



Memorandum

Office of the CAO

Prepared for: Regular Council

Meeting Date: Monday, November 17, 2025

Title: Town of Fort Erie Submission on the Province of Ontario's Special Economic Zones Framework

This memorandum provides a summary of the Town of Fort Erie's response to the Province of Ontario's request for input on the development of a regulatory framework for Special Economic Zones (SEZs). The intent of SEZs is to accelerate economic growth in priority areas by streamlining approvals, reducing regulatory barriers, and attracting high-impact investment.

Under this framework, the Province would have the authority to designate specific zones, projects, and trusted proponents within a defined area, while continuing to uphold environmental, social, and safety standards.

As part of the Province's consultation process on the development of SEZs, public input was collected between April 17th and May 17th 2025, resulting in the identification of three overarching themes:

- Democratic Participation and Indigenous Rights,
- Safeguarding the Environment and People, and
- Transparency and Oversight.

These themes are integral to the development of SEZs and have been incorporated into the Town's feedback, alongside additional local priorities.

The Town's response in this memorandum includes input from Economic Development and Tourism Services (EDTS), Planning, Building and By-law Services (PBBS) and Infrastructure Services (IS) as outlined below.

Economic Development and Tourism Services (EDTS)

EDTS recommends that SEZs be designed to encourage sustainable and responsible growth through the implementation of a "sustainability lens." This includes measures such as low-carbon transportation and logistics initiatives, climate-resilient infrastructure, and the protection of habitats and ecosystems.

Fort Erie's strategic location on the U.S. border provides a unique opportunity to establish a

“Gateway SEZ” framework. This framework would focus on areas near border crossings, bridges, and key transportation hubs to strengthen trade, tourism, and regional supply chains.

To ensure a coordinated and effective approach, EDTS recommends forming a local SEZ working group to identify priority sectors, engage Indigenous communities, and advocate collectively to the Province. Public input and municipal approval should also guide this process, ensuring that SEZ development respects local priorities and infrastructure capacities.

Planning and Development Services

SEZs as a planning tool should only be used in a very limited and surgical way. In areas where the Town does not have any Environmental or Public Health concerns and provides an opportunity to encourage infrastructure projects that support critical economic development that bolsters international trade.

If the intent of the Provincial government is to unlock growth and economic development opportunities across the province, the most effective way to achieve that goal in Fort Erie is to assist the Town with the funding to implement the infrastructure projects that are currently creating an impediment to that potential.

Infrastructure Services

In the spirit of reducing the timelines for development surrounding SEZ's, we believe that it may be beneficial that a proponent be evaluated on their inclusion of Indigenous communities on their team as well as environmental stewards from the Municipalities.

A way that we force proponents to include those with the interest of the archaeological and environmental contexts directly within their teams to ensure that the voice is heard through the visioning down to the construction of the developments.

With respect to infrastructure and servicing, we would encourage consideration of a more efficient Environmental Assessment process for SEZ projects—one that maintains appropriate environmental oversight while facilitating timely development. It remains important that the relevant subject matter experts are engaged, as environmental and engineering requirements tend to be the largest factors influencing project delivery.

Regional Approach with other LAMs

In addition to its independent submission, the Town is collaborating with other local area municipalities (LAMs) across the Niagara Region, focusing on three overarching regional themes:

- **Transportation:** Focus on major transportation hubs and corridors, such as the QEW, St. Lawrence Seaway, Hoverlink, Niagara District Airport, and HOPA properties, to support the efficient movement of goods and people through infrastructure expansion and multi-modal connections.

- **Tourism:** Advance the Destination Niagara Strategy through the development of large-scale tourism attractions, supported by expanded transportation infrastructure and servicing capacity to accommodate peak visitor demand.

By working together regionally, staff believe that the Town can better attract high-impact economic development investments and ensure that growth, infrastructure and tourism initiatives are aligned for maximum benefit.

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