



Burlington Economic Development and Tourism
April 10, 2026

Mayor Marianne Meed Ward and Members of Council
City of Burlington
426 Brant Street
Burlington, ON

RE: TRN-04-26 – Governance, Service Agreement Framework and Strategic Alignment

Delegation from:

Ron Laidman, Chair, Board of Directors
Burlington Economic Development and Tourism (BEDT)
Leslie Cooke-Bithrey, Chair, HR & Governance Committee

Dear Mayor Meed Ward and Members of Council,

On behalf of the HR & Governance Committee and the Board of Directors of Burlington Economic Development and Tourism (BEDT), we appreciate the opportunity to provide input on Report TRN-04-26.

We would like to acknowledge the significant work undertaken by City staff and the collaborative engagement in achieving the Council direction regarding CAO-06-25. The Board remains committed to a partnership-based, solutions-oriented approach as we work together to strengthen alignment, governance, and service delivery.

This delegation is in support of the staff recommendation to proceed with Option 1 – an Enhanced Service Agreement.

We note that financial analysis, cost assumptions, and risk considerations associated with TRN-04-26 are addressed in detail through the Finance & Risk Committee delegation submitted separately.

This submission focuses on governance, service agreement framework, accountability, and strategic alignment considerations.

Governance Model and Partnership Value

In alignment with staff analysis, we recognize that BEDT is:

- An independent, incorporated not-for-profit organization that does not form part of the Agencies Boards and Committees (ABC) framework
- Governed by an independent Board of Directors
- Operating as a strategic delivery partner to the City

This distinction is foundational and should be clearly reflected in the service agreement and partnership approach. BEDT is not a municipal department or ABC, but rather a partner organization that delivers services on behalf of the City within an aligned governance framework.

The current governance model provides a level of value that is not replicated under an internal structure.

BEDT's Board:

- Is composed of private sector and industry leaders
- Brings direct market insight, sector expertise, and business networks
- Enables credibility and trust with the business community and investors
- Provides the ability to convene partners and respond quickly to economic opportunities and risks

This model supports:

- Stronger alignment between municipal priorities and market realities
- More effective investment attraction and sector development
- Enhanced stakeholder engagement and partnership leverage

Importantly, this structure enables BEDT to:

- Operate with agility and responsiveness
- Deliver programs that are market-informed and outcomes-driven
- Act as a bridge between the City of Burlington and the business community

Principles-Based, Strategy-Led Service Agreement

The board supports the development of a renewed service agreement and recommends that it be structured as:

a) Principles-Based and Strategy-Aligned

- The agreement should be principles-based at this stage, aligned to Horizon 2050
- It should evolve alongside development of an updated Community Economic Development Strategy, building from:
 - Vision 2040
 - Economic Vision 2025
 - Vision to Focus
 - Red Tape Red Carpet Taskforce
 - BEDT 2023-2026 Strategy
 - Destination Stewardship Plan

This approach ensures scope, KPIs, and performance expectations are grounded in an updated, Council-aligned strategy framework established through the evolution Vision 2040 to Horizon 2050 that will have the flexibility to evolve as strategy is refined.

b) Partnership-Oriented Positioning

The Board noted that early-stage materials and initial framing for the service agreement may reflect a more transactional tone, which is understandable given the stage of development.

We recognize that:

- Materials at this stage are intended to establish a preliminary position
- The full service agreement will be developed through ongoing collaboration and discussion following council direction

We recommend that the final agreement clearly reflect a partnership model, grounded in shared objectives, aligned strategy, and mutual accountability.

c) Governance, Role Clarity and Accountability

The service agreement should provide clear definition of:

- The relationship between BEDT, City staff, and Council
- The reporting framework and accountability structure
- BEDT's role as:
 - An independent organization
 - Governed by a Board responsible for oversight
 - Delivering services aligned to Council strategy and direction

Additional clarity is required on:

- The defined scope of services delivered on behalf of the City
- Any rescoping from current service delivery

Ensuring alignment with strategy and defined services while maintaining appropriate operational flexibility and recognizing BEDT's independent status.

Strategic Alignment and KPI Framework

BEDT's work is already grounded in:

- Vision 2040
- Economic Vision 2025
- Vision to Focus implementation
- Red Tape Red Carpet
- Destination Stewardship Plan
- BEDT Strategic Plan 2023-26

These frameworks provide established priorities and defined KPIs aligned with economic and community outcomes that have been approved by council.

The opportunity through TRN-04-26 is to align and modernize these frameworks within a Horizon 2050 context evolving from Vision 2040/Economic Vision 2025 to an updated community economic development strategy, not rebuild from first principles.

Context on Findings – MDB, Rubicon and Transition Period

We would also like to provide important context regarding the framing of findings within TRN-04-26. The report combines findings from the 2020 MDB review and 2025 Rubicon report into a single narrative of persistent challenges. Portions of this context were not fully reflected in the materials provided for the BEDT board review associated with TRN-04-26 and were therefore not reflected in our feedback to staff.

Key Considerations:

The MDB review did not conclude that the external model was less effective, and identified benefits of the model, including the following that are not reflected in TRN-04-26:

- Innovation capacity
- Initiatives such as TechPlace

The Rubicon report reflects a point-in-time assessment, based on:

- Limited business survey responses
- Variable stakeholder engagement with the noted absence of engagement with key business support ecosystem partners
- Mixed and at times conflicting perspectives across interviews

As outlined in the Board's prior delegation on CAO-06-25:

- There were methodological limitations to the Rubicon report, including:
 - Limited engagement with business stakeholders and partners
 - Small sample sizes in survey inputs with primarily small businesses represented
 - Divergent perspectives between City and external stakeholders

It is critical that findings of Rubicon be understood within the context of an active transition period, including:

- The BEDT amalgamation (completed January 2025)
- Ongoing City transformation initiatives
- Changes in reporting structures and governance processes during the period of engagement

Identified gaps should be understood as transitional and structural, not indicative of model failure. We recommend that Council materials:

- Clearly differentiate MDB and Rubicon findings
- Avoid establishing a negative baseline that does not reflect:
 - Recent progress
 - Completed integration work
 - Ongoing alignment efforts

Service Delivery and Organizational Considerations

From an HR & Governance perspective, Option 2 introduces risks related to:

- Staff transition and retention
- Loss of institutional knowledge
- Disruption to stakeholder relationships
- Reduced agility in service delivery

These considerations are particularly important given:

- The recent successful organizational merger
- Current alignment work underway with the City of Burlington

Alignment with Staff Recommendation

The BEDT board supports the staff recommendation to proceed with Option 1 – Enhanced Service Agreement, which provides:

A structured pathway to:

- Clarify governance and roles
- Strengthen accountability
- Formalize alignment mechanisms

The ability to:

- Maintain continuity of service delivery
- Retain governance and stakeholder engagement strengths
- Evolve within a defined and collaborative framework

Closing

The BEDT Board remains committed to working collaboratively with City staff and Council to strengthen governance, alignment, and service delivery.

We believe that:

- The current BEDT service delivery model provides a strong and evolving foundation
- The key opportunity is to formalize and strengthen alignment through a renewed service agreement and an evolved Community Economic Development Strategy, building on Vision 2040 with the integrated Economic Vision 2025
- Proceeding with Option 1 enables this work to be undertaken in a measured, strategic, and partnership-based manner

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this process and look forward to continued collaboration.

Respectfully submitted,

Ron Laidman
Chair, Board of Directors
Burlington Economic Development and Tourism

Leslie Cooke-Bithrey
Chair, HR & Governance Committee
Burlington Economic Development and Tourism

cc:

Curt Benson, Chief Administrative Officer, City of Burlington
Andrew Scott, Chief Transformation Officer, City of Burlington
Anita Cassidy, Executive Director, BEDT
BEDT Board of Directors