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2024-2025

November 20, 2024

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Jonathan Altenberg
President & CEO

His Worship Gary Zalepa, Lord Mayor
Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake

Dear Lord Mayor Zalepa:

In 2024, we expanded partnerships with key organizations, secured funding, and supported vulnerable communities. Our advocacy efforts unlocked \$274 million to prevent the spread of invasive carp in the Great Lakes, increased the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative's funding to \$500 million annually, and the creation of the independent Canada Water Agency and the launch of the first intake of Canada's \$420-million Great Lakes protection funding. Additionally, the Cities Initiative led another 35 coastal resilience projects in disadvantaged areas and launched the Great Lakes Lead Pipes Partnership to accelerate lead pipe replacements in high-need cities. We are also proud to have signed collaborative agreements with the Council of the Great Lakes Region to drive economic transformation in the basin and with Conservation Ontario to address coastal challenges. The Cities Initiative is becoming a driving force for positive change in our basin and other organizations are taking notice of our unique coalition's ability to effect change.

Now more than ever, your continued support is essential in empowering local governments and creating a space for cross-border collaboration to drive the sustainable development and well-being of communities throughout the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Basin.

This package includes a detailed overview of our accomplishments in the **2024 annual report**, as well as your invoice for the 2025 annual membership contribution to the Cities Initiative. Please also make sure to mark your calendar for **May 14-16, 2025**, to join us at our **Annual Conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin**, centered around the theme 'The Future of Fresh Water: Leading the Way in an Era of Scarcity.' Further event details are included in this package.

We remain a lean organization with low overhead and competitive rates, focused on creating value for our members and amplifying your voice daily. For example, the Cities Initiative launched the **Mayors Commission on Economic Transformation**. This new commission, led by prominent mayors from cities like Chicago, Montréal, and Québec City, is dedicated to transforming our region into a flourishing blue-green economic corridor. **We look forward to working with you and the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake in 2025 to continue our progress towards even stronger basin communities.**

If you have any questions, please contact our Chief Development Officer, Phil Murphy-Rhéaume at phillipe.murphy-rheaume@gslcities.org.

Sincerely,

Gino Moretti
Co-Chair
Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative
Mayor, Saint-Anicet, QC

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



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

**Mayors Securing the
Future of Our Basin**

Annual Report 2024

Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative
P.O. Box 1332 New Lenox, IL 60451
312.201.4518

www.glslcities.org

Executive Summary

A YEAR OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In 2024, our organization deepened its commitment to fostering resilient and thriving communities across the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Basin, emerging as a leading advocate for preparing for a changing climate and advancing sustainable economic development. With over 70 organizations (business, government, and non-profit partners) joining the Mayors Commission on Economic Transformation, we have built an unprecedented coal-

ition to chart the development of our region's economy. We remain dedicated to a prosperous and sustainable future for all our communities — that means ensuring that your residents have access to good jobs, reliable and safe infrastructure, communities that are resilient to extreme weather, and access to all the opportunities that come with being in a region that makes up over 80 percent of North America's fresh water.

\$420 M

Supported the launch of the independent **Canada Water Agency** and securing the first phase of funding under Canada's **\$420 million** Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River protection commitment.

UP TO
\$425 M

Provided project planning and grant support for **62 projects** through the **Resilient Coastal Projects Initiative** for a total project value of up to **\$425 million.***

\$400 M

Advocated for nearly **\$400 million** in funding to prevent the devastating spread of invasive carp through the Brandon Road Interbasin Project.

450

Trained approximately **450 participants** through webinars, workshops, and sessions on sustainable solutions for coastal resilience challenges.

OVER
750

Presented at various conferences to a **total audience of over 750**, highlighting the climate action initiatives spearheaded by the Cities Initiative and its members.



Photo by Ryan Hagerty/USFWS

350

Hosted **12 workshops** with industry, agency, and non-profit partners in The Blue Mountains, Montreal, and Upstate New York with a **total of 350 people participating.**

OVER
\$2 B

Helped secure over **\$2 billion** for water infrastructure funding across Canada to accelerate housing construction in our basin.



Letter from Our Co-Chairs

Dear Members,

As we reflected on 2024, our organization celebrated a year of delivering meaningful support to advance your priorities. We provided and secured financial resources, technical training, and instructional programs to help you and your staff implement effective green solutions for challenges facing your communities. We also worked alongside you and your teams to advocate for legislation and policies that improved your residents' lives. Our coalition grew to nearly 270 communities, supported by a dedicated team committed to providing the resources needed to make a real difference.

As mayors, we understood the immense challenges faced by our communities, especially when resources were limited. Our organization remained hyper-focused on helping your residents live healthy and fulfilling lives. Our mission was to safeguard the resilience and success of all communities across the basin for future generations.

Protecting the environment and a freshwater resource that is the envy of the world was critical to our region's ongoing success and ability to attract the best and brightest people, companies, and changemakers. We empowered you and your staff to address the most pressing issues impacting your residents, including flooding, coastal erosion, aging infrastructure, and ensuring that every resident had access to clean and affordable water.

We also recognized the potential for our basin to become a leading blue-green economic corridor. In 2025, our Mayors Commission on Economic Transformation planned to deliver a 10-year plan to remake our fresh coast economy and ensure that the basin remained an ideal place to live, work, invest, and play for the next 50 years.

We looked forward to your continued commitment to the Cities Initiative. Please review this report, and don't hesitate to reach out with any questions or concerns. Let's aim to make 2025 an even more successful year for our coalition.

Mayor Gino Moretti, Co-Chair
Saint-Anicet, QC



Mayor Ryan Sorenson, Co-Chair
Sheboygan, WI



Protecting Our Environment. Securing Our Future.

KEY DELIVERABLES ACHIEVED

- 1 Advocated for the Brandon Road Interbasin Project, unlocking **\$274 million** in federal funding and **\$114 million** in non-federal funding, advancing the project to the construction phase to **prevent the spread of invasive carp.**
- 2 Pushed for the **implementation of the CAD \$500 million Blue Fund in Québec** through increased royalties on important water users to finance water-quality protection initiatives, including **\$80 million** for water-infrastructure including upgrades.
- 3 Supported the launch of the independent **Canada Water Agency** to strengthen coordination of freshwater policy and securing the roll out of the first phase of enhanced funding under Canada's **\$420+ million** Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River protection commitment.
- 4 **Endorsed the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) Act of 2024**, encouraging the U.S. Congress to extend the GLRI's authorization for an additional five years while increasing spending to **\$500 million** annually.
- 5 Advocated to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for fair distribution of lead service line funding under the **Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act**, resulting in funding increases for five of eight Great Lakes states and a **\$16 million award to Milwaukee** for lead service line replacement funding.

over
\$1.9B Funding Secured
 Thanks to the
 Cities Initiative



Coastal and Climate Resilience

US PROGRAMMING

40

Provided training and technical assistance to **40 communities**, including **28 vulnerable ones**, through our Initiative for Resilient Great Lakes Coasts partnership program with NOAA.

up to
\$425M

Provided project planning and grant support for **62 projects** through the Resilient Coastal Projects Initiative for a total project value of up to **\$425 million.***

22

Provided engineering and design support for **22 projects** through our coastal programs, moving these projects one step closer to construction.

over
\$24M

Submitted over **\$24 million in grant applications to American funding agencies** for new programming at the Cities Initiative to support our members with their resilience and source water protection concerns.



ONTARIO, CA

Pursuing new federal program funding in partnership with **Conservation Ontario** and over 15 member municipalities to create **new coastal programs** on three Great Lakes over the next three years.



QUÉBEC, CA

Working to foster stakeholder collaboration among municipalities from **Greater Québec City with a hands-on workshop** to support the metropolitan community's climate adaptation mandate.



Enhancing International Cooperation and Influence

Signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the **Council of the Great Lakes Region** — an organization dedicated to maintaining the Great Lakes region's economic competitiveness through sustainable development — to help guide our new strategic pillar on Economic Transformation.

Established a **Memorandum of Cooperation with Conservation Ontario** to address coastal erosion, flooding and storm impacts for member communities in addition to partnering on a briefing for elected officials at the **Association of Municipalities of Ontario's Annual Conference in Ottawa**.

Recruited more than 70 businesses, government agencies, and non-profit organizations to serve as **advisors to the Mayors Commission on Economic Transformation**.

Co-organized a **Mayoral Reception at the Dutch Ambassador's residence** with Climate Mayors and Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative, which was attended by more than 100 thought leaders and government officials, including Senator Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota

and John Podesta, Senior Advisor to the President for Clean Energy Innovation and Implementation.

Hosted an educational public event in Chicago entitled, "Honoring Our Waters," to **showcase strong partnership between Indigenous and Municipal leaders**, co-hosted by our partners at the Biinaagami Initiative, Canadian Geographic, Swim Drink Fish, and the City of Chicago.



2024 Highlights

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR THE BASIN



Great Lakes Coastal Resiliency Study

Hosted a high-impact policy roundtable in Washington D.C., led by the Mayors Commission on Coastal Resilience, to strengthen municipal engagement with the Great Lakes Coastal Resiliency Study. This event featured Major General Mark C. Quander, Commander of the Great Lakes and Ohio River Division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, alongside other key project partners, resulting in a renewed commitment to collaborative resilience planning and actionable support for Great Lakes communities.



Great Lakes Lead Pipes Partnership at the Water Summit

Launched the Great Lakes Lead Pipes Partnership at the White House Water Summit in April 2024, led by three Mayors Commission on Water Equity members – Mayor Brandon Johnson of Chicago, Mayor Mike Duggan of Detroit, and Mayor Cavalier Johnson of Milwaukee – to expedite lead service line replacement in Great Lakes big cities with the heaviest lead burdens.





Basin-Wide Declaration Signed by Major Cities and Endorsed by All Members

With record attendance, the Cities Initiative's launched the Mayors Commission on Economic Transformation at its 2024 Annual Conference in Montréal, QC. Mayors Valérie Plante of Montréal, Mayor Brandon Johnson of Chicago, IL and Mayor Cavalier Johnson of Milwaukee, WI signed a declaration, endorsed by all Cities Initiative members, to collaborate on an Action Plan that will guide the way for our region to become a leading blue-green economic corridor



Québec Government's New Maritime Strategy

Teamed up with the Québec Union of Municipalities and the Saint-Lawrence Economic Development Network to position mayors and industry leaders as key partners as the Québec government renews its maritime strategy. This vital and strategic industry supports over 27,000 jobs in the province, and more than 350,000 jobs across the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway, while connecting the heart of North America to the Atlantic Ocean.

Be a Part of Economic Transformation

A shift from traditional industry to a sustainable blue-green economic corridor that attracts eco-friendly industries, revitalizes waterfronts, adopts renewable energy, and enhances water-based commerce, establishing the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Basin as a leader in sustainable development while preserving freshwater resources for future generations.



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Today, the economy and environment are inextricably linked, and our success depends on integrating them seamlessly. Our 2024 initiatives—Coastal and Climate Resilience, Economic Transformation, and Enhancing International Cooperation and Influence—are vital to unlocking the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Basin's immense growth potential for the next 50 years. Building a blue-green economic corridor is essential for driving sustainable progress in our communities while protecting the invaluable resources that define our region.

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

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Photo Credit: USEPA Environmental Protection Agency



THE FUTURE OF
**FRESH
WATER**

Mark your
calendar now for
May 14-16, 2025,
in Milwaukee!





THE FUTURE OF
**FRESH
WATER**

LEADING
THE WAY
IN AN ERA
OF SCARCITY

Join us in Milwaukee for the Cities Initiative's 2025 Annual Conference, where more than 200 attendees—including mayors, government officials, and industry leaders—will convene to address critical topics shaping the future of the Great Lakes St. Lawrence basin.

As we face one of the most pressing challenges of our time, this event will explore how communities across the basin can act to transform water management and enhance our region's resilience in the face of global water challenges. Together, we will delve into strategies to foster sustainable growth and drive innovation, all while managing our freshwater resources responsibly.

**Mark your calendar now for
May 14-16, 2025, in Milwaukee!**

Registration Opens Soon
Book early to save over 25%
on the regular rate and
maximize your 2024 budget.

MEMBER SUPER
SAVER
\$800

(ends December 31, 2024)

MEMBER
EARLY BIRD
\$900

(ends March 31, 2025)

REGULAR
RATE
\$1,250



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