

Document 3
2025 Nightlife Office Annual Report
Reporting Period: January–December 2025

Executive Summary

In its first full year of operations, the Nightlife Office delivered on all ten recommendations in the Council-approved [*Nightlife Economy Action Plan*](#), with particular focus on establishing a Nightlife Council which advises on nightlife policy and its implementation, updating City regulations to be more nightlife friendly, and piloting new safety and placemaking initiatives.

Key accomplishments in 2025 included launching OttawaAtNight.ca, establishing the Nightlife Council, hosting the Canada After Dark forum and the Nightlife Town Hall, implementing the ByWard Market Night Ambassadors Pilot, and facilitating activations such as Metcalfe Plaza and a Nuit Blanche teaser event.

This work strengthened collaboration between City services, businesses and community partners, enhanced safety, and inclusivity in nightlife spaces, and positioned Ottawa as a national and international leader in nightlife policy. Together, these achievements provide a strong foundation for the continued implementation of the Nightlife Economy Action Plan and the sustainable growth of Ottawa’s nightlife economy.

Overview

The year 2025 marked the first full year of operations for the City’s Nightlife Office. Established following Council’s approval of the *Nightlife Economy Action Plan* in May 2023, the Nightlife Office was created to improve coordination, governance, safety, and economic development related to nightlife activity across the city.

In 2025, the Nightlife Office operated with an operational budget of \$200,000, complemented by a \$150,000 allocation from the Ontario–Ottawa Agreement for Downtown Revitalization, dedicated to public-space activation, communication, and safety initiatives in the downtown core. The Office is staffed by the Nightlife Commissioner with part-time support from Economic Development Officers in Economic Development Services.

Nightlife Office 2025 Activities

- Creation of the Nightlife Council (November 2024)
- Nightlife Report to Council (March 2025)
- Canada After Dark forum (May 2025)
- ByWard Market Night Ambassadors Pilot (July 2025)
- Street Seats & Metcalfe Plaza pilots (August 2025)
- Launch of the Ottawa at Night website (September 2025)
- Communication Campaign on Safety (September 2025)
- Safety booklets for nightlife staff and participants (September 2025)
- Safety workshops for staff (October 2025)
- Nightlife Office Town Hall (November 2025)

Nightlife Economy Action Plan Update

Of the ten recommendations outlined in the Nightlife Economy Action Plan, eight are complete, and two are ongoing, marking an important milestone in the implementation of Ottawa's first coordinated strategy dedicated to the nightlife economy.

This work has advanced key priorities related to governance, regulatory modernization, public safety, placemaking, industry engagement, and economic development after dark. Through cross-departmental collaboration and sustained engagement with industry interest holders, community partners, and enforcement agencies, the Office has helped lay the groundwork for a more supportive and structured operating environment for nightlife activity in Ottawa.

The completion of these recommendations provides an opportunity to assess outcomes, measure impacts, and identify emerging priorities that will inform the next phase of the City's nightlife economy strategy.

R1. Establish the framework for a 'Nightlife Commissioner' Office, for implementation in 2024 — Complete

This recommendation was completed in June 2024 with the hiring of Ottawa's first Nightlife Commissioner and the formal establishment of the Nightlife Office within the City's organizational structure. The creation of the Office established a dedicated governance framework to support, advocate for, and coordinate issues related to the nightlife economy.

Since its inception, the Nightlife Office has served as a central liaison between industry interest holders, community partners, and City departments, advancing strategic priorities related to economic development after dark, public safety, regulatory modernization, and placemaking.

R2. Promote city-wide and neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood participation of residents, visitors, and businesses in the nightlife economy — Ongoing

To support broader participation in Ottawa’s nightlife economy, the Nightlife Office has implemented a series of promotional, partnership, and communications initiatives aimed at increasing visibility for local cultural activity and encouraging public engagement after dark.

In June 2024, the Nightlife Office established a partnership with Ottawa Tourism to amplify communications related to nightlife programming through their digital platforms, helping position nightlife as a core component of the city’s visitor experience. Building on this work, the Office launched new promotional tools on OttawaAtNight.ca, including a nightlife business directory and the *Insiders* section, designed to spotlight cultural programming in nightlife venues and support organizations managing online event listings (July 2025).

The website launch was supported by a bilingual marketing campaign, “It’s Night O’Clock / Yé Nuit’ Heures,” promoting local nightlife experiences to residents and visitors. The campaign targeted audiences aged 19 to 35 and was deployed across campuses, bus shelters, and social media platforms, generating over 5 million impressions (September 2025).

R3. Consider amendments supportive of the nightlife economy while undertaking planned reviews of City by-laws, policies, procedures, and services — Complete

In 2025, several by-law changes were approved by Council to facilitate special events and support licensed businesses. Those changes included:

- Removal of separation distance requirements between nightclubs
- Broader permissions for nightclub use city-wide
- Authorization of alcohol consumption in designated parks
- Consolidation of food premise and bar use categories
- Introduction of a one-hour noise exemption for outdoor events affected by weather delays
- Simplified processes for food trucks at special events and

- Improved access to the AGCO Temporary Extension of Hours for events of municipal significance.

The Nightlife Office contributed to discussions with the Public Policy Development Branch in Emergency and Protective Services on several of the proposed changes, some of which were also presented to the Nightlife Council prior to implementation. The Nightlife Office will continue to work across Emergency and Protective Services, including Event Central and By-Law and Regulatory Services, to facilitate amendments supportive of nightlife economy where appropriate and consistent with public safety and nuisance control considerations.

R4. Establish a Nightlife Council comprised of industry and community leaders to provide feedback and support to the Nightlife Office — Complete

The Nightlife Council was established in January 2025 following an extensive recruitment process that attracted 500 applicants from across Ottawa. The Council is composed of 18 members, including six seats specifically reserved for representatives from economic and cultural development organizations.

The primary role of the Nightlife Council is to enhance communication and collaboration between the City, nightlife businesses, and residents, while providing strategic guidance and support to the Nightlife Commissioner and the Nightlife Office. Throughout 2025, the Council held five meetings focused on key themes, including:

- By-law review, conducted in partnership with the Public Policy Team
- Nightlife safety, in collaboration with Ottawa Public Health
- Nightlife promotion
- ByWard Market revitalization and placemaking projects
- Planning for the 2026 work program

At the end of the year, the Nightlife Office conducted a feedback survey with Nightlife Council members. Seventy per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Nightlife Council is having a positive impact on Ottawa's nightlife economy and community. Members highlighted the Council's effectiveness in "de-siloing conversations within City departments" and noted that "the exchange of perspectives on specific challenges has been insightful and impactful."

Looking ahead, the Nightlife Council will hold a minimum of four meetings in 2026, with current members completing their term in September. A new recruitment process for the 2027–2028 term will begin in Q3 2026, and current members are eligible to reapply.

Each member may serve a maximum of two consecutive terms, ensuring continuity while allowing for regular renewal and the infusion of new perspectives.

R5. Develop an annual 'Nightlife Commissioner's Report' that highlights Nightlife Office achievements and nightlife economy developments — Complete

The Nightlife Office presented its first annual Nightlife Commissioner's update to Council in April 2025, as part of the broader Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan Implementation Update Report. This update highlighted the Office's key achievements over its first six months of operations, including the completion of priority Action Plan recommendations.

The report also reinforced the Nightlife Office's role as a central coordinating body for nightlife governance, facilitating communication and collaboration between municipal departments, industry interest holders, and the community.

The annual report is intended to be a recurring publication, enabling Council, industry partners, and the public to track progress, celebrate successes, and inform the next phase of Ottawa's nightlife strategy.

R6. Collaborate with Ottawa Tourism to promote nightlife experiences to visitors as part of destination marketing investments and advocate for the development of new nightlife experiences through the Destination Development Fund — Complete

Building on collaboration in 2025, Ottawa Tourism announced in February 2026 its first funding stream dedicated to the development of nightlife projects with touristic potential, under the Destination Development Fund. This initiative is the first of its kind in Canada to be managed by a destination development organization and represents a bold step toward leveraging nightlife as a key component of Ottawa's visitor economy.

The program is expected to generate local interest among nightlife operators and cultural partners, encouraging the creation of new experiences, events, and offerings that enhance Ottawa's after-dark appeal. Over the longer term, these initiatives aim to shift perceptions of the city's brand, positioning Ottawa as a destination not only for its heritage and natural attractions but also for vibrant nightlife activity.

Applications for the fund run from March 1 to 31, 2026, with successful recipients scheduled to be announced in April 2026.

R7. Develop a city-wide Nightlife Safety and Security Plan for nightlife workers and participants — Complete

Over the past year, the Nightlife Office has advanced the implementation of the Nightlife Safety and Security Plan through a coordinated, multi-departmental approach focused on prevention, harm reduction, and the creation of safer public spaces after dark. The Office has worked closely with key partners, including Ottawa Police Service, Ottawa Public Health, By-law and Regulatory Services, and community organizations, to ensure a comprehensive approach to nightlife safety.

Key actions undertaken in 2025 include:

- Publication of two Nightlife Safety booklets—one aimed at venue staff and one for nightlife participants—providing guidance on best practices for personal safety, responsible service, and incident reporting.
- Launch of the ByWard Market Nightlife Ambassadors pilot program, designed to provide a visible, supportive presence in nightlife districts, assist with conflict prevention, and enhance communication between venues, patrons, and City services.
- Delivery of two dedicated nightlife safety workshops at Club SAW, targeting venue staff and operators, with content focused on staff training, responsible alcohol service, incident response, and fostering inclusive and secure nightlife environments.

The ByWard Market Nightlife Ambassadors program proved highly successful, supporting more than 1,100 individuals across 549 interactions over the 12 weeks of the pilot program. While the majority of engagements (86 per cent) focused on general outreach and positive engagement—helping build trust, provide information, and increase awareness—the program’s interventions related to aggression or conflict (four per cent), lost or vulnerable individuals (three per cent), and medical or substance-related issues (three per cent), though smaller in proportion, represent critical contributions to community safety and harm reduction.

Collectively, these initiatives have helped improve safety conditions in Ottawa’s nightlife districts, strengthened communication channels between interest holders, and reinforced a shared culture of responsibility among operators, staff, and patrons.

R8. Facilitate, with partners, new and diverse cultural and placemaking activities — Ongoing

In 2025, the Nightlife Office actively facilitated new placemaking and cultural animation through targeted pilot initiatives, most notably the Metcalfe Plaza project and the Nuit Blanche “teaser” event.

The Nightlife Office played a central role in supporting the funding, planning, and implementation of Metcalfe Plaza, working in partnership with the Downtown Business Improvement Area, Aire Commune, and Amashowza. This seasonal public-realm activation was designed to animate downtown Ottawa through recurring cultural programming, food and beverage offerings, and inclusive nightlife experiences.

The Metcalfe Plaza pilot demonstrated significant public engagement and social media traction. The project’s Instagram account grew from 1,000 to more than 8,000 followers within weeks, generating over three million content views and 55,000 interactions. Over the six-week pilot, 50 local and visiting artists performed across 20 events held Thursday and Friday evenings (5:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.) and Saturdays (noon to 10:00 p.m.), attracting more than 7,000 visitors. Programming emphasized diverse DJ scenes and cultural communities, with strong representation from local artists. Except for the stage, the site met *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) standards. Visitor feedback was overwhelmingly positive: 87.9 per cent rated their overall experience as “Satisfied” or “Very Satisfied,” and 91 per cent indicated that spaces like Metcalfe Plaza are very important for enhancing Ottawa’s nightlife and downtown experience. Building on this success, Metcalfe Plaza is planned to expand in 2026 to a full seasonal activation.

In parallel, the Nightlife Office collaborated with cultural partners to deliver a Nuit Blanche teaser activation, aimed at building public awareness, and generating momentum for the full festival in 2026. The Mobile Homme show on October 17, 2025, in the ByWard Market attracted more than 3,000 spectators. The return of the full Nuit Blanche experience is scheduled for September 26, 2026, as part of the 200th anniversary celebrations of the founding of Bytown.

For both initiatives, the Nightlife Office played a convening and enabling role, facilitating partnerships between event producers, BIAs, and City services, thereby contributing to downtown vibrancy, and expanding Ottawa’s after-dark cultural offer. Looking ahead, in 2026 the Nightlife Office will have access to a dedicated \$150,000 budget to support new placemaking and nightlife activities, continuing its work to strengthen Ottawa’s nightlife cultural ecosystem and city-wide engagement.

R9. Develop a virtual nightlife resource centre of tools and resources for new and established nightlife businesses and event organizers to encourage diverse, sustainable, inclusive, and compatible experiences, events, and businesses — Complete

In June 2025, the Nightlife Office launched OttawaAtNight.ca / OttawaLaNuit.ca, an online resource centre that serves as the public facing digital hub of the City of Ottawa's Nightlife Office. The website provides a centralized platform for Ottawa's nightlife economy and culture by listing nightlife businesses with cultural programming (more than 100 businesses are listed), offering a searchable venues directory, and promoting independent initiatives that animate Ottawa after dark. It also provides valuable information for nightlife operators, cultural producers, and event organizers, including updates on permits, regulations, funding opportunities, and city programs relevant to nightlife activity, all while publishing reports, announcements, and insights tied to 24-hour governance and city building.

Since its launch, the site has become a key reference point for residents, visitors, and industry interest holders (with 78,000 page views, 220,000 events and 78,000 unique visitors to date), underscoring growing engagement with Ottawa's nightlife ecosystem. The platform is designed to evolve over time, with ongoing enhancements planned to expand its tools, content, and sector support resources. By reinforcing the role of nightlife in downtown revitalization, tourism, cultural vibrancy, and community wellbeing, OttawaAtNight.ca supports the broader objectives of the Nightlife Economy Action Plan and helps position Ottawa's nightlife culture as an accessible and compelling part of the city's overall experience.

R10. Identify opportunities to support the establishment of new mid-size venues (1,500 - 2,000-person capacity) for events and live music — Complete

In June 2024, Live Nation announced that its History brand from Toronto would be expanding to Ottawa, taking over the former Chapters building recently acquired by the National Capital Commission. This 2,000-capacity standing venue will host a wide range of artists from Ottawa, across Canada, and internationally, providing a platform for both emerging and established performers.

The establishment of History addresses a longstanding gap in Ottawa's venue ladder, offering a mid-size capacity space that complements smaller club venues and larger arenas, thereby supporting the growth of a more diverse and resilient live music ecosystem. By providing a dedicated venue for high-quality performances, the project is

expected to strengthen Ottawa's live entertainment sector, attract touring artists who previously bypassed the city due to limited capacity options, and create opportunities for local talent to perform on a professional stage.

Scheduled to open in August 2026, History represents a key milestone in the Nightlife Office's broader strategy to enhance the city's nightlife economy, improve cultural vibrancy, and support downtown activation. Its presence is anticipated to generate economic benefits through increased tourism, higher patron spending in surrounding businesses, and expanded employment opportunities within the live events sector. Moreover, the venue contributes to Ottawa's long-term goal of positioning itself as a destination for diverse and high-quality nightlife experiences.

Conclusion

In its first full year of operations, the Nightlife Office successfully delivered on its foundational mandate by establishing dedicated governance structures, modernizing regulatory frameworks, piloting innovative safety and placemaking initiatives, and actively promoting Ottawa's nightlife economy to both national and international audiences. Key achievements included the creation of the Nightlife Council to foster collaboration between City departments, residents, and industry interest holders; the launch of OttawaAtNight.ca as a central digital hub for nightlife information and resources; and the facilitation of high-profile cultural and placemaking projects such as Metcalfe Plaza and the Nuit Blanche teaser activation.

Through these initiatives, the Office has not only enhanced the safety, accessibility, and inclusiveness of Ottawa's nightlife but also strengthened communication channels between City services, industry operators, and community partners. By supporting venue development, promoting cultural diversity, and integrating nightlife into broader city-building and tourism strategies, the Nightlife Office has positioned Ottawa as a Canadian leader in innovative nightlife policy and governance. Collectively, these efforts have established, for the first time, a coordinated governance, policy, and delivery model for Ottawa's nightlife economy, providing a strong foundation for the continued implementation of the Nightlife Economy Action Plan, and ensuring that the sector continues to grow in a sustainable, vibrant, and inclusive manner.

A look at 2026

In 2026, the Nightlife Office will focus on two primary priorities: delivering cultural and placemaking pilot projects that support a vibrant, safe, and inclusive nightlife environment, supported by \$150,000.00 in Council-approved funding, and developing a

new Nightlife Strategy to guide future work and reflect the evolving realities of Ottawa's nightlife economy.

Ottawa's first Nightlife Economy Action Plan was approved by Council in 2023, and the most recent economic benchmarking of the sector was completed in 2022 during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the Action Plan's recommendations remain relevant, the operating context has changed significantly. Shifts in work patterns, evolving cultural preferences, post-pandemic recovery, rising inflation, and increased expectations around safety, accessibility and inclusion have reshaped how residents, visitors and workers experience the city after dark. An updated strategy supported by current economic data will ensure the City's approach remains responsive and forward-looking.

As part of this work, the Nightlife Office will commission an updated economic impact study to better understand the scale and contribution of Ottawa's *nighttime* economy. In addition to traditional nightlife sectors such as hospitality, entertainment, arts and culture, the assessment will examine the broader nighttime economy, including sectors such as healthcare, transportation, public safety, logistics, manufacturing, delivery services, and essential municipal operations. These sectors represent a significant share of nighttime employment but have historically been underrepresented in economic analyses.

The development of the new Nightlife Strategy will also include consultation with City departments, businesses, workers, and community partners to identify challenges and emerging opportunities. Together, the economic analysis and engagement process will establish clear priorities and actions to support a resilient, inclusive, and well-coordinated nighttime economy. The updated Strategy will be presented to Council in Q1 2027.