers:

- **Mayor Andrea Horwarth**, City of Hamilton, ON
- **Mayor Cavalier Johnson**, City of Milwaukee, WI
- **Mayor Josh Morgan**, City of London, ON
- **Deputy Mayor Paul Ainslie**, City of Toronto, ON

**3:20 PM –
4:15 PM**

Plenary Session

Presented by the Nuclear Waste Management Organization

Building the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor: Strategies for Locally Driven Industry Attraction and Economic Growth

As water scarcity increases the costs of doing business globally, industries will be increasingly drawn to the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region. With 21% of the world's surface fresh water, access to global markets through the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway, and an innovation-ready workforce, the region is poised for a new era of growth. Yet it would be a mistake to repeat the same playbook that generated economic growth at the expense of lakes and rivers. This plenary will explore how to attract the right industries to our region and how elected leaders can partner with the private sector to ensure new business investment delivers good jobs, protects water quality and supply, and advances long-term freshwater stewardship for communities for generations to come.

Moderated by: Catherine Vallières-Roland, Deputy Mayor, Québec City, QC and Metropolitan Community of Québec

Speakers:

- **Christy George**, President and CEO, Illinois Economic Development Corporation
- **Mayor William Steele**, City of Port Colborne, ON

**4:15 PM –
4:45 PM**

Networking Break

Presented by LimnoTech

**4:45 PM –
6:00 PM**

Breakout Sessions

- I. ***The Water-Waste-Energy Nexus: Optimizing Infrastructure Investment for Economic Growth***



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Presented by Veolia Canada

Communities across the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region are grappling with aging infrastructure, growing demand on utilities, and funding gaps to renew these critical systems. While a growing infrastructure deficit could hold our region back, it also presents an unparalleled opportunity to transform our economy. Innovation can turn into a catalyst for growth and a key advantage for communities. This session examines how embracing integrated water-waste-energy solutions can transform infrastructure deficits into a platform for prosperity, resilience, and regional competitiveness.

Introduction by: Wes Muir, Director, Business Development & Government Relations, Veolia Canada

Speakers:

- **Anthony Parente**, General Manager, Water & Wastewater, Region of Peel

II. *Vacant to Vibrant: Transforming Brownfields into Thriving, Working Waterfronts*

Presented by SmithGroup

Given its industrial heritage, brownfields are found across the Great Lakes region. To reduce the hazards and burdens associated with brownfields, remediating and redeveloping them is an urgent priority for the region's leaders. Importantly, redevelopment also creates a unique opportunity for cities to innovate in prime locations, often along the Great Lakes shoreline, catalyzing local economic development, revitalizing waterfront areas, and increasing property values – exponentially creating rippling benefits in tourism, recreation, community-building, biodiversity and more. This session will engage participants in a dynamic discussion that showcases how innovation, partnerships, community engagement, and leveraging of available resources can transform vacant and blighted areas to vibrant and thriving community assets.



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Introduction by: Tom Rogers, Senior Principal, Urban Design & Waterfront Studio Leader, SmithGroup

Moderated by: Tom Rogers, Senior Principal, Urban Design & Waterfront Studio Leader, SmithGroup

Speakers:

- **John MacKenzie**, Chief Executive Officer, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority
- **Allison Marusic**, Principal, Landscape Architect, SmithGroup
- **Laura Solano**, Partner, Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates

7:00 PM –
9:00 PM

Mayors Opening Reception*

* *Hamilton Art Gallery – 123 King St W*

In collaboration with:

- **Algoma Central Corporation**
- **Reyes Coca-Cola Bottling**

THURSDAY, MAY 7

7:00 AM –
9:00 AM

Breakfast Service

Presented by Conservation Ontario

7:30 AM –
5:00 PM

Registration Desk Open

7:30 AM –
8:45 AM

Networking Breakfasts

I. **Climate Resilient Coastal Communities**

Presented by Stantec

Introduction by: David Goldwater, Senior Vice President, Public Policy, Stantec

Speakers:

- **Bonnie Fox**, Director of Policy and Planning, Conservation Ontario



	<p>II. <i>Efficient and Effective Water Utilities</i> <i>Presented by M.E. Simpson, Co.</i></p> <p>III. <i>Port Cities and Marine Champions</i> <i>Presented by Algoma Central Corporation</i></p> <p>IV. <i>First Nations and Tribal Engagement Committee</i> <i>In partnership with the Biinaagami Initiative</i></p>
<p>9:00 AM – 10:15 AM</p>	<p>Day 2 Opening <i>Presented by Geosyntec Consultants</i></p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Hon. Todd McCarthy, Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, Government of Ontario
<p>10:15 AM – 11:00 AM</p>	<p>Plenary Session</p> <p><i>Sustaining Turtle Island: First Nation and Tribal Approaches to Economic Transformation</i></p> <p>First Nations and Tribes have long traded freely across Turtle Island and engaged in a variety of economic activity to promote wealth, preserve traditional ways of life, and protect the environment. However, First Nations and Tribes have been persistently excluded from economic decision-making. As water-intensive industries relocate to the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region, it is imperative that First Nations and Tribes have a seat at the table with municipalities, recognizing their status as sovereign nations, deep commitment to environmental stewardship, and the impacts of economic development on their people, lands, and waters. In this plenary session, First Nation and Tribal leaders and mayors will share perspectives on our region's future economic development and opportunities for enhanced regional collaboration to uphold First Nation and Tribal treaty rights, promote broadly shared economic prosperity, and sustain Turtle Island for all residents.</p>



Moderated by: Kahsennenhawe Sky-Deer, Vice President, Dable Advisory & Consulting Services and former Grand Chief, Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke

Speakers:

- **Grand Council Chief Linda Debassige**, Anishinabek Nation
- **Hon. Shannon Malsey**, President, Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians
- **Mayor Ken Johnson**, City of Muskegon, MI
- **Warden Andrea Matrosovs**, Grey County, ON

**11:00 AM –
11:30 AM**

Networking Break

**11:30 AM –
12:45 PM**

Breakout Sessions

III. *Municipal Innovation Exchange: Addressing Local Needs for Water Technology Innovation*
Presented by AquaAction

Rapidly evolving water challenges in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Region – flooding, invasive species, contamination, aging infrastructure – will require innovative approaches. Global investments in water technology indicate a major growth in this sector over the next decade. However, new technologies must be responsive, accessible, and affordable to the communities that will use them. On the flipside, municipalities will be better equipped to innovate if they are familiar with emerging approaches. This session will pair technology companies with municipalities in a cross-sector dialogue to learn, share, and innovate together.

Introduction by:

- **Soula Chronopoulos**, President, AquaAction

Moderated by:

- **Oliver Anderson**, Vice President, Communications and Growth, AquaAction



IV. *From Port to Place: Enhancing the Fresh Coast Tourism Experience*

While the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region welcomes over half of North America's tourists each year, it captures less than 20% of the continent's tourism-related economic activity. With thousands of lakes and rivers, more than 40 tributaries, and hundreds of shoreline communities, Fresh Coast tourism has untapped potential. This session explores how building seamless visitor journeys that leverage transport networks and emerging trends can transform the tourism experience, positioning our region as a globally competitive destination and fueling local opportunities.

Moderated by: Andrew Siegart, President and CEO, Tourism Industry Association of Ontario

Speakers:

- **Sally Berry**, Tourism Director, Cruise the Great Lakes, Great Lakes St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers
- **Kevin Eshkawkogan**, President and CEO, Indigenous Tourism Ontario
- **Ryan McHugh**, Manager, Tourism and Events, City of Hamilton
- **Luke Polcyn**, Fellow, Council on Foreign Relations, Ontario Chamber of Commerce
- **Mayor Justin Towndale**, City of Cornwall, ON

**12:45 PM –
1:45 PM**

Lunch Service

**1:15 PM –
1:45 PM**

Luncheon Keynote Plenary

Presented by:

- **St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation**
- **Great Lakes St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation**

Expanding Maritime Commerce in Our Region: Opportunities and Challenges for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway



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The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway is the unheralded engine of our region's economic prosperity. The Seaway and regional waterways move over 250 million tons of domestic and international cargo and generate CA\$66.1 billion (US\$50.8 billion) in economic activity each year while supporting more than 350,000 jobs in Canada and the United States. Yet the Seaway is falling short of its economic potential, operating at just 50% of its historic capacity. Both Ottawa and Washington share an interest in leveraging this key asset to support export-driven manufacturing, supply-chain resilience, and trade diversification. This plenary session will explore how targeted investments in port modernization, container terminals, customs clearance capacity, and multimodal infrastructure can help build the *Fresh Coast Economic Corridor* and realize a more robust vision our regional economy through a thriving Seaway.

Moderated by: Mayor Roger Reinert, City of Duluth, MN

Speakers:

- **Jim Athanasiou**, President and CEO, St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation
- **Hon. Greg Zerzan**, General Counsel, U.S. Department of Transportation

**1:45 PM –
2:00 PM**

Luncheon Address

Presented by Toronto Port Authority

Speaker: PJ Steenstra, President and CEO, Toronto Port Authority

**2:00 PM –
2:55 PM**

Plenary Session

Presented by EllisDon

***Leveraging Brownfields for a Brighter Economic Future:
Environmental Remediation, Business Attraction, and Community
Revitalization***

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region has the highest concentration of brownfield sites in North America – many of which exist along post-industrial waterfronts that have since been deemed "Areas of Concern" by U.S. and Canadian federal governments. Persistent contamination often leaves these valuable sites unusable for



business and harms nearby water sources. But through targeted remediation and reinvestment, brownfields offer powerful opportunities for economic transformation and community revitalization. Across our region, communities are transforming brownfields into "brightfields" of renewable energy, attracting exciting new industries, and restoring public access to multi-use waterfronts. This session will examine how local elected leaders can creatively leverage contaminated properties to drive investment, return waterfront land to productive use, and prevent further environmental degradation.

Moderated by: Chris De Sousa, Ph.D., Professor, Toronto Metropolitan University, School of Urban and Regional Planning

Speakers:

- **Deputy Mayor Paul Ainslie**, City of Toronto, ON
- **Chris Phillips**, Director of Government Relations and Strategy, City of Hamilton, ON

**2:55 PM –
3:25 PM**

Networking Break

**3:25 PM –
4:40 PM**

Breakout Sessions

V. *Partnerships for a Prosperous Fresh Coast: Aligning Strategies for Economic Development, Investment Attraction, and Industrial Transformation*

The Cities Initiative's Economic Transformation Action Plan envisions attracting 500,000 new enterprises and creating over 18 million jobs across the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region over the next decade. This vision is grounded in economic development that avoids the environmental mistakes of the past and improves freshwater health. This interactive session brings together economic development professionals with the business leaders of the Cities Initiative's Industry Leaders Circle to explore strategies for investment attraction, freshwater stewardship, and building the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor.



VI. *Digital Dividends: Turning the Data Centre Boom into Local Value*

By 2030, companies are expected to invest nearly \$7 trillion in data centre infrastructure globally. As data centres rapidly expand across our region, communities must be prepared to assess both the economic opportunities and associated risks. From proper governance tools and siting considerations to partnership models that support local goals, a strategic approach is critical to achieve community benefits. This session explores how municipalities can proactively evaluate land-use implications, energy and water demands, and infrastructure capacity to turn data centre investments into long-term success.

Speakers:

- **Laura Jay**, Deputy Director, Climate Mayors
- **Mayor Marcus Muhammad**, City of Benton Harbor, MI
- **Andrea Densham**, Alliance for Great Lakes

**4:40 PM –
5:30 PM**

Closing Ceremony
In collaboration with AquaAction

Speakers:

- **Soula Chronopoulos**, President, AquaAction

**6:15 PM –
7:30 PM**

Exhibitors Reception
Presented by AquaAction
In collaboration with:

- **Andrew Peller Limited**
- **Lakewater Nutrient Capture**
- **International Joint Commission**
- **CORE Molding Technologies**

**7:30 PM –
9:30 PM**

Cities Initiative 2026 Awards Dinner
Presented by Ducks Unlimited Canada
In collaboration with McKeil Marine Limited



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FRIDAY, MAY 8

9:00 AM –
1:00 PM

Educational Tours

Presented by:

- *The City of Hamilton*
- *HOPA Ports*

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