



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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

425 Cities Initiative Members Adopt Declaration to Attract Water-Centered Industries and Expand Maritime Commerce

HAMILTON, ON – May 6, 2026 – Today, at the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative’s 2026 Annual Conference in Hamilton, ON, 425 Cities Initiative members from across the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region adopted a new declaration committing themselves to working collaboratively to build the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor over the next decade.

The declaration, titled *“Building the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor by Attracting New, Water-Centered Industries and Expanding Maritime Commerce on the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway,”* commits Cities Initiative members to attracting 500,000 new water-centered industries and expanding maritime commerce on the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway by 30 percent over the next decade while protecting the region’s precious freshwater resources.

Representing the third largest economy in the world, the region generates approximately C\$12.72 trillion / US\$9.3 trillion in annual economic output and accounts for 30 percent of the combined economic activity of Canada and the United States, according to a 2025 report by BMO. Home to about 84 percent of North America’s surface fresh water, a skilled workforce, and the Seaway, the region is uniquely positioned to attract investment and support long-term economic growth, particularly as global water scarcity increases.

This effort builds on the Cities Initiative’s [*Economic Transformation Action Plan*](#), a 10-year roadmap to build the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor and position the regional economy to be among the fastest growing in North America.

"I am thrilled to welcome my colleagues from across our region to Hamilton this week," said Mayor Andrea Horwath of Hamilton, ON. "I look forward to working closely with them over the next decade to build the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor, which will bring thousands of new businesses and millions of new jobs to our communities."

"I am pleased to join mayors from across the region in supporting this shared vision," said Mayor Olivia Chow of Toronto, ON. "By attracting new water-centered industries and improving how we use and protect our water, we can grow our economy and build a stronger future for our communities."

"Maritime commerce is a key driver of Milwaukee's economic growth, with a focus on shipping, agricultural exports, and tourism," said Mayor Cavalier Johnson of Milwaukee, WI, the Cities Initiative’s U.S.-Chair. "This declaration is an excellent example of port cities collaborating to bolster maritime commerce on the Seaway, modernize our ports, and transform our regional economy into a world-renowned Fresh Coast Economic Corridor."

"This declaration is about expanding economic opportunity for residents of Great Lakes cities like Cleveland. We are strengthening our city's role in a more connected, competitive regional economy," said Mayor Justin M. Bibb of Cleveland, OH. "By growing industry and advancing sustainable shipping on the Great Lakes Seaway, we are creating jobs, supporting businesses, and positioning Cleveland to compete and thrive across North America and beyond."

“The St. Lawrence River is central to our history, our economy, and our future,” said Mayor Bruno Marchand of Québec City, QC. “Through purposeful regional collaboration and smart investments industry attraction and Seaway expansion, we can strengthen our economic ties while safeguarding the freshwater resources that sustain our communities.”

While adopted by the Cities Initiative’s full membership, the declaration was signed by several mayors representing the region’s big cities, including Buffalo, NY; Cleveland, OH; Hamilton, ON; Laval, QC; London, ON; Milwaukee, WI; Montréal, QC; Québec City, QC; and Rochester, NY.

Cities Initiative members in Hamilton also approved several resolutions on topics such as Seaway expansion, water infrastructure, and freshwater protection, reinforcing their shared commitment to building a strong, sustainable future for the region’s communities.

The Cities Initiative’s Annual Conference, taking place May 6–8 in Hamilton under the theme “Fresh Coast Economic Corridor: Advancing Our Journey to Prosperity,” brings together more than 300 municipal, First Nations and Tribal, federal, state, and provincial leaders, along with industry and environmental stakeholders, to advance the vision of a dynamic and thriving Fresh Coast Economic Corridor from Lake Superior to the Gulf of the St. Lawrence.

For more information about the conference, please visit: <https://glsicities.org/events/annual-meeting/annual-conference-hamilton-on-2026/>.

About the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative is a multinational coalition of municipal and Indigenous government executives representing communities in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region who are working to promote economic prosperity and protect our fresh water for the benefit of current and future generations. With more than 425 communities represented, the Cities Initiative is leading the way in advancing the environmental, economic, and social health of the region by addressing issues impacting its residents. The Cities Initiative is comprised of a U.S. organization and a Canadian organization.

For more information, please contact:

Christine Maydossian | Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative | cmaydossian@mercure.ca