



Community Development Award Committee

MINUTES

Thursday, April 30th, 5:00pm
Biggings Room, Level 3, Civic Centre

Live Stream: <https://www.youtube.com/user/SaultSteMarieOntario>

Present: M. Jones, S. Suwal, P. Christian

Regrets: J. Parsons

Staff: S. Zuppa

1. Land Acknowledgement

2. Welcome and Introductions

S. Zuppa reminded the group that this is a Committee of Council, which means it must follow the procedures set out in Procedural By-law 2013-100. Any deliberations on nominations have to take place in a Closed session of our regular meetings. Members must not discuss (either verbally or through email/chat) these nominations outside of our meetings as group discussions will count as an “official” meeting under the procedural by-law.

S. Zuppa reminded the group that the purpose of the committee is to recognize exceptional community development projects by recommending one award winner per year to Council. Council ultimately approves that recommendation.

The term “Community Development” is broad. For a project to be eligible for the award, it should positively benefit the community in one or more of the following ways:

- Enhance the visual quality of the built environment
- Pursue sustainable development and protect the natural environment
- Promote equity and accessibility to a variety of people, income groups, and abilities

- Maximize employment and earning opportunities
- Facilitate heritage preservation

Typically, the Committee has preferred a bricks-and-mortar type of project, awarding a building or development project. That said, if other types of projects are considered, they have to relate to one of those criteria.

Previous committees have also tended to consider private vs. public-funded projects.

2. Pecuniary Interest

None indicated.

3. Elect Chair and Vice Chair

A. Election of Chair

Open the floor to nominations: M. Jones nominates J. Parsons as Chair.
Seconded by: S. Suwal. Nominations Closed. *Note that J. Parsons indicated via email that she would be willing to stand as either Chair or Vice Chair if nominated in absentia.*

Moved by: P. Christian
Seconded by: S. Suwal

Motion: Resolved that Jennifer Parsons be appointed as Chair of the Community Development Award Committee. CARRIED

B. Election of Vice-Chair

Open the floor to nominations: S. Suwal nominates M. Jones as Vice-Chair.
Seconded by: P. Christian. Nominations Closed.

Moved by: P. Christian
Seconded by: S. Suwal

Motion: Resolved that Mark Jones be appointed as Vice-Chair of the Community Development Award Committee. CARRIED

4. Carry-over Nominations from 2023-2025

Nominees from 2023 and onwards (year nominated in parentheses):

- A. The Art Hub at Spring – 504 Queen Street East (2023)
- B. Windsor Place Retirement Residence – 617 Queen Street East (2023)
- C. Vicary Fremlin – Lock City Dairies – 938 McNabb Street (2024)

- D. Nicole Dyble - Mutual Aid Hub, Dryer Fire/Piecing it Together Shows –
Now located at 331 Wellington Street West (2024)
- E. One Ten Pim Apartments – 110 Pim Street (2025)
- F. Café 4 Good – 326 Queen Street (2025)
- G. Soo Market – 73 Brock Street (2025)
- H. Northway Wellness Centre – 145 Old Garden River Road (2025)

The Committee decided to re-add the Shoppes on TransCanada (originally nominated in 2022) and Grocer 4 Good (originally nominated in 2021) to the list of nominees.

5. New Nominees for 2026

The public nomination deadline ended at 4:30PM, right before the CDAC meeting took place. The new nominations are:

- Robin Walker - Open Minds, 444 Albert St E
- Natasha Ralph – K9 Mobile Nails & Grooming Inc, 539 Trunk Road
- Blaster Power House (formerly Soo Blaster), 345 Queen St E – 10 nominations, one of which came after our agenda was posted online.
- The Sault Ste. Marie Community Pantry and Household Bartering Items Foundation, 281 North St
- Huron-Superior Regional Metis Community, 136 John St. Note that this nomination came in after the agenda was posted online on April 29. It was included with the Committee's printed package and is included as an attachment to the minutes.

6. Closed Session

Moved by: P. Christian
Seconded by: S. Suwal

Motion: Resolved that this Committee move into closed session to discuss the merits of the current nominations and roll-over nominations from the previous year. CARRIED

(Municipal Act section 239(2)(b) personal matters about an identifiable individual, including municipal or local board employees.)

7. Other Business

8. Next Meeting(s)

No meeting date set. S. Zuppa will send out a poll to determine the best date for the following meeting.

9. Adjournment

Moved by: P. Christian
Seconded by: S. Suwal

Motion: Resolved that this Committee meeting now adjourn. CARRIED

New Nominations in 2026 as of April 30, 2026 @4:30pm

**nominations are now closed*

1. Robin Walker - Open Minds

444 Albert Street East

Submitted

07/04/2026 by Christie Currie

Description of community development projects worthy of recognition. Please address one or more of the criteria.

Robin Walker has made the Open Minds clinic into much more than clinical services - creating a welcoming, relationship-based hub, hosting free community workshops & inclusive programming. It's a place where neurodivergent people are understood, respected & included; where educators & community partners are equipped to create more accessible environments

EXAMPLES INCLUDE: Connections Parent Group - free monthly meeting of parents that focuses on peer-to-peer support and shared advocacy; Free and Low-cost Workshops - for youth & caregivers, educators & community partners; Book Studies - for parents & educators; Open Minds Community Library - resources shared for free Connections Annual Conference

2. Natasha Ralph - K9 Mobile Nails & Grooming Inc

539 Trunk Road

Submitted

15/04/2026 by Natasha Ralph

Description of community development projects worthy of recognition. Please address one or more of the criteria.

K9 Mobile Nails & Grooming Inc. supports community development by improving access to pet care and giving back to local animal welfare. Monthly nail trimming clinics provide affordable services while raising funds for the Humane Society, contributing thousands annually. The business also organizes seasonal initiatives such as toy drives and pet photography fundraisers, encouraging community involvement and support. Through partnerships with local businesses and organizations, these efforts strengthen community connections, promote responsible pet ownership, and provide accessible, low stress services, especially for seniors and those with limited mobility.

3. Blaster Power House (formerly Soo Blaster) – 10 nominations

345 Queen Street East

Date Submitted

21/04/2026 by Thomas Stephenson

Description of community development projects worthy of recognition. Please address one or more of the criteria.

Blaster Power House, previously known as Soo Blaster provides a great family experience in the downtown core. They recently invested over \$700,000 to expand the operation to include a laser tag arena, bowling lanes, a lighted dance floor, and a play arena. They have modern high tech arcade games, and VR Simulators as well. Popular concerts are hosted often, there is a sports bar with a large projection screen and multiple big screen tv's, a restaurant operation, pool tables, darts, and more. There is something there for the whole family in approximately 50,000 square feet of floor space, all built by local entrepreneurs. This is the largest operation of its kind in Northern Ontario.

Date Submitted

22/04/2026 by Sharmila

Description of community development projects worthy of recognition. Please address one or more of the criteria.

Blaster Powerhouse, formerly Soo Blaster, is a \$2M+ redevelopment in Sault Ste. Marie led by local entrepreneurs Dasa Kumar and Sharmila. The 25,000-sq-ft facility is the largest indoor entertainment complex in Northern Ontario, featuring laser tag, bowling, arcade, LED Game, simulators, playground, sports bar, and restaurant. It drives economic growth, job creation, and downtown revitalization by attracting residents and tourists, increasing foot traffic for local businesses. Hosting events and community activities, it boosts tourism, extends visitor stays, and enhances quality of life—making it a key driver of regional development. Its a complete community recreation and entertainment hub

Date Submitted

24/04/2026 by Sault Lock Tours c/o Jeffrey DiCorpo

Nominee

Days Inn / Soo Blasters

Description of community development projects worthy of recognition. Please address one or more of the criteria.

The combination of an excellent, welcoming hotel and a unique entertainment venue deserves recognition within our community. Tourists visiting our city, as well as local residents, are able to enjoy fun and games not found anywhere else in town. Over the past few years, there have been many improvements to both the exterior and interior of this establishment, enhancing the overall look and feel of the downtown area.

Date Submitted

24/04/2026 by Shawn Casey

Address

345 Queen St. E, Sault Ste Marie, Ontario

Description of community development projects worthy of recognition. Please address one or more of the criteria.

Blaster Powerhouse, formerly SooBlaster, is a key part of downtown Sault Ste. Marie's entertainment scene. It has grown into a true community hub where people of all ages come together to have fun and create lasting memories. I enjoyed the concerts and comedy shows, every visit feels was enjoyable, with new bowling lanes, arcade games, and a great atmosphere. Their vision of an inclusive and welcoming space has made it a place for families, youth, and adults alike. Over the years, their dedication has built more than a venue—it has brought the community together in a meaningful way.

Date Submitted

24/04/2026 by Sault Blues Society c/o Johnnie Tibbles

Description of community development projects worthy of recognition. Please address one or more of the criteria.

Soo Blaster continually participates on fundraising events. They have given major support to the Sault Blues Society's Annual Blues for Food for the past 3 years, including paying the house bands for each of the 2 night fundraisers.

They are currently renovating to become the Soo's largest arcade/concert venue.

The Sault Blues Society has our next Blues presentation already booked for May 21 2026 and Blues for Food a 2 night fundraiser in November.

Date Submitted

24/04/2026 by Michael

Description of community development projects worthy of recognition. Please address one or more of the criteria.

Blaster Powerhouse is a family friendly entertainment destination in Sault Ste. Marie, offering activities for all ages and bringing more energy to the downtown area. The venue features exciting attractions like laser tag, bowling, and a dedicated indoor playground, making it suitable for both younger children and older kids. By hosting a variety of all ages events and activities, it has become a popular gathering place for families and the community. It provides a fun, safe, and engaging environment while adding more things to do locally and encouraging people to spend time in the downtown core.

Date Submitted

24/04/2026 by Mikhal Muto

Description of community development projects worthy of recognition. Please address one or more of the criteria.

I believe Blaster Power House has created a lot of options for people as a "third space" in the community, by hosting queer and pro feminist events, birthday parties, comedy, and concerts for the community, and anyone is allowed to book the space.

Most recently they have renovated and added mini bowling lanes and laser tag in addition to their arcade which we have had a lack of. This has provided a lot of opportunity for entertainment for people of all ages.

Date Submitted

28/04/2026 by Rahul Sharma

Description of community development projects worthy of recognition. Please address one or more of the criteria.

Soo Blaster is a dynamic community-driven venue that has emerged as a key cultural and social asset, delivering strong alignment with multiple community development recognition criteria.

At a foundational level, Soo Blaster serves as a multi-purpose event space that brings people together through shared experiences. By hosting comedy nights, multicultural DJ events, live band performances, and a wide range of other programming, it creates consistent opportunities for residents to engage, connect, and participate in community life. This directly contributes to enhanced social cohesion—one of the most important indicators of a thriving community.

From a cultural diversity and inclusion stand

Date Submitted

28/04/2026 by Terrance O'Neil

Description of community development projects worthy of recognition. Please address one or more of the criteria.

Went to many shows and events and the atmosphere and staff are amazing. Events for all ages and with the new branding Sault Ste Marie will soon have a one stop place for all your entertainment needs. Great food, drinks, and now Blaster Power House brings Laser Tag. Fun for all ages and now the place to be in our community.

Date Submitted

29/04/2026 by Sharmila Dasa Kumar and Das Kumar

Description of community development projects worthy of recognition. Please address one or more of the criteria.

Blaster Powerhouse, formerly SooBlaster, is a major contributor to community development in downtown Sault Ste. Marie. The project revitalizes the built environment with a modern entertainment space featuring bowling, laser tag, arcade games, and dining. It promotes equity and accessibility by offering inclusive, family-friendly experiences for all ages and income levels. The facility also supports economic growth by creating jobs and increasing downtown traffic. As a central gathering place, it strengthens community connections through events and shared experiences. It stands as a transformative investment that revitalizes the downtown core and builds long-term resilience.

4. The Sault Ste. Marie Community Pantry and Household Bartering Items Foundation
281 North Street, Sault Ste. Marie

Date Submitted

23/04/2026 by Helen Lannigan

Description of community development projects worthy of recognition. Please address one or more of the criteria.

The Pantry” offered a lot of resources to anyone in need, such as food, clothing, household items and footcare. They were also offered a warm place to come into, to socialize; their concerns were respected. Those without funds could barter, help out at the store, to earn purchases. They kept their dignity, something some had not felt in a long time.

People were allowed to celebrate,holidays, sample party foods and enjoy live music.

There was no stigma attached to "customers" one was not classified as ,homeless , down on your luck or just someone that liked to thrift shop.

The goal was to make people feel that they still belonged to society, that they mattered, and would be taken care of

5. Huron-Superior Regional Metis Community
136 John Street, Sault Ste. Marie

Date Submitted

29/04/2026 by Samantha Boyer

Description of community development projects worthy of recognition. Please address one or more of the criteria.

The Huron-Superior Regional Métis Community has been a driving force behind transformative, community-wide impact in Sault Ste. Marie. Through multi-million-dollar investments, they have advanced housing, tourism, culture, and economic development at a scale unmatched locally. Projects include the Powley Institute and Ontario’s first Métis Heritage Centre, alongside 20 affordable homes, sustainable energy infrastructure, & Métis-led eco-tourism. By hosting provincial and national events, they have brought significant visitor & economic activity to the city. With over 40 local employees and decades of frontline service delivery, their work continues to strengthen Sault Ste. Marie as a whole.

Note: another self-nomination was submitted, however staff determined that this nomination does not qualify because the project did not take place in Sault Ste. Marie.