



Staff Report

Strategic Initiatives – Special Projects & Strategic Initiatives

Report To: COW- Admin, Corp and Finance, SI, Comm. Services
Meeting Date: October 6, 2025
Report Number: SI.25.032
Title: Destination Strategy 2025 – 2026 Work Plan
Prepared by: Tim Hendry, Director of Strategic Initiatives

A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report SI.25.032, entitled “Destination Strategy 2025 – 2026 Work Plan”;

AND THAT Council endorses the 2025 – 2026 Destination Strategy workplan in principle as presented;

AND THAT Council directs staff to include \$150,000 from the Town’s share of Municipal Accommodation Tax to implement the Destination Strategy Workplan into the 2026 budget for consideration;

AND THAT Council directs staff to apply for available grant funding opportunities to support the implementation of the Destination Strategy;

AND THAT Council acknowledges that staff will provide an annual report regarding the implementation progress of the Destination Strategy.

B. Overview

This report seeks Council endorsement of the 2025 – 2026 Destination Strategy workplan, which is based on the 2025 – 2030 Destination Strategy that was approved by Council in May 2026.

C. Background

The [2025 – 2030 Destination Strategy](#) is the Town’s first formal strategy to guide and manage tourism in The Blue Mountains. The strategy was approved by the Committee of the Whole on May 26, 2025, through report [SI.25.015 “Approval of 205 – 2030 Destination Strategy”](#).

The strategy was developed through a collaborative relationship with the Blue Mountain Village Association, serving as the Town's Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) and was informed through direct public and tourism sector stakeholder engagement.

The project work plan included both a public and industry survey assessing the role and perception of tourism, two public open houses and multiple industry roundtable events to engage directly with local tourism businesses and operators, accommodation providers and hospitality sector leaders. Importantly, the development of the Destination Strategy drew from past tourism-focused work for the Town, including the Municipal Accommodation Tax research study and the Beaver Valley Sustainable Tourism Strategy. Through this feedback and engagement, the Destination Strategy provides a robust framework that addresses key tourism-related issues and aims to position the Town to succeed as a leading destination through proactive planning, management and infrastructure investment.

Through the recommended actions, the strategy provided examples of key projects to achieve the expected objectives and outcomes and to enhance the experience of both visitors and residents. This report provides Council with in-depth information regarding the work plan and implementation details for 2025 and 2026.

D. Analysis

Following the approval of the strategy in May 2025, staff have continued efforts to support the local tourism sector and worked collaboratively with project partners to develop a detailed work plan to guide implementation throughout 2025 and 2026. The proposed work plan is summarized below with the full details available in attachment #1 to this report.

2025 Actions

- A3.1- Establish a Destination Advisory Committee
- A2.3 - Establish a monitoring and evaluation framework
- A1.1 - Revise by-laws to support tourism and agritourism innovation and encourage sector diversification
- B1.1 – Streamline wayfinding and interpretive signage

2026 Work Plan

- A2.1 – Conduct a carrying capacity study
- A1.4 – Establish a workforce housing reserve fund and explore solutions to support attainable housing
- A1.2- Revise Town decision-making processes to ensure that impacts to tourism are considered
- A2.4 – Develop tourism sentiment and experience surveys to engage residents and visitors
- A3.3 - Foster collaboration with indigenous communities
- B2.2 – Ensure consistency and access to visitor information services

- A2.2 – Create dedicated initiatives for tourism opportunities: agritourism, cultural tourism and sports tourism

Implementation Details

As explained in the work plan, not all actions are the sole responsibility of the Town. Many actions will leverage the partnership and resources of the Blue Mountain Village Association (BMVA), which serves as the Town’s Destination Marketing Organization. The Strategic Initiatives department will lead implementation with support from various Town departments, including By-law Enforcement, Planning and Community Services.

In addition, many actions will be supported through the collaborative efforts and expertise of the Destination Advisory Committee, including community groups and external organizations.

Funding to support the Destination Strategy will be allocated through the Town’s Share of Municipal Accommodation Tax. As many of the budget figures referenced in the work plan are estimates and presented in ranges, it’s recommended that Council allocate an overall amount to the implementation of the Destination Strategy. The report recommends allocating \$150,000 to implement the 2025/2026 work plan. Project-specific staff reports with further details will be presented to Council based on the work plan implementation schedule.

In addition, the Town and DMO will actively monitor and apply for available grant opportunities to support implementation. Details regarding the status of grant applications will be shared with Council through the annual progress report.

E. Strategic Priorities

1. Communication and Engagement

We will enhance communications and engagement between Town Staff, Town residents and stakeholders

2. Organizational Excellence

We will continually seek out ways to improve the internal organization of Town Staff and the management of Town assets.

3. Community

We will protect and enhance the community feel and the character of the Town, while ensuring the responsible use of resources and restoration of nature.

4. Quality of Life

We will foster a high quality of life for full-time and part-time residents of all ages and stages, while welcoming visitors.

F. Environmental Impacts

The principles of sustainability are embedded within the goals, anticipated outcomes and recommended actions of the strategy. Staff understand and acknowledge the importance and significance of preserving the natural landscape both for the quality of life for residents and future generations and to ensure the best interests of the Town's tourism sector.

The natural environment of the Niagara Escarpment and Georgian Bay is a significant attraction for visitors and residents and forms the essence of their experience here. Through this Strategy, the Town is committed to managing tourism responsibly and sustainability to help ensure the long-term health and viability of the community.

G. Financial Impacts

The recommendation of this report is for Council to support the allocation of \$150,000 from the Town's share of Municipal Accommodation Tax into the 2026 budget process for consideration. As detailed through the Municipal Accommodation Tax report ([SI.25.030](#)), the use of the Town's share of MAT will be considered through a formal evaluation process completed by the Senior Management Team using the Council approved evaluation criteria.

Given the detailed work undertaken as part of the Strategy Development process, staff recommend that Council preliminarily supports the allocation of the \$150,000 from the Town's share of Municipal Accommodation Tax, with formal approval considered through the follow-up staff report that will be presented in November 2025, with the outcomes of the evaluation process.

H. In Consultation With

Patti Kendall, Blue Mountain Village Association & Town Destination Marketing Organization

Camilo Montoya-Guevara, Bannikin, External Tourism Consultant

I. Public Engagement

The topic of this Staff Report has not been the subject of a Public Meeting and/or a Public Information Centre as neither a Public Meeting nor a Public Information Centre are required. However, any comments regarding this report should be submitted to Tim Hendry, Director of Strategic Initiatives si@thebluemountains.ca.

J. Attached

1. 2025 and 2026 Destination Strategy Work Plan

Respectfully submitted,

Tim Hendry
Director of Strategic Initiatives

For more information, please contact:
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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SI.25.032 Destination Strategy 2025 - 2026 Workplan.docx
Attachments:	- Attachment 1 - 2025-2026 Destination Strategy Work Plan.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Sep 29, 2025

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

No Signature - Task assigned to Tim Hendry was completed by workflow administrator Carrie Fairley

Tim Hendry - Sep 29, 2025 - 1:40 PM



The Town of The Blue Mountains

Destination Strategy
2025 & 2026 Workplan

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Overview

The 2025 - 2030 Destination Strategy was approved by Council on May 26, 2025. To action the strategy, the 2025/2026 Workplan was developed to build on the pre-scoped implementation plan and to prioritize the Strategy recommendations based on current resources, competing and complimentary projects, tourism industry needs and community priorities. The format of this Workplan will set the standard for how the implementation of the Destination Strategy will be planned for and shared in future years.

The Workplan serves as the actionable framework through which the Town aims to achieve the goals set forth in the Destination Strategy. The Workplan prioritizes specific initiatives aligned with each of the strategy's four pillars aiming to enhance tourism infrastructure, elevate visitor experiences, and foster a robust tourism ecosystem.

Prioritization within the Workplan is linked to resource allocation, ensuring that staffing and budgets are efficiently directed towards high-impact projects. This includes foundational actions such as establishing a Destination Advisory Committee, conducting a carrying capacity study and allocating funding for workforce housing, along with strategic tourism promotional initiatives that will be actioned by the Blue Mountain Village Association serving as the Destination Marketing Organization.

The Workplan aims to optimize partnerships across interrelated areas by working with tourism industry members, local business association and regional/provincial agencies to positively benefit the Town's tourism industry, visitor experience and quality of life for residents.

Additionally, the Workplan integrates mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation, which is essential for adjusting strategies and tracking progress. It accounts for tourism's evolving landscape, setting benchmarks for success and allowing for flexibility in line with community feedback and industry trends.

Ultimately, the 2025/2026 Workplan is more than just an operational guide; it embodies a commitment to realizing the vision of the Destination Strategy through targeted actions and strategic foresight, ensuring The Blue Mountains continues to thrive as a premier, well-managed, and sustainable tourism destination.

Strategic Pillars

The Destination Strategy is structured around four strategic pillars, each accompanied by specific objectives designed to guide its implementation. Each pillar includes recommended actions that were developed with the environmental, social, and economic contexts in mind.

1. Connected and Empowered Destination Network

- Objective A1 - Strengthen the Town's role and capacity as a destination management leader
- Objective A2 - Grow knowledge and understanding of destination opportunities and challenges
- Objective A3 - Foster new relationships and formalize existing partnerships to expand capacity

2. Accessible and Quality Destination Experience

- Objective B1 – Enhance the sense of place and invest in tourism infrastructure
- Objective B2 - Align and enhance the destination's tourism services

3. Cohesive and Inspirational Destination Identity

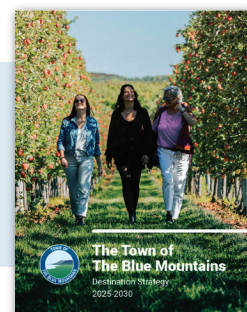
- Objective C1 - Bring to life an inclusive, distinctive, and compelling place brand
- Objective C2 - Mindfully market and promote the entire destination

4. Compelling and Diversified Destination Offering

- Objective D1 - Guide the development of a diversified and four-season tourism offering.

These pillars and objectives came out of the collective insights, perspectives, and knowledge gathered through active participation and feedback from tourism industry members and community residents from August 2024 to April 2025.

Scan to Open the Full Version of the Destination Strategy



Workplan Overview 2025/2026

The Workplans for 2025 and 2026 establish a clear framework for implementing the Destination Strategy, emphasizing strategic priorities to manage and grow tourism in a responsible and sustainable manner.

In 2025, the focus is on strengthening governance and infrastructure to support tourism growth. In 2026, the actions pivot towards deeper engagement and strategic studies, ensuring alignment with industry and community needs. Collectively, these actions are designed to guide The Blue Mountains towards achieving its vision of a vibrant, sustainable and world class tourism destination.

2025 Actions

1. Establish a Destination Advisory Committee (A3.1)
2. Establish a monitoring and evaluation framework (A2.3)
3. Revise by-laws to support innovation and encourage sector diversification (A1.1)
4. Streamline wayfinding and interpretive signage (B1.1)

2026 Actions

1. Conduct a carrying capacity study (A2.1)
2. Establish a workforce housing fund and explore solutions to support housing (A1.4)
3. Revise Town decision-making processes to ensure that tourism is considered (A1.2)
4. Develop tourism sentiment surveys to engage residents and visitors (A2.4)
5. Foster collaboration with indigenous communities (A3.3)
6. Ensure consistency and access to visitor information services (B2.2)
7. Create dedicated initiatives for tourism opportunities (A2.2)

**Titles of actions have been shortened for design purposes*

2025 Workplan

The focus for 2025 is to strengthen governance and infrastructure to support tourism growth. As the Destination Strategy was approved mid-year, the 2025 workplan is focused on initiating actions to demonstrate momentum and progress. Given the compressed timelines, many of the actions will be initiated with implementation continued into 2026 and beyond.

Action A3.1: Establish a Destination Advisory Committee		
Key Steps:	• Research best practices related to Destination Advisory Committee governance structures and committee representation • Create a draft Terms of Reference for Council review and approval • Complete the committee recruitment process • Develop committee orientation material and schedule meetings	
Priority: High	Lead: Strategic Initiatives	Approval: Council
Budget: N/A	Timeline: Q4 2025 - Q1 2026	Resources: Internal Staff
Expected Outcomes:	• Formation of a well-structured committee that represents a breadth of local tourism interests, expertise and community perspectives • Development of a supportive governance structure to guide informed and strategic decision-making to support tourism • Enhanced collaboration among stakeholders, facilitating cohesive actions towards shared tourism goals	

Action A2.3: Establish a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework		
Key Steps:	• Research best practices related to strategy performance reporting and destination performance measurement • Identify and confirm data points that will be tracked/reported • Integrate the framework into the Destination Strategy webpage on the Town website and launch	
Priority: High	Lead: Strategic Initiatives	Approval: Director of SI
Budget: N/A	Timeline: Q3 2025 - Q1 2027	Resources: Internal Staff
Expected Outcomes:	• Creation of a framework to monitor and measure the implementation progress of the Destination Strategy • Review and confirmation of key destination indicators to report on the role of tourism in the destination and to increase public awareness of tourism's value • Collaboration across departments and partners through shared metrics and reporting	

Action A1.1: Revise by-laws to support tourism and agritourism innovation and encourage sector diversification		
Key Steps:	• Conduct internal review to identify by-laws/policies that may have a potential impact and/or connection to tourism and agritourism • Research and draft potential amendments that could be considered to support key tourism and agritourism goals and objectives • Present research findings and potential changes to Council seeking endorsement to advance recommended amendments • Conduct public consultation including relevant external organizations, stakeholder groups and residents • Further refine and present the final recommendation to Council for approval/endorsement	
Priority: Medium	Lead: Strategic Initiatives	Approval: Council
Budget: \$6 - 10K	Timeline: Q4 2025 - Q4 2026	Resources: Internal & External Support
Expected Outcomes:	• Updated by-laws that more effectively support tourism and agritourism objectives, enabling innovation and sector diversification • Increased engagement with stakeholders leading to well-informed amendments that reflect community and industry needs	

Action B1.1: Streamline wayfinding and interpretive signage		
Key Steps:	• Continue to advance efforts to install Gateway and Community Entrance signs • Continue to support the interpretive sign work of the Blue Mountain Public Library and Craigleith Heritage Depot • Conduct an inventory/needs review to identify where new wayfinding signs are needed and where existing signs require refurbishment • Research and apply for grant funding opportunities when available	
Priority: Medium	Lead: Strategic Initiatives	Approval: Director of SI & Council
Budget: N/A	Timeline: Q4 2025 - Q4 2026	Resources: Internal & External Support
Expected Outcomes:	• Updated, consistent, accessible, and relevant wayfinding and signage across the destination, including interpretive and informational signage • Improved visitor experiences and engagement across the whole destination through clearer informative signage	

2026 Workplan

The focus for 2026 is to enhance the foundation that supports tourism as the Town's primary economic sector. Actions are planned to understand tourism opportunities and challenges, including prioritizing tourism considerations within Town decision making, addressing key issues such as workforce housing, deepening relationships and partnerships with community groups and external organizations, and to beginning the process to further explore areas of opportunity to grow and support tourism.

Action A2.1: Conduct a carrying capacity study		
Key Steps:	• Pre-engage potential partners to gather interest, confirm potential study locations and to build awareness about upcoming work • Confirm study scope/priorities, hire external consultant and implement monitoring/measurement tools • Review existing data inputs and collect new data as required • Work with the project team to conduct study across four tourism seasons and analyze findings • Present findings to Council to guide future planning, investment and tourism development decisions	
Priority: High	Lead: Strategic Initiatives	Approval: Director of SI
Budget: \$50k	Timeline: Q2 2026 - Q2 2027	Resources: Internal & External Support
Expected Outcomes:	• Comprehensive understanding of the Town's environmental, social, and economic tourism limits, informing future development and investment decisions • Data-driven insights to balance tourism growth with environmental and community health	



Action A1.4: Establish a workforce housing fund and explore solutions to support housing		
Key Steps:	• Define fund purpose and policy, including clarifying objectives, drafting a policy framework for how the reserve fund will operate, and revising Municipal Accommodation Tax bylaw as needed • Review opportunities to integrate the reserve fund with Community Improvement Program incentives to support industry participation • Present the framework to Council for endorsement and seek direction of MAT fund percentage allocation • Support ongoing Council efforts to increase the supply of workforce housing	
Priority: High	Lead: Strategic Initiatives	Approval: Council
Budget: N/A	Timeline: Q1 2026 - Ongoing	Resources: Internal Staff
Expected Outcomes:	• Development of a fund and policy that bolster workforce housing availability, supporting tourism sector employment • Strategic integration of community improvement incentives to foster industry participation and support	

Action A1.2: Revise Town decision-making processes to ensure that potential impacts to tourism are considered before decisions are made		
Key Steps:	• Conduct internal review to identify opportunities to integrate tourism considerations into the decision making process (ex- staff reports, internal review meetings, budget meetings, etc.), with a focus on where tourism considerations are currently absent or informal • Review opportunities to increase the awareness regarding the role and importance of tourism to the Town's economy into employee and Council orientation and training • Identify opportunities to share the story regarding the role and importance of tourism to the Town's economy to the general public and residents	
Priority: Medium	Lead: Strategic Initiatives	Approval: Council & SMT
Budget: N/A	Timeline: Q2 2026 - Q4 2026	Resources: Internal Staff
Expected Outcomes:	• Incorporation of tourism implications in the Town's decision-making process, enhancing alignment with economic and community goals • Increased awareness and appreciation of tourism's role among staff, Council, and the public	

Action A2.4: Develop and implement tourism sentiment and experience surveys to engage visitors and residents		
Key Steps:	• Define survey objective/scope and adapt previous question sets (ex - Role of Tourism Survey and Resident Satisfaction Survey) • Develop project plan and align surveys with internal work timelines and tourism seasonality • Engage Grey County, RTO7, local BIAs, accommodation providers, and tourism operators to support distribution and promotion • Analyze survey results, identify key insights, and incorporate learnings into future Destination Strategy strategic actions	
Priority: Medium	Lead: Strategic Initiatives	Approval: Director of SI & DMO
Budget: \$6 - 10K	Timeline: Q3 2026 - Q1 2027	Resources: Internal & External Support
Expected Outcomes:	• Comprehensive data collection on resident and visitor tourism experiences to refine the focus of destination management and to inform decision making • Establishing data sets to benchmark and monitor progress to improve sentiment and personal experiences related to tourism	

Action A3.3: Foster collaboration with Indigenous communities and Indigenous tourism organizations and businesses		
Key Steps:	• Review and confirm contact information for local Indigenous tourism organizations and officials • Strengthen relationships to share updates on destination development and explore collaboration opportunities • Align with existing indigenous projects and explore co-development of Indigenous tourism products and storytelling capacity/activations • Assess value of Town membership with Indigenous tourism organizations (e.g., Indigenous Tourism Ontario, Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada) to grow partnerships and stay informed on good practices and opportunities • Continue established meeting processes and regularity to build on process and trust, leading to future partnerships, storytelling expansion, and a more connected destination	
Priority: Medium	Lead: Strategic Initiatives	Approval: Director of SI
Budget: N/A	Timeline: Q1 2026 - Ongoing	Resources: Internal Staff
Expected Outcomes:	• Strengthened partnerships with Indigenous communities and organizations, promoting inclusive tourism development • Co-development of tourism products and narratives that honor Indigenous cultures and histories	

Action B2.2		Ensure consistency and access to visitor information services	
Key Steps:		- Identify visitor information gaps through visitor survey and first impression assessment reviews (availability and accuracy of information, ease of access, brand consistency, etc.) - Confirm visitor information priorities and approaches including available resources, organizational roles, marketing needs and current practices - Work with Grey County, RTO7, local BIAs, tourism businesses, surrounding municipalities, and Destination Ontario to support content sharing, distribution, and resource contribution - Design and develop visitor information materials (website, social media, print, signage, etc.)	
Priority: Medium		Lead: Strategic Initiatives & DMO	Approval: Director of SI
Budget: \$51 -100K		Timeline: Q1 2026 - Ongoing	Resources: Internal Staff & DMO
Expected Outcomes:		- Strong and consistent access to visitor information services to inform trip planning, local event promotion and to enhance brand consistency across platforms - To strengthen the destination brand identity and position through collaboration with the DMO and local/regional tourism partners for improved content distribution and visitor engagement	
Action A2.2		Create dedicated initiatives for niche tourism opportunities including agritourism, cultural tourism and sports tourism	
Key Steps:		- Leverage the Destination Advisory Committee (DAC) to identify opportunities to support and grow agritourism, cultural tourism and sports tourism - Conduct best practice research to identify current market gaps, support, services and infrastructure required to advance the opportunity - Establish DAC subcommittees to conduct indepth opportunity review - Review potential initiatives in line with Destination Strategy and Economic Development Action Plan and schedule for implementation	
Priority: Medium		Lead: Strategic Initiatives & DMO	Approval: Director of SI
Budget: \$16 - 30K		Timeline: Q1 2026 - Ongoing	Resources: Internal Staff & DMO
Expected Outcomes:		- Diversification of tourism offerings, leading to growth during shoulder seasons and stabilizing economic impacts throughout the year - Increased visitor spending and extended stays through enriched experiences that appeal to diverse interests - Enhanced collaboration with industry stakeholders and the Destination Advisory Committee through targeted action plans	

Investment & Resources

Investment and resource allocation is crucial for the successful implementation of the Destination Strategy. Funding to support implementation will come from four primary areas:

1. Town Share of Municipal Accommodation Tax
2. DMO Share of Municipal Accommodation Tax
3. External Funding through Provincial Tourism Grant Applications
4. Previous Town Funds Allocated to Tourism

Given the interconnected nature of tourism, it's important to highlight that not all actions identified in the 2025 and 2026 workplans are the sole responsibility of the Town. Many actions will leverage the partnership and resources of the Blue Mountain Village Association (BMVA), serving as the Town's Destination Marketing Organization. Further, many actions will be supported through the collaborative efforts and expertise of the Destination Advisory Committee, including community groups and external organizations.

To ensure that the Town is positioned to implement the strategy, staff hours will be allocated within employee workplans of the Strategic Initiatives department. Further, the BMVA has hired a dedicated part-time staff position to support the actions of the DMO.

A key component of this financial framework is the strategic allocation of Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) funds. As identified when the Destination Strategy was approved and through the MAT exploration and implementation research conducted in 2023, a portion of the MAT funds should be allocated to support the Destination Strategy. As many of the budget figures referenced in the work plan are estimates and presented in ranges, it's recommended that Council allocate an overall amount to the implementation of the Destination Strategy. The report recommends allocating \$150,000 to implement the 2025/2026 work plan. Project-specific staff reports with further details will be presented to Council based on the work plan implementation schedule.

In addition, the Town and DMO will actively monitor and apply for available grant opportunities to support implementation. Details regarding the status of grant applications will be shared with Council through the annual progress report.

Conclusion

The 2025/2026 Workplan for the Destination Strategy underscores the Town's pivotal commitment to nurturing a thriving and sustainable tourism sector by aligning key actions with the goals, objectives and anticipated outcomes of the Strategy. The Workplan is not just a roadmap but an embodiment of collective aspirations, informed by community and industry input and expert insights through continued collaboration with and support from Bannikin. It establishes a framework aimed at enhancing governance, infrastructure and collaboration to grow, manage and support The Blue Mountains as a leading four-season tourism destination.

Central to this vision is the understanding that tourism should enhance, not overwhelm, the local community and natural environment. This plan is dedicated to proactively managing tourism in a way that balances the enjoyment and quality of experiences for both visitors and residents. Strategic actions are designed to ensure that tourism pressures are identified, understood, and addressed effectively, preserving the community's character and environmental values.

By allocating a portion of the Town's Municipal Accommodation Tax and leveraging strategic partnerships with stakeholders such as the Blue Mountain Village Association, this Workplan underlines a strong resource strategy that ensures the Town is well-equipped to meet the objectives set out in the Destination Strategy. The integration of adaptive management practices, alongside consistent monitoring and evaluation, positions the Town to remain agile in the face of evolving industry trends and community needs .

Further, this Workplan fosters an environment where economic growth goes hand-in-hand with sustainability and community well-being, ensuring that tourism continues to be a vital contributor to the Town's economy. With the foundation laid by the 2025/2026 Workplan, The Blue Mountains is well positioned to not only meet but exceed its goals, setting a benchmark for sustainable tourism leadership in Ontario.

