

MAYOR MATTHEW SHOEMAKER



SIX MONTH REPORT

RELEASED: SPRING 2025

SIX MONTH REPORT

Real progress is finally being made in securing the support needed to better address the mental health and addictions crisis in Sault Ste. Marie – progress made possible through the efforts of local service providers, persistent advocacy from the community and City Council, and a growing willingness from higher levels of government to focus on our most pressing needs.



Over the past six months, there have been several announcements attesting to the fact that government funding is finally catching up to local advocacy. In August, the Provincial government announced that it would be dedicating major funding to increase access to addictions and mental health treatment and supportive housing services through HART Hubs. Communities throughout the province [submitted applications](#), and Sault Ste. Marie was one of the [successful recipients](#) of a HART Hub.

Last year at the AMO Conference, [I met with Health Minister Jones](#) to advocate for better mental health and addictions support, and presented her with a package of letters from community members demonstrating the need for assistance. When the HART Hub process was officially launched, I put out a [call for letters of support](#), and Saultites overwhelmingly responded with thousands of submissions. I am convinced that this community advocacy helped ensure the Province recognized not only how badly we needed help, but that we were ready to put their plans into action through the local partners we had mobilized.

Further demonstrating the impact of persistent local advocacy, [permanent funding](#) was secured to continue the Concurrent Disorders Intensive Day Treatment Program at the Sault Area Hospital. This was an announcement the City's leadership had been working toward for a number of years – either myself or my predecessor has written to the provincial government about the need for action on the mental health and addictions crisis on 13 separate occasions. This program fills a critical gap by offering specialized care for individuals with both mental health and substance use disorders – a population that often falls through the cracks of traditional systems.

When the hospital was [forced to suspend](#) the pilot program due to a lack of funding, City Council passed a resolution in July 2022 calling for urgent provincial action. We made it clear that cutting services in the middle of an escalating crisis was unacceptable. Thanks in part to those efforts, this vital program will now continue.

In addition to securing funding for the Day Treatment Program, we also helped ensure continued support for the [24/7 Community Wellness Bus](#) operated by the Canadian Mental Health Association by lobbying the federal government and submitting an application to the Federal Emergency Treatment Fund. This mobile service ensures people in crisis have access to support day and night, meeting individuals where they are and reducing strain on emergency departments.

[SOYA's recent opening](#) of a new facility on Gore Street is another positive step, extending the reach of an organization deeply embedded in our community's response to the mental health and addictions crisis. There are countless examples of SOYA's impact, but one of the most powerful relates to the meeting with Minister Jones referenced above. At my request, Connie Raynor-Elliott reached out to community members SOYA has worked with to see if they would be willing to share their experiences. Just a few days later, she provided my office with hundreds of letters illustrating the real-life impact of the mental health and addictions crisis in Sault Ste. Marie. I presented those letters to the Minister and urged her to consider them when making funding decisions.

The positive examples I've highlighted above are the result of sustained local advocacy and municipally driven collaboration – and I am confident these successes reflect a larger shift toward a more resourced system of care. The work is far from done and I know we still face significant challenges, but we are finally receiving the kind of support necessary to make the meaningful changes we've long needed.



Mayor Matthew Shoemaker

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A PLAN FOR PROGRESS - IN MOTION

Rooted in community input, my 2022 platform A Plan for Progress laid out a vision for Sault Ste. Marie. I'm committed to providing updates every six months to show where we stand.

PLATFORM COMMITMENT

More Meetings and Collaboration with Peer Governments (to fight against tariffs)

ACTION

With U.S. tariffs threatening local jobs and industries, I'm actively working with cross-border partners through the Border Mayors Alliance to fight back and promote cross-border economic cooperation. We have hosted a Border Mayors Alliance meeting in SSM with Windsor Mayor Drew Dilkins and I've also met with U.S. Congressman Jack Bergman and Sault Michigan Mayor Don Gerrie to advocate for fair trade and continued economic cooperation between both Canada and the U.S. The focus remains on encouraging American leaders to make the case to its government that tariffs pose a severe risk to a historically positive and productive relationship between our two countries.



PLATFORM COMMITMENT

Conduct Due Diligence on a Potential Downtown Police Station

ACTION

As part of ongoing efforts to improve safety in the downtown core, Sault Police opened Division 2 at 180 Brock Street in late April. It will be staffed by a sergeant and four constables. Their responsibilities will include downtown bicycle and foot patrols, targeted enforcement, community engagement, crime prevention and responding to other issues affecting the area. Partner agencies such as the Collision Reporting Centre, CrimeStoppers and Victim Services of Algoma will be integrated into the Division 2 location to enhance service delivery and support safety and well-being in the downtown core.



A PLAN FOR PROGRESS - IN MOTION

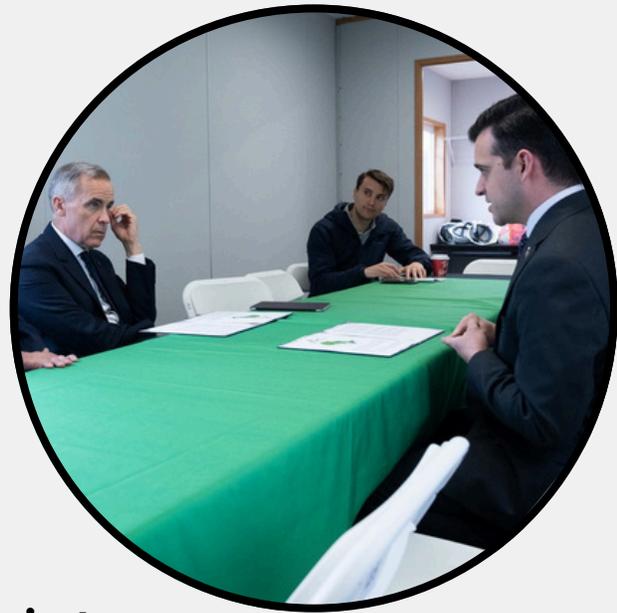
○ PLATFORM COMMITMENT

Lobbying the Provincial and Federal Governments for More Support

✓ ACTION

Ongoing advocacy from the City has resulted in major investments that demonstrate the impact of speaking up for Sault Ste. Marie's needs and working closely with other levels of government to deliver real results for our community. This includes \$5.2 million from the Province to extend Sackville Road and Federal funding for the Port project.

The Port project was one of the top priorities I identified to Prime Minister Carney during a meeting with him in April. The City continues to be a key player in facilitating immigration that helps address labour force shortages. The federal government recently launched the Rural Community Immigration Pilot – a program the City actively advocated for – to ensure communities like ours can continue addressing labour shortages and population growth through immigration. Through RCIP's predecessor program, the City was able to attract nurses, personal support workers, and specialized skilled workers like aircraft mechanics and welders. These are positions that have gone unfilled despite the best efforts to hire locally.



○ PLATFORM COMMITMENT

Bringing Indigenous Knowledge/Teachings to City Hall

✓ ACTION

The City has hired an E-wiidookaaged (meaning “one who helps”) to guide the development and implementation of municipal policies and programs that align with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, and she will also work to strengthen relationships between the City and local First Nations, Indigenous organizations, and community members.



A PLAN FOR PROGRESS - IN MOTION

○ PLATFORM COMMITMENT

Securing New Housing and Economic Development

✓ ACTION

Sault Ste. Marie is experiencing a significant upswing in housing development. In 2024, the City issued 980 residential building permits, approving 303 new residential units with a combined construction value of \$112 million. Important projects include a \$35 million, 108-unit apartment building on Northern Avenue at the former Holy Trinity Church, a \$15 million conversion of The Tech complex into 59 residential units, and a \$10 million, 47-unit apartment building on Pine Street. This momentum is assisted by an \$8.6 million federal investment through the Housing Accelerator Fund and the launch of the Sault Foundations program, which helps non-profit groups explore building much-needed mixed-use affordable housing on land they already own. These combined efforts are set to expand the city's housing supply, support employment and drive growth.



○ PLATFORM COMMITMENT

Supporting Downtown Revitalization

✓ ACTION

City Council has decided take to the lead on downtown development by taking on the functions of the Downtown Association. I believe we can grow downtown events and marketing, streamline operations, improve accountability and ensure a more strategic approach to downtown revitalization. We've already seen the benefits of this approach in Sault Ste. Marie through the successful integration of economic development and tourism services into the city's operations. That transition streamlined processes while maintaining strong industry oversight through a dedicated advisory board.



A PLAN FOR PROGRESS - IN MOTION

○ PLATFORM COMMITMENT

Lobbying the Provincial and Federal Governments for more support

✓ ACTION

After years of aggressive advocacy, we've received significant support over the past few months for the mental health and addictions crisis. The City helped secure new funding to support key frontline initiatives, including the 24/7 Community Wellness Bus operated by the Canadian Mental Health Association, the Concurrent Disorders Day Treatment program at the Sault Area Hospital and for the development of a HART (Homelessness, Addictions Recovery & Treatment) Hub. SOYA also opened a new location on Gore Street which will help them continue to provide crucial support. These successes reflect ongoing collaboration between local partners and higher levels of government, with a shared focus on improving outcomes for vulnerable residents and building a more connected, supportive system of care.



○ PLATFORM COMMITMENT

Taking Action against Negligent Landlords

✓ ACTION

To help address property neglect and improve neighbourhood safety, the City has introduced a Vacant Residential Unit Tax. Property owners with vacant homes will now face a 4% tax on the assessed value of those units if left unoccupied without a valid exemption. The goal is to discourage prolonged vacancies, crack down on absentee landlords and encourage the return of unused housing stock to the market – particularly at a time when housing demand is high and affordability remains a key concern. Revenues generated through the tax will support municipal housing initiatives and help fund strategies aimed at creating more livable, vibrant neighbourhoods.



A PLAN FOR PROGRESS - IN MOTION

○ PLATFORM COMMITMENT

Improving Traffic Flow

✓ ACTION

The City is taking steps to improve traffic flow and reduce unnecessary delays. Council approved a review of late-night traffic signals to identify where lights could switch to flashing mode overnight, easing wait times during low-traffic hours. Demolition work is completed at the corner of Second Line/Goulais Ave to prepare for a dedicated right-turn lane at this busy intersection. Council also approved the removal of signals at the Albert St/Dennis St intersection, and the Queen St/Church St intersection. These efforts are part of a broader push to make getting around Sault Ste. Marie more efficient and responsive to real-time traffic needs.



○ PLATFORM COMMITMENT

A Realistic Approach to Keeping Property Taxes in Check

✓ ACTION

City Council worked hard to keep the municipal portion of the property tax increase as low as possible while ensuring we help address community challenges. The final approved increase to the tax levy was 1.43%, below the rate of inflation. During budget deliberations, I proposed/supported \$350,000 in savings, while advocating for funding increases for physician recruitment, downtown security and park upgrades, all of which were approved.

○ PLATFORM COMMITMENT

Incorporating a Youth Voice on Council

✓ ACTION

The Mayor's Youth Advisory Council has started sending a representative to City Council meetings to provide commentary related to the youth perspective on an agenda item. It is an effort to engage youth in municipal government and local politics, helping them better understand how decisions are made and encouraging active participation in civic life.



MEDIA COVERAGE



Sault Ste. Marie Mayor Matthew Shoemaker called U.S. President Donald Trump's tariffs 'reckless' and 'short sighted' in a statement issued on Saturday night.

"Rather than strengthening economies, these tariffs create uncertainty and disrupt a trade relationship that has long benefited both nations. Nowhere is this benefit more evident than in Sault Ste. Marie, where Ontario and Michigan share more than just a name in the Twin Saults. Everyday, thousands of Canadians and Americans cross this bridge for work, shopping or even just to play hockey. We all benefit from this reciprocity."

SooToday, February 1, 2025

The City will accelerate the construction of 280 homes over the next three years with millions of dollars of federal funding. The funding will help eliminate barriers that citizens face when building housing and will speed up the rate at which new units and homes can be built.

Shoemaker said the funding will also allow the city to run a program called Sault Foundations which pays the owners of underutilized properties to develop a plan for how to maximize their land use. "There's lots of old schools, churches, charitable organizations, and cultural centers that might be able to take advantage of this," said Shoemaker, adding that property owners will be able to choose developers based on the needs of the organization and the needs of the community.

Sault Star, January 27, 2025



MEDIA COVERAGE

A two-year journey of collaboration and trust-building between the City and Garden River First Nation has resulted in a new friendship, better understanding and a commitment to work together. The City and Garden River have been working together since 2023 to foster Reconciliation, strengthen partnerships and develop shared economic goals and culture. They signed a Friendship Accord earlier to represent ongoing collaboration and mutual respect.



“We learned there was a willingness of Sault Ste. Marie to endeavor into a partnership of significance with Garden River First Nation. Garden River First Nation commends the Sault mayor and council with approaching this by jumping in with both feet, open eyes and open hearts,” said Chief Karen Bell.

Sault Star, February 6, 2025

These are complicated times along Canada’s border. Border towns are essential economic nodes within massive supply chains, but their interconnectedness is more human than widget.



In steeltown Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Mayor Matt Shoemaker recently told POLITICO that the identically named town across the St. Marys River — a community about one-fifth the size of its Ontario counterpart — lacks a public swimming pool. If Michiganders want to take a dip, many just cross the bridge to Canada.

Politico, March 26, 2025

MEDIA COVERAGE

Sault Ste. Marie has been selected to participate in a new phase of an immigration program that connects employers and people from other countries with the right skills. Shoemaker noted that for decades the city's population has been on the decline but, thanks to RNIP and now RCIP, the city's population has grown 5 per cent over the past two years, reaching levels the community hasn't seen since the 1990's and growth not experienced since the 1970's.

Shoemaker said Sault Ste. Marie was the first community in RNIP to welcome invitees and "we plan to be the first community to invite RCIP invitees as well. It's not by chance that we are the first, it's by preparation. By hiring a dedicated point person to guide applicants and employers through the process, the city has ensured its success."

Sault Star, January 29, 2025

The Ontario government is investing \$5,253,000 in critical infrastructure to enable construction of up to 238 new homes in Sault Ste. Marie. Shoemaker said the Sackville Road extension is vital.

"We are here celebrating a municipal project that's been deferred a number of times by municipal councils of the past. Once completed, it will provide advantages including the addressing of traffic congestion at Great Northern Road and Second Line, which is the busiest intersection in our city. And it will unlock the opportunity for 238 new residential units."

SooToday, January 27, 2025



MEDIA COVERAGE

Mayor Matthew Shoemaker is lobbying hard across the border to change a situation he can't make any sense of, but he also has ideas for what Canadian governments can do to help the city weather the storm and come out even stronger.

“Expanding the impact that post-secondary institutions are having on our community is one of the ways that we can diversity our economy, especially if we’re doing things like helping address community issues by (training) doctors locally. We will need federal and provincial help to do it, but we are not going to say ‘until we get the federal and provincial money, we’re going to wait.’ We’re making the plans, we’re carrying out the plans and what we’re actually saying to the government is ‘here is the success we’re having, fund this success so we can be an example for communities across Canada.”



Institute for Research on Public Policy Podcast, April 30, 2025

The Sault Ste. Marie Downtown Association will be dissolved by year end and its responsibilities and activities will be transferred to the City . The move is similar to one that saw the former Economic Development Corp. and Tourism SSM come under the city’s umbrella.

Shoemaker said he doesn’t believe the association has been effective in marketing and activating the downtown.

“Encompassing the whole of downtown is what we should be doing and we should be doing it with a budget that reflects the need to do that work properly,”

Sault Star, April 7, 2025

