



Staff Report

Administration – Communications

Report To: COW_Finance_Admin_Fire_Community_Services
Meeting Date: September 16, 2024
Report Number: FAF.24.105
Title: Tourism Strategy Project Introduction
Prepared by: Tim Hendry, Manager of Communications and Economic Development

A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report FAF.24.105, entitled “Tourism Strategy Project Introduction” for information purposes.

B. Overview

This report provides Council with an overview of the work plan for the Tourism and Marketing Strategy project.

C. Background

Through the process of researching the feasibility of implementing [Municipal Accommodation Tax \(MAT\)](#), the Town realized a need and opportunity to develop a formal Tourism and Destination Strategy.

The original recommendation to develop a formal Tourism and Destination Strategy for the Town was supported by Council through report [FAF.24.004](#). In July 2024, Council formally approved the award of a request-for-proposal (RFP) through report [FAF.24.076](#) to hire a tourism consultant to lead the development of the strategy. Through the RFP evaluation process, the project was awarded to Bannikin.

Bannikin specializes in research, strategy, and tourism development and is respected as a leading expert in strategy development for municipalities and destination marketing organizations.

D. Analysis

The Tourism and Marketing Strategy is being developed through collaboration and consultation with residents, tourism businesses, operators and industry stakeholders, as well as through the engagement of external tourism-related organizations.

The strategy is divided into two parallel parts. The first is a five-year Destination Development Plan that will guide the Town's actions of supporting and investing in tourism and destination development. The second is a five-year Tourism Marketing Strategy that will support the actions and work plan of the Blue Mountain Village Association as the Town's Destination Marketing Organization (DMO).

The intent is for both plans to be actionable and realistic based on the Town's role in supporting the local tourism industry, including accommodation providers, through enhancing tourism-related infrastructure and service delivery; and through the role of the DMO in leading tourism marketing/promotion, and tourism product development throughout the community.

Research, collaboration and public engagement are key pillars that will help support the development of the strategy and the action items. The following information summarizes the research and public engagement activities. Specific dates, times, location and meeting formats are still being determined and will be shared on the project webpage when available. Best efforts will be made to ensure that the public engagement activities reach as many residents and tourism businesses/operators as possible. A mix of mid-week, after-hours and weekend sessions will be used to help foster strong community participation.

1. Research Engagement and Communications Planning

- **Background and context review** - Collection and review of relevant background documents to help inform strategy development.
- **Tourism ecosystem mapping** – Detailed review of the local tourism ecosystem, including businesses/operators, support services, accommodation and more, with the goal of understanding roles/responsibilities and areas of focus.
- **Research and communications plan** – Research goals, objectives, questions, methods, data sources, tools, stakeholder database and draft outreach materials.

2. Destination Development and Marketing Research

- **Infrastructure and key services scan** – Review of tourism-related infrastructure (e.g., parking, washrooms, trails, active transportation, signage, etc.) and key tourism services (e.g., trip planning resources, visitor information/guides, visitor information channels), to identify gaps, challenges and areas of opportunity related to tourism-related infrastructure and tourism services.
- **Tourism product and asset review** – Review of existing tourism products, services, experiences, and events currently offered both locally and regionally, along with built and natural assets, as well as how these are being approached, positioned, and safeguarded.
- **Marketing review and audit** – Review of existing marketing efforts by various partners and to capture insights and observations on various marketing sources.
- **Audience and market profile research** – Defining the ideal target markets and audience segments based on existing visitor data and forecasts.

- **Destination visit and in-person research** – Three-day community visit to assess, explore, experience, and better understand the local tourism landscape, including key tourism assets, wayfinding, current and planned infrastructure, business and destination storytelling, and delivery of tourism services.
- **Tourism industry round tables** – Three industry-focused round table discussions with local tourism businesses and stakeholders.
- **Community open house** – One in-person, drop-in style community open house for residents and stakeholders to learn about the projects and to share perceptions and feedback around tourism.
- **Community focus groups** – Three virtual focus groups with residents and stakeholders to gain a deeper understanding and insight into the feedback shared through the Role of Tourism survey conducted in late 2023 as part of the Municipal Accommodation Tax project.
- **EDAC focus group** – One in-person focus group with the Town’s Economic Development Advisory Committee members to gain additional perspective and understanding on tourism to help inform the strategy.
- **Key informant interviews** – Interviews with key tourism stakeholders, representatives from local and regional tourism organizations and industry experts.
- **Best practice research** – Review of comparator destinations to assess destination marketing and tourism marketing best practices.

Following the research and public/stakeholder engagement phases, the project will move into the strategy development and pressure testing phases. Activities in these phases will focus on collaboratively developing recommendations, action items, and the strategic framework to support destination development, tourism management and marketing. The pressure testing phase of the project will include additional public and stakeholder engagement through focus groups and virtual stakeholder sessions to gather input and feedback on the draft destination development and the draft tourism marketing frameworks, along with identifying alignments between current and future work, and exploring solutions to real and perceived challenges.

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

No direct environmental impacts are anticipated as a result of this report. However, a key objective of the Tourism strategy is to understand and prioritize the sustainability of the environment, society, and the tourism economy and four-season hosting capacity of the destination.

G. Financial Impacts

In report [FAF.24.004](#), Council supported the staff recommendation to apply for grants to support the development of the tourism strategy. Under this direction, staff submitted a grant application for the Federal Tourism Growth Program. In July 2024, through report [FAF.24.076](#), Council approved a project budget at an upset limit of \$80,000 to be temporarily funded through working capital until the status of the grant is known.

Unfortunately, in August 2024, the Town received notice that the grant application was not successful. As the project has been awarded and funded through working capital, the project is proceeding as anticipated.

Staff are actively reviewing other grant opportunities and will be working with the Finance Department to review options to cover the cost of the strategy.

H. In Consultation With

Shawn Everitt, Chief Administrative Officer

Allan Gibbons, Communications and Economic Development Coordinator

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, Manager of Communications & Economic Development communications@thebluemountains.ca.

J. Attached

None.

Respectfully submitted,

Tim Hendry
Manager of Communications & Economic Development

For more information, please contact:
Tim Hendry, Manager of Communications & Economic Development
communications@thebluemountains.ca
519-599-3131 extension 282

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	FAF.24.105 Tourism Strategy Project Introduction.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Sep 5, 2024

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

Tim Hendry - Sep 4, 2024 - 9:48 AM

Shawn Everitt - Sep 5, 2024 - 8:57 AM