



Staff Report

Administration – Communications

Report To: Economic Development Advisory Committee
Meeting Date: April 12, 2021
Report Number: FAF.21.064
Title: 2021 – 2025 Economic Development Strategy
Prepared by: Tim Hendry, Manager of Communications and Economic Development

A. Recommendations

THAT the Economic Development Advisory Committee receive Staff Report FAF.21.064, entitled “2021 – 2025 Economic Development Strategy” for information;

AND THAT the Economic Development Advisory Committee endorses the 2021 – 2025 Economic Development Strategy as presented and recommends that the Strategy be presented to Council for consideration and implementation.

B. Overview

This report seeks endorsement of the 2021 – 2025 Economic Development Strategy from the Economic Development Advisory Committee.

C. Background

The Blue Mountains 2021 - 2025 Economic Development Strategy is the Town’s first Strategy and action plan that aims to facilitate business growth and success by leveraging strategic partnerships, investing in community development, enhancing the quality of life, and mitigating economic risk factors.

The Strategy was developed through direct consultation and collaboration with the Economic Development Advisory Sub-Committee, of which the members represent four key local business associations including the Blue Mountain Village Association, Thornbury Business Improvement Area, The Blue Mountains Chamber of Commerce and the Clarksburg Village Association.

To create meaningful value for local businesses and to strengthen the Town's economic base, the Strategy recommends the implementation of 24 tactics over the next five years.

D. Analysis

To ensure the success of the Strategy, three economic development goals were created based upon the findings of the SWOT Analysis and through reflection of the pillars of sustainability and the strategic priorities identified within the Corporate Strategic Plan:

1. Financial and Economic Prosperity - To create an innovative and resilient local economy and diversified workforce and foster an environment where entrepreneurs can thrive.

2. Community Wellbeing - To foster the development of a sustainable community and support long term residency through strengthened quality of life factors and social well-being.

3. Environmental Resiliency - To protect and preserve the natural environment for future generations through sustainable development and businesses practices.

Based on the broad economic development goals, the Strategy was further defined through the development of four strategic priorities and key considerations for each which ultimately led to the development of the tactics:

Strategic Priority	Key Considerations
1. Supporting Business Growth and Facilitating Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Strengthen business relationships and encourage networking- Facilitate business training opportunities- Address key economic barriers as identified by businesses
2. Strengthening Infrastructure, Business and Development Readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Ensure the Town is development ready- Streamline municipal processes with a business-friendly focus- Review and improve level of service standards- Improve community and Town brand identity- Target new economic sectors to diversify tax base and create local jobs
3. Developing an Innovative Workforce and Attracting Visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Create an inclusive and welcoming community- Promote local employment opportunities- Increase availability of business support services- Leverage local businesses association partnerships to build overall strength
4. Prioritizing the Community's Quality of Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Support the needs of aging residents- Celebrate business and community success- Benchmark progress- Plan strategically for future sustainable growth

To help guide and inform the foundation of the Strategy, two public surveys were completed in early 2020. The surveys targeted feedback from both the business community and residents. Conducted independently, the surveys provided the opportunity to compare results to find key areas of alignment.

Despite being conducted prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the surveys provided valuable insight to help develop the initial drafts of the Strategy. As the COVID-19 Pandemic progressed, the Strategy was adjusted to better reflect immediate actions that could be implemented to support businesses, address ongoing challenges, and to realize unanticipated opportunities based on lessons and insights learned from the Economic Development Advisory Committee, the Community Recovery Task Force and through the Grey County COVID-19 Business Impact Surveys.

The implementation of tactics within the Strategy will be tracked and guided by the Economic Development Division under the leadership of the Chief Administrative Officer, and through direct and regular coordination with the Economic Development Advisory Committee.

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

N/A

G. Financial Impacts

The financial requirement of implementing the 2021 – 2025 Economic Development Strategy is \$378,000 as outlined on page 32 of the Strategy document. The financial requirements combine both one-time costs and ongoing operating costs to continue the level of service.

The costs per year are as follows:

- 2021: \$41,000
- 2022: \$92,500
- 2023: \$74,500
- 2024: \$85,000
- 2025: \$85,000

The funding request related to the implementation of the Strategy will be brought forward to Council for consideration through the annual budget process. It is important to highlight that there are tactics contained within the Strategy that do not have a financial cost identified due to the need for additional information.

2021 Funding Request

Through the 2021 Budget, the Economic Development Advisory Committee requested \$75,000 to implement the following:

- \$15,000 to implement a film attraction and promotion strategy for The Blue Mountains;
- \$25,000 to fabricate and install community gateway signage to strengthen brand identity;
- \$25,000 to implement an ExploreBlue.ca promotional campaign to support local businesses, arts & culture, tourism and to assist and support in the promotion of community-based events;
- \$10,000 to implement Year-1 strategic action items, or to cover unexpected economic development opportunities / challenges as a result of the uncertainty created throughout 2021 by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

As this funding was approved by Council, no additional funding request is required to support the implementation of the year one tactics of the Economic Development Strategy.

H. In Consultation With

Shawn Everitt, Chief Administration Officer

Ruth Prince, Director of Finance

Peter Bordignon, EDAC Chair

EDAC Sub-Committee, Andrew Siegwart, Tony Poole and Sarah Fillion

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 economicdevelopment@thebluemountains.ca.

J. Attached

1. 2021 – 2025 Economic Development Strategy

Respectfully submitted,

Tim Hendry
Manager of Communications & Economic Development

Shawn Everitt
Chief Administrative Officer

For more information, please contact:
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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	2021 - 2025 Economic Development Strategy.docx
Attachments:	- 2021 - 2025 Economic Development Plan - Town of The Blue Mountains.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Apr 2, 2021

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

Tim Hendry - Apr 1, 2021 - 8:58 PM

Shawn Everitt - Apr 2, 2021 - 10:23 AM



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2021-2025

REACHING OUR PEAK



**RECOGNIZED AS
ONTARIO'S TRUE
FOUR-SEASON TOURISM
AND RECREATION
DESTINATION**

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MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR

Content Pending.



MESSAGE FROM THE CAO

Content Pending.



**STRATEGIC LOCATION
WITH ABUNDANCE OF
NATURAL RESOURCES &
OUTDOOR ATTRACTIONS**



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Content Pending.

PLANNING THE ECONOMIC PATH 2021 - 2025

The Blue Mountains Economic Development Strategy is the Town's first Strategy and action plan that aims to facilitate business growth and success by leveraging strategic partnerships, investing in community development, enhancing the quality of life, and mitigating economic risk factors.

Recognized as Ontario's true four-season tourism and recreation destination, The Blue Mountains was built on a strong history of agriculture and tourism. With entrepreneurship and small business success at the economic core, the Town has earned a world-class reputation as a respected community with a highly sought-after quality of life. The Blue Mountains offers a thriving four-season economic environment to own and operate a business. As families, young professionals and retirees continue to call The Blue Mountains home, the community continues to grow, creating a more diversified economy with increased business opportunity.

Since its humble beginnings, the Town remains steadfast in its mission to drive economic prosperity and promote community well-being. By 2038, Grey County has forecasted an increase in the Town's population of approximately 2,075 full-time residents. This anticipated growth provides opportunities to create a diversified and innovative community within the Town's key economic sectors: tourism, agriculture, small business, and development.

Despite strong economic success and growth, there are various challenges that require strategic action to sustain the community's positive momentum. In consultation with the Town's Economic Development Advisory Committee including local business associations, and through analysis of the public and business community surveys, the following key challenges were identified:

- Access and Availability of Housing
- Affordability of Goods and Services
- Investment into Growth Infrastructure
- Preservation of the Natural Environment
- Workforce Retention and Development
- Economic Diversification
- Resident Attraction and Retention

To address and overcome these challenges, the Strategy recommends four strategic priorities with 24 action-oriented tactics for the Town to implement and focus on over the next five years. The commitment and implementation of this Strategy combined with the collective effort of stakeholders and community partners will help ensure that The Blue Mountains remains prosperous and sustainable for future generations.

CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN

The 2020-2024 Corporate Strategic Plan outlines four strategic priorities, with Community and Quality of Life identified as key priorities. The plan also outlines three key pillars of sustainability to be considered by staff and Council within the decision-making process. These three interdependent pillars are necessary to secure the responsible use of resources and the preservation of nature to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.



SWOT ANALYSIS

As a primary step, working with the Economic Development Advisory Committee, the Town conducted a SWOT analysis to evaluate and provide insight into the current economic state of the Town and community as a whole.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well established tourism destination with four-season recreational offerings • Strong tourism brand identity with national and international recognition • Internationally recognized apple growing and vineyard region with a unique microclimate • Strong economic and industry growth within tourism, service sector, agriculture and residential development • High standard and quality of life • Strategic location with abundance of natural amenities and outdoor attractions • Engaged businesses community and community members • Well-developed natural active leisure infrastructure • Unique culture and heritage assets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited Town managed business support services • Misalignment in community needs and direction of future growth • Community and Town identity and branding challenges • Workforce challenges related to resident and youth retention and employee recruitment • Availability and affordability of housing, goods and services within the community • Limited public transportation infrastructure • Lack of proactive municipal infrastructure servicing to support future development
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen the Town's position as a Provincial leader in sustainability • Increase partnership with agriculture community and growth of agri-tourism • Create welcoming environment for businesses and newcomers • Celebrate community pride, heritage and business success • Develop framework and policies to address workforce development challenges • Continued industry growth and resilience through strategic partnerships • Strengthen Town brand and community identity • Enhance, support and strengthen experiential tourism products and offerings • Increase downtown and outdoor maintenance and beautification efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for economic diversification • Workforce leakage and out-migration of youth and residents • Ability to address infrastructure demand to support service-driven economy • Ongoing threats in agriculture sector created by climate change • Market reliance in agriculture sector • Aging population and associated needs • Rising real estate prices • Lack of community diversity • Limited access to local post-secondary educational institutions (University) • Limited access to health, emergency services and aging in place services • External factors beyond control



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The Economic Development Strategy is aligned with the Corporate Strategic Plan through the understanding and need for a balanced and sustainable approach to economic growth.

To ensure the success of the Strategy, three economic development goals were created based upon the findings of the SWOT Analysis and through reflection of the pillars of sustainability and the strategic priorities identified within the Corporate Strategic Plan. Each of the following goals aims to achieve community prosperity and guide the Town towards a strong economic development sector while fostering environmental and cultural resilience.

1. Financial and Economic Prosperity

To create an innovative and resilient local economy and diversified workforce and foster an environment where entrepreneurs can thrive.

2. Community Wellbeing

To foster the development of a sustainable community and support long term residency through strengthened quality of life factors and social well-being.

3. Environmental Resiliency

To protect and preserve the natural environment for future generations through sustainable development and businesses practices

BUILDING ON SUCCESS

Entrepreneurship and small business success are at the economic core of The Blue Mountains. With a respected and highly sought-after quality of life, the success of the local economy has been driven by strong year-over-year industry growth led by agriculture, tourism, construction, small business, and hospitality/service.

Together, these sectors account for \$584,605,018 in annual economic exports and employ over 4,500 individuals within the Town of The Blue Mountains. Furthering this success and growth, by 2028 Grey County has forecasted an increase in the Town's population by approximately 2,075 full-time residents, which when combined with the influx of residents as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic will provide further opportunity to create a diversified, resilient and innovative community.

The natural environment and allure of The Blue Mountains has attracted creative, forward-thinking entrepreneurs, businesses and residents whose vision has helped grow and shape the community and has driven the economic base to where it is today. Through strategic partnerships, comprehensive planning, and sustainable growth management, the Town and the greater South Georgian Bay region is well positioned and will continue to prosper for future generations to prosper and find success.



COVID-19 IMPACT

With the sudden and unexpected onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic, many businesses in The Blue Mountains were heavily impacted and were forced to modify or cease their operations. Data sourced from the Grey County COVID-19 Business Impact Surveys provided invaluable insight regarding the challenges faced by businesses in the community.

As an immediate action, the Town's Economic Development Division alongside the local business associations provided personal protective equipment, signage, business support programs and marketing assistance to help support businesses throughout the community.

Understanding the ongoing challenges faced by businesses, the Town remains committed to supporting businesses and the local economy through infrastructure investment, business support services, and by taking any necessary emergency measures to address economic impacts. It is vital that as a community we continue to work together to overcome and move forward through this challenging time.



COMMUNITY RECOVERY TASK FORCE

In March 2020, the Town of The Blue Mountains Council launched the Community Recovery Task Force through partnership with local business associations, community groups and organizational leaders. The immediate focus of the Task Force was to address business and community challenges as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic head-on. The Task Force went into swift action to address the initial health, safety and economic impacts while also planning and navigating through the future challenges imposed by the pandemic. Almost a year after its inception, the Task Force remains in place to guide the Town's businesses and residents through economic and community recovery. This has led to a number of actions being undertaken with a total investment of over \$812,000 in the first year to ensure an increased level of support for local businesses and an increased level of community safety and services for residents and visitors in 2020. The chart below references actions undertaken by the Task Force.

- ✓ Hiring four additional By-law enforcement officers to manage parking issues and to respond to COVID-19 related complaints and inquiries;
- ✓ Implemented paid parking at high-volume beachfront areas to manage traffic;
- ✓ Hired three additional staff and increased investment into the maintenance of outdoor recreational areas to promote a healthy, active lifestyle;
- ✓ Installed jersey barriers and handwashing stations within downtown Thornbury to increase sidewalk space to allow for appropriate physical distancing requirements;
- ✓ Installed COVID-19 safety signage throughout the Town to support education and awareness efforts;
- ✓ Implemented a Mandatory Face Covering By-law to reinforce the importance of wearing a mask indoors/enclosed spaces throughout the Town;
- ✓ Launched www.exploreblue.ca, an outdoor recreation and business support website to provide up-to-date information on recreation operations and support services;
- ✓ Deferral of Property Taxes without penalty to assist residents and businesses;
- ✓ Launched a Shop Local Holiday Campaign to encourage residents to shop local and support small businesses located in the Town;
- ✓ Launched a website development program to provide financial assistance to local businesses and support digital innovation;
- ✓ Allocated staff resources to support grocery delivery services to residents in need throughout the community;
- ✓ Launched a community donation challenge to raise funds in support of community initiatives related to COVID-19.

UNDERSTANDING THE ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE

As cited in the 2019 Grey County Official Plan, the Town of The Blue Mountains is projected to grow by approximately 2,075 full-time residents by 2038, and with the unanticipated influx of new full-time residents, seasonal residents and visitors as seen through the cultural and lifestyle shift during the COVID-19 Pandemic, it is imperative to understand where the Town is as a community and plan for the future level of services that are necessary to support the aging population, as well as creating a more diversified and innovative community within the Town's key economic sectors.

As the Town of The Blue Mountains continues to see significant growth in population, it is more important than ever to set a clear, strategic path forward for sustainable economic development.

FORECASTED POPULATION GROWTH

	2016	2018	2021	2031	2036	2038	ANNUAL % GROWTH
POPULATION	7,190	7,260	7,660	8,600	8,980	9,100	1.1%

In addition to the forecasted full-time population, the Town of The Blue Mountains' non-permanent population is estimated at just over 6,000, for a total year-round population of over 13,000 residents.

SOUTH GEORGIAN BAY COMPARISON (2016 DATA)

To shape the Strategy, it is important to understand the community's economic landscape and benchmark patterns and trends with neighbouring communities.

The following table provides a comparison between the Town of The Blue Mountains and South Georgian Bay communities. The data is referenced from the 2016 Census data and will be updated when the 2021 Census data is available.

MUNICIPALITY	POPULATION	MEDIAN AGE	MEDIAN HOUSE- HOLD INCOME	MEDIAN HOME PRICE
The Blue Mountains	7,025	57.6	\$78,490	\$500,370
Collingwood	20,102	48.5	\$62,671	\$320,564
Wasaga Beach	20,675	55.3	\$62,150	\$319,725
Grey Highlands	9,804	47.7	\$67,447	\$313,565
Meaford	4,910	53.4	\$53,360	\$250,878
Clearview Township	14,151	45.3	\$78,519	\$349,187



AGE DISTRIBUTION

The Blue Mountains is an aging community with over 45 per cent of residents over the age of 60. As the median age of residents continues to increase, greater effort to support resident retention and investment within age-in-place infrastructure and services will be required to ensure that residents are not forced to move to be closer to services that may be required.

In addition, targeted efforts must be undertaken to attract families and a younger workforce to the Town to support the labour supply demands of local businesses within the community. Despite growth, workforce challenges will continue to be a primary economic development barrier for businesses.

The Blue Mountains is projected to grow by approximately 2,075 full-time residents by 2038.

AGE	POPULATION	INDEX TO ONTARIO
0 to 4 years	218	55
5 to 9 years	267	64
10 to 14 years	271	63
15 to 19 years	334	70
20 to 24 years	371	72
25 to 29 years	339	60
30 to 34 years	320	57
35 to 39 years	309	58
40 to 44 years	314	62
45 to 49 years	388	76
50 to 54 years	481	90
55 to 59 years	750	127
60 to 64 years	835	159
65 to 69 years	846	193
70 to 74 years	785	213
75 to 79 years	531	210
80 to 84 years	335	189
85+ years	300	158

INDUSTRY GROWTH IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

Through an innovative and resilient economic base, The Blue Mountains has seen significant industry growth throughout various sectors. As an established tourism and service focused economy, the Town's leading sectors continue to be within accommodation and food services, and arts entertainment and recreation.

TOP 15 INDUSTRIES: JOBS VERSUS GREY COUNTY BENCHMARK

INDUSTRY	2020 JOBS	% CHANGE IN JOBS (2011-2020)	GREY COUNTY	SHARE OF JOBS
Accommodation and food services	1,945	51%	4,592	42.3%
Retail trade	533	28%	5,797	9.1%
Arts, entertainment and recreation	425	30%	1,128	37.6%
Construction	375	63%	4,472	8.3%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	346	52%	2,994	11.5%
Professional, scientific and technical services	310	29%	2,046	15.1%
Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services	303	- 42%	1,854	16.2%
Transportation and warehousing	301	336%	1,794	16.7%
Other services (except public administration)	247	123%	2,314	10.6%
Manufacturing	236	- 39%	5,350	4.4%
Health care and social assistance	189	6%	6,857	2.7%
Real estate and rental and leasing	185	- 2%	757	24.4%
Public administration	165	- 16%	1,796	9.1%
Educational services	91	- 37%	2,193	4.1%
Unclassified	85	25%	729	11.6%



SPECIALIZED INDUSTRIES IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

Over the next five years, there is significant opportunity to increase the Town's specialized industries and work alongside partners to attract, retain and expand key economic sectors to The Blue Mountains. Focusing on these specialized industries will allow the Town to further strengthen the economic base, while also planning and developing a foundation for new and existing businesses and entrepreneurs to find success when locating, or re-locating to the community.

The chart below indicates ten industries and their coinciding Location Quotient* that have achieved a growth rate of 20% over the past ten years. As the Town sets its course, there is an opportunity to further support these growth industries and highly specialized sectors through attracting and developing workforce and new businesses related to technical and skilled trades, agriculture, and personal care.

DESCRIPTION	2011 JOBS	2020 JOBS	2011 - 2020 % CHANGE	2020 LOCATION QUOTIENT
Traveler accommodation	799	1,107	38%	19.95
Other amusement and recreation industries	263	380	44%	6.94
General freight trucking	<10	215	Insf. Data	3.51
Farms	225	289	28%	3.31
Offices of real estate agents and brokers	<10	98	Insf. Data	2.61
Full-service restaurants and limited-service eating places	480	796	66%	2.46
Personal care services	27	96	260%	1.70
Building material and supplies dealers	20	53	169%	1.24
Management, scientific and technical consulting services	28	67	140%	1.19
Commercial and industrial machinery and equipment (except automotive and electronic) repair and maintenance	13	24	78%	1.10
	1,868	3,125	67%	

* Location quotient (LQ) is a metric used to quantify how concentrated a particular industry is within a region as compared to the nation. It can reveal what makes a particular region unique. An LQ of greater than one indicates that there is a high level of specialization and/or concentration.



EMERGING & HIGH GROWTH INDUSTRIES

Invest in Canada, Canada's global investment attraction and promotion agency, has identified seven key industries as high-growth industries.

Focused on year-over-year growth, continual innovation, and resiliency, these industries all provide a unique opportunity for the Town to leverage.

To realize this opportunity, the Town needs to be investment-ready through proactive land-use planning and infrastructure servicing. The ability for the Town to attract a high-growth industry will help diversify the economic base, create local jobs and reduce the tax burden on residents.

Further, The Province of Ontario is focused on growing Ontario-based businesses and has committed significant effort and financial and tax incentives to attract key sectors for growth.



DEVELOPMENT IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

Over the past decade, the Town has experienced significant growth within residential development both in year-round residences and within recreational and seasonal oriented development. In 2020, the Town issued 649 building permits with a construction value of over \$214 million, compared to 469 building permits and a construction value of \$47.4 million ten years earlier.

TOTAL BUILDING PERMITS ISSUED

	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018	2020
Permits Issued	469	368	401	563	589	649
Construction Value	\$47.4 M	\$47.4 M	\$50.8 M	\$125.7 M	\$161.1 M	\$214.0 M

DEVELOPMENT FORECAST

As detailed in the Town's 2019 Development Charges Background Study, the Town is anticipated to add an additional 2,880 census dwelling units by 2028 and an additional 8,547 census dwelling units by full build out.

	2018 Estimate	General Services 2019 - 2028		Engineering Services 2019 - Build Out	
		Growth	Total at 2028	Growth	Total at Build Out
Total Occupied Units - Total Census Dwellings	6,897	2,880	9,777	8,547	15,444

Year-over-year growth has increased the demand on all Town services, including municipal servicing and infrastructure. The demand will only continue to increase through the development of additional housing units and residential growth. Understanding development forecasts and the unanticipated influx of residents as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic, it is imperative that the Town continues to strategically manage and plan for future growth with a clear and dedicated focus to community sustainability.





RETAIL GAP ANALYSIS

In February 2020, Tate Economic Research Inc. was selected to conduct a Commercial Retail Gap Analysis for the Town of The Blue Mountains. The Commercial Retail Gap Analysis was completed in April 2020 and was a key document to support the development of the Economic Development Strategy.

This analysis provided insight into the current state of retail in the Town and outlined the general impact and effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and the potential outcomes following its conclusion. The analysis also provided key insights on various retail trends, socioeconomic characteristics and behaviours, service gaps, retail opportunities, impact of e-commerce, affordability and stakeholder input and will continue to serve as a guiding document as the Town navigates and emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key recommendations suggested by Tate Economic Research Inc. included that the current economic direction of the community be continued and that the Town and business associations continue to foster an environment where independent boutiques and services feel valued and welcomed.

The report indicated that, while it is recognized there is a segment of the market that would benefit from value-oriented retailers, expanding the breadth of value-oriented retail in the Town would be limited by population constraints and as a result, would not be a recommended course of action at this time.

INCREASING HOUSING OPTIONS & STOCK

The Town of The Blue Mountains continues to see significant growth in both residents and visitors on a year-over-year basis. Ensuring that a skilled labour force is available for businesses to thrive and that the labour force has access to housing and long-term rental property is essential to the overall success of economic development within the community.

The median cost to purchase a home in The Blue Mountains has increased exponentially through the COVID-19 Pandemic, with a median cost of \$1,185,500 in the fourth quarter of 2020. This increase can also be seen in the average cost of a home in The Blue Mountains, which in 2016, was \$637,047 and by December 2020 was \$913,577. The increase in cost means that an individual or family looking to purchase a home would require an income of at least \$169,354 based on standard mortgage calculations and rates.

Further, only 20 percent of households in The Blue Mountains earn more than \$150,000. This means that moderate-income earners are not able to afford to purchase homes in the community, which has resulted in many young adults and families leaving the community to start their careers.

The challenges are also seen in the long-term rental market, where opportunities to rent a home or apartment in The Blue Mountains are under supplied. The average rent in 2020 for a 2-bedroom unit in The Blue Mountains was \$1,825, which would require an income of \$73,000 based on the 30 per cent income to rent ratio. With 50 per cent of households in the Town earning an annual income of less than \$70,000, households are paying a disproportionately high amount of income on housing which in turn reduces the income available for other essential living costs. This translates into a loss of potential direct revenue going right back into the local economy.

As a result of these factors, the current labour force has become locked out of the housing market, which has heightened the labour demand challenges faced by businesses as they struggle to attract and retain employees. This impact also has a risk of deterring potential new investors as there is a limited number of skilled and professional talent available to meet needs. In The Blue Mountains tourism sector alone, this has translated into 150 jobs going unfilled at any given time and could lead to prospective businesses looking to relocate to more affordable communities.

In 2013, The Town of The Blue Mountains Council established The Blue Mountains Attainable Housing Corporation (BMAHC) as a not-for-profit corporation with a goal of creating and expanding the supply of healthy and sustainable housing in The Blue Mountains and addressing the affordability gap by providing housing to moderate-income working individuals and families locked out of the housing market.

Finding sustainable solutions to address access to attainable housing in The Blue Mountains includes working with partners across the board, from businesses and community organizations and all levels of government to ensure the success of businesses and unlock the full potential for the Town's economic growth while establishing an open community for all to live in and enjoy for generations to come.

References: CREA 2021, Statistics Canada 2016, EMSI 2020





*Photo taken in 2019

THE WOMEN OF THORNBURY PUBLISHED BY ESCARPMENT MAGAZINE

"Today, over 80% of businesses in Thornbury are owned and operated by women - clothing stores, restaurants, art galleries, day-spas, home décor stores, hair salons, bakeries, fitness centres, cafes, caterers, gift shops and cosmetic/skin/laser clinics. These establishments are enhancing the character and prosperity within our community"

- Escarpment Magazine 2019



WORKING TOGETHER WITH VARIOUS STRATEGIC PLANS

As the Town of The Blue Mountains continues its path towards becoming a more sustainable and resilient community, it is important to understand that the connection and integration between economic development and community development need to complement one another through a unified approach. The Town is currently undertaking the development of multiple key strategic plans that will provide a vision for economic and community prosperity.

THESE KEY STRATEGIC PLANS INCLUDE:



**OFFICIAL PLAN
UPDATE**



**INTEGRATED COMMUNITY
SUSTAINABILITY PLAN**



**TRANSPORTATION
MASTER PLAN**



**MASTER
DRAINAGE PLAN**



**LEISURE
ACTIVITIES PLAN**



**COMMUNITY
IMPROVEMENT PLAN**



**COMMUNICATIONS
STRATEGY**

In addition to the key strategic plans, the Town is actively involved in addressing the availability of housing supply and stock through its work with The Blue Mountains Attainable Housing Corporation, and continues its advocacy and planning for access to health care services, including the recruitment and retention of family physicians through the Joint Physician Recruitment and Retention Committee.

Working with various Committees through the Town and Town Staff, the Economic Development Advisory Committee aims to address unique challenges and opportunities as related to economic development through close collaboration during the development process of these key strategic plans. The focus of the Economic Development Advisory Committee will be to support the overall economic growth of the Town and serve as an advocate for the business community.



SETTING THE ECONOMIC VISION FOR THE FUTURE

As the community sees steady growth in permanent residents and in business investment, the Town is at an exciting and pivotal time to shape what the future of economic growth in the area will look like. While seeking opportunities and planning for growth, it is important that efforts continue within supporting and addressing the need for the level and quality of services that will be required by the aging population and for new families moving to the community.

The Blue Mountains has the opportunity through the implementation of the various strategic plans to become a true full-service community to support all residents and businesses.

This Economic Development Strategy will serve as a roadmap and launching pad to create a more resilient and sustainable economy for future generations to enjoy.

WORKING WITH OUR PARTNERS

Moving forward, the Town's economic vision cannot be achieved without collaborative and complimentary efforts throughout the community. Working together, with partners including Grey County, Regional Tourism Organization 7 (RTO7), The Blue Mountain Village Association, The Blue Mountains Chamber of Commerce, South Georgian Bay Tourism, The Clarksburg Village Association, The Thornbury Business Association and many more industry and community organizations, The Blue Mountains will continue to thrive both economically, culturally and socially. The tactics within the 2021-2025 Economic Development Strategy will aim to support, connect and build on existing programs and industry-driven initiatives.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Four strategic priorities were established to serve as building blocks that work together to achieve the three economic development goals identified in Strategy, and ultimately the vision as outlined through the Corporate Strategic Plan. The following strategic priorities and associated tactics will be instrumental to building a strong and entrepreneurial workforce and fostering business prosperity in the Town:

1. Supporting Business Growth and Facilitating Success
2. Strengthening Infrastructure, Business and Development Readiness
3. Developing an Innovative Workforce and Attracting Visitors
4. Prioritizing the Community's Quality of Life

LEGEND

- CAO: Chief Administrative Officer
- CED: Communications and Economic Development Division
- FIT: Finance and IT Department
- OPS: Operations Department
- CS: Community Services Department
- COUNCIL: Town of The Blue Mountains Council
- GC: Grey County
- EDAC: Economic Development Advisory Committee (includes local business associations)
- AAC: Agriculture Advisory Committee

PRIORITY 1. SUPPORTING BUSINESSES GROWTH AND FACILITATING SUCCESS

In a time of rapid economic change and adaptation, strengthening the existing foundation of the Town's business community relations is crucial to ensure businesses can not only succeed but thrive. Through the first strategic priority, the Town aims to support and address existing challenges faced by the current workforce and continue to foster stronger partnerships, connections and outreach with the business community while investing in and supporting local economic development initiatives. This strategic priority will be supported through six action items.

1.1 Conduct Annual Economic Development and Business Survey

ACCOUNTABLE: CED

RESPONSIBLE: CAO

SUPPORTING: CS & EDAC

ESTIMATED COST	ESTIMATED STAFF TIME	DATE INITIATED	DATE ACHIEVED
\$5,000 Annually	15 hours	Q4 2021	Ongoing

1.2 Conduct Annual Shop Local Holiday Campaign and Year-Round Educational Awareness Campaign

ACCOUNTABLE: CED

RESPONSIBLE: CAO

SUPPORTING: CS

ESTIMATED COST	ESTIMATED STAFF TIME	DATE INITIATED	DATE ACHIEVED
\$15,000 Annually	50 hours	Q3 2021	Ongoing



1.3 Support Local Events Through Advertising Campaigns to Attract Visitors During Shoulder Seasons

ACCOUNTABLE: CED

RESPONSIBLE: CAO

SUPPORTING: CS

ESTIMATED COST	ESTIMATED STAFF TIME	DATE INITIATED	DATE ACHIEVED
\$25,000 Annually	50 hours	Q2 2022	Ongoing

1.4 Launch Monthly Business E-Newsletter to Promote Business Support, Training and Funding Opportunities

ACCOUNTABLE: CED

RESPONSIBLE: CAO

SUPPORTING: EDAC

ESTIMATED COST	ESTIMATED STAFF TIME	DATE INITIATED	DATE ACHIEVED
\$0	36 hours	Q1 2022	Ongoing

1.5 Facilitate Networking And Business Training Opportunities To Support Local Businesses Including Growers And Producers Within The Agricultural Sector

ACCOUNTABLE: CED

RESPONSIBLE: CAO

SUPPORTING: EDAC & AAC

ESTIMATED COST	ESTIMATED STAFF TIME	DATE INITIATED	DATE ACHIEVED
\$2,500 Annually	15 hours	Q2 2021	Ongoing

1.6 Launch 'Grown in Blue' Marketing Campaign to Promote and Support the Agriculture Sector

ACCOUNTABLE: CED

RESPONSIBLE: CAO

SUPPORTING: EDAC & AAC

ESTIMATED COST	ESTIMATED STAFF TIME	DATE INITIATED	DATE ACHIEVED
\$7,500 Annually	35 hours	Q2 2023	Ongoing

PRIORITY 2. STRENGTHENING INFRASTRUCTURE, BUSINESS AND DEVELOPMENT READINESS

To ensure the Town can support innovative startups, entrepreneurs and existing businesses, the second strategic priority aims to streamline municipal processes that foster an environment of opportunity for the business community. While conducting internal reviews to streamline development, Town Staff will work to promote existing economic development services readily available for anyone looking to open a new business or expand their existing business in The Blue Mountains. This strategic priority will be supported through seven action items.

2.1 Create and implement a targeted industry action and development-ready plan to attract an emerging and high-growth industry as identified by Invest in Canada and Invest Ontario

ACCOUNTABLE: CEDC RESPONSIBLE: CAO SUPPORTING: EDAC

ESTIMATED COST	ESTIMATED STAFF TIME	DATE INITIATED	DATE ACHIEVED
TBD	TBD	Q2 2024	Q4 2024

2.2 Update Business Retention & Expansion Study to Identify Business Opportunities to Target Investment Within Core Economic And Geographic Areas

ACCOUNTABLE: CEDC RESPONSIBLE: CAO SUPPORTING: EDAC

ESTIMATED COST	ESTIMATED STAFF TIME	DATE INITIATED	DATE ACHIEVED
TBD	TBD	Q1 2024	Q4 2024

2.3 Review the Sign by-Law Application Process

ACCOUNTABLE: BY-LAW RESPONSIBLE: LEGAL SUPPORTING: CED

ESTIMATED COST	ESTIMATED STAFF TIME	DATE INITIATED	DATE ACHIEVED
\$0	10 hours	Q3 2021	Q3 2021

2.4 Review the Planning and Building Permit Process to Identify Enhancements and Standard Operating Procedures

ACCOUNTABLE: BUILDING RESPONSIBLE: PDS SUPPORTING: CED

ESTIMATED COST	ESTIMATED STAFF TIME	DATE INITIATED	DATE ACHIEVED
\$0	TBD	Q1 2021	Q4 2021



2.5 Review Community Beautification Efforts and Infrastructure Needs and Develop a Level of Service to be Considered by Council

ACCOUNTABLE: CS

RESPONSIBLE: COUNCIL

SUPPORTING: CED & FIT

ESTIMATED COST	ESTIMATED STAFF TIME	DATE INITIATED	DATE ACHIEVED
\$0	15 hours	Q3 2021	Q4 2021

2.6 Conduct a Review of Community Identity and Wayfinding Signage

ACCOUNTABLE: CED

RESPONSIBLE: CAO

SUPPORTING: OPS, CS & GC

ESTIMATED COST	ESTIMATED STAFF TIME	DATE INITIATED	DATE ACHIEVED
\$0	10 hours	Q3 2021	Q4 2021

2.7 Develop Processes and Approval Workflow to Support Film Production and Attraction

ACCOUNTABLE: CED

RESPONSIBLE: CAO

SUPPORTING: OPS, CS & GC

ESTIMATED COST	ESTIMATED STAFF TIME	DATE INITIATED	DATE ACHIEVED
\$15,000 *Approved within the 2021 EDAC Budget	25 hours	Q1 2021	Q4 2021

PRIORITY 3. DEVELOPING AN INNOVATIVE WORKFORCE AND ATTRACTING VISITORS

Having a solid foundation built on strong local economic support, sustainability and infrastructure, the third strategic priority aims to attract and develop an innovative workforce and increase the number of visitors in the area. Through the exploration of new economic opportunities, and by creating an inclusive and welcoming community, these initiatives will work together to alleviate attraction and retention challenges faced by startups, entrepreneurs and new and existing businesses and builds on overall business and community resiliency in the Town. This strategic priority will be supported through seven action items.

3.1 Assess the Feasibility of Creating a Cooperative Co-Working Space and Accelerator for startup Businesses

ACCOUNTABLE: CED

RESPONSIBLE: CAO

SUPPORTING: EDAC

ESTIMATED COST	ESTIMATED STAFF TIME	DATE INITIATED	DATE ACHIEVED
TBD	60 hours	Q2 2022	Q3 2022

3.2 Create job portal and promote local employment opportunities on Explore Blue

ACCOUNTABLE: CED

RESPONSIBLE: CAO

SUPPORTING: EDAC

ESTIMATED COST	ESTIMATED STAFF TIME	DATE INITIATED	DATE ACHIEVED
\$2,500	15 hours	Q2 2022	Q2 2022

3.3 Partner to open satellite South Georgian Bay Small Business Enterprise Centre Office in The Blue Mountains to support local businesses

ACCOUNTABLE: CED

RESPONSIBLE: CAO

SUPPORTING: EDAC

ESTIMATED COST	ESTIMATED STAFF TIME	DATE INITIATED	DATE ACHIEVED
TBD	TBD	Q1 2022	Q3 2022

3.4 Join the UNESCO Collation of Inclusive Municipalities to improve practices and promote social inclusion within The Blue Mountains

ACCOUNTABLE: CED

RESPONSIBLE: CAO

SUPPORTING: EDAC

ESTIMATED COST	ESTIMATED STAFF TIME	DATE INITIATED	DATE ACHIEVED
\$2,000	20 HOURS	Q2 2023	Q4 2023



3.5 Develop community profile and business toolkit to attract new businesses and entrepreneurs

ACCOUNTABLE: CED

RESPONSIBLE: CAO

SUPPORTING: EDAC

ESTIMATED COST	ESTIMATED STAFF TIME	DATE INITIATED	DATE ACHIEVED
\$3,500 *Approved within the 2020 EDAC Budget	30 HOURS	Q2 2021	Q3 2021

3.6 Launch Pilot Mobile Tourism Ambassador Program to Provide Community and Tourism Information

ACCOUNTABLE: CED

RESPONSIBLE: CAO

SUPPORTING: EDAC

ESTIMATED COST	ESTIMATED STAFF TIME	DATE INITIATED	DATE ACHIEVED
\$20,000	40 hours	Q2 2025	Q3 2025

3.7 Launch Annual Printed Explore Blue Tourism Guide To Promote Outdoor Recreation, Local Events, Culture And Heritage

ACCOUNTABLE: CED

RESPONSIBLE: CAO

SUPPORTING: CS

ESTIMATED COST	ESTIMATED STAFF TIME	DATE INITIATED	DATE ACHIEVED
\$10,000 Annually	40 hours	Q2 2022	Ongoing

PRIORITY 4: PRIORITIZING THE COMMUNITY’S QUALITY OF LIFE

As a vibrant small-town community situated in the natural landscape of the Niagara Escarpment and South Georgian Bay, the Town’s high-quality of life is desirable to residents and visitors alike. With the community facing an influx of growth in its early adolescence, it is not only important to maintain and enhance the quality of life that attracted residents to call The Blue Mountains home, but also to align the community’s vision and ensure the path to economic success is achieved. The fourth strategic priority aims to ensure the Town has the services and programs in place to maintain and strengthen the area’s overall health and well-being. This strategic priority will be supported through four action items.

4.1 Celebrate Innovation and Creativity from Businesses, Individuals and Community Groups Through Annual Town Awards Ceremony

ACCOUNTABLE: CED		RESPONSIBLE: CAO		SUPPORTING: COUNCIL	
ESTIMATED COST	ESTIMATED STAFF TIME	DATE INITIATED	DATE ACHIEVED		
\$7,500 Annually	30 hours	Q3 2022	Ongoing		

4.2 Develop an Aging in Place Strategy to Identify an Action Plan to Support the Aging Population and Resident Retention

ACCOUNTABLE: CED		RESPONSIBLE: CAO		SUPPORTING: EDAC	
ESTIMATED COST	ESTIMATED STAFF TIME	DATE INITIATED	DATE ACHIEVED		
\$25,000	60 hours	Q2 2022	Q4 2022		

4.3 Adopt a Quality of Business and Quality of Life index to benchmark progress and improve the community’s overall health and well-being

ACCOUNTABLE: CED		RESPONSIBLE: CAO		SUPPORTING: EDAC	
ESTIMATED COST	ESTIMATED STAFF TIME	DATE INITIATED	DATE ACHIEVED		
\$10,000	20 hours	Q1 2024	Q4 2024		

4.4 Establish EDAC Task Force to review strategic business development and property acquisition opportunities and provide recommendations to Council, with a focus on the following: Assess the need for office space; Support housing supply through infill and mixed-use development; Support retail businesses in core economic areas.

ACCOUNTABLE: CED		RESPONSIBLE: CAO		SUPPORTING: EDAC	
ESTIMATED COST	ESTIMATED STAFF TIME	DATE INITIATED	DATE ACHIEVED		
\$10,000	20 hours	Q1 2024	Q4 2024		

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #1: SUPPORTING BUSINESSES GROWTH AND FACILITATING SUCCESS

TACTIC	2021				2022				2023				2024				2025			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
1.1																				
1.2																				
1.3																				
1.4																				
1.5																				
1.6																				

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #2: STRENGTHENING INFRASTRUCTURE, BUSINESS AND DEVELOPMENT READINESS

TACTIC	2021				2022				2023				2024				2025			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
2.1																				
2.2																				
2.3																				
2.4																				
2.5																				
2.6																				
2.7																				

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #3: DEVELOPING AN INNOVATIVE WORKFORCE AND ATTRACTING VISITORS

TACTIC	2021				2022				2023				2024				2025			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
3.1																				
3.2																				
3.3																				
3.4																				
3.5																				
3.6																				
3.7																				

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #4: PRIORITIZING THE COMMUNITY'S QUALITY OF LIFE																				
TACTIC	2021				2022				2023				2024				2025			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
4.1																				
4.2																				
4.3																				
4.4																				

Financial Requirements

The following chart outlines the overall financial requirements associated with the tactics of the five-year Economic Development Strategy. Estimated costs were calculated through analysis and comparative projects based on staff experience, information provided by municipal partners and best practices.

It is important to highlight that many of the tactics contain ongoing costs that will be carried forward into future years to continue the delivery of the service.

The following table provides a year-over-year breakdown of the one-time cost, and the annual additions to the budget that will be required to carry forward.

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
One Time Cost	\$18,500	\$27,500	\$9,500	\$20,000	\$20,000
Annual Addition	\$22,500	\$42,500	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Includes one-time costs plus year over-year annual additions	\$41,000	\$92,500	\$74,500	\$85,000	\$85,000



MEASURING SUCCESS

To ensure the effectiveness of the Economic Development Strategy, it is essential that the progress of each action item is tracked, and that performance is measured. Each action item will be tracked through an annual report card, which will set a benchmark to measure the success of economic development efforts and aid in the annual review of budget and resource requirements needed to achieve each tactic.

GOALS	INDICATOR	METRIC
Financial and Economic Prosperity	Revenue Growth & Diversification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residential building permit values Commercial building permit values Revenue from user fees Revenue from other sources
	Business Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retail vacancy rate Retail sales per square foot Retail rental rate per square foot Business workshop & training participation rate Perceived business satisfaction Industry growth
	Workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Availability of employment opportunities Average salary levels
	Tourism Visitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Average length of stay Tourism expenditure / visitor
Community Well-being	Quality of Life Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Median Age Population Growth Unemployment Rate Labour Force Participation Household Income Average housing prices Percentage visible minority / population Youth friendly index Crime severity index Perceived level of community acceptance
Environmental Resiliency	Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Energy consumption per capita (kW) Water consumption rates Waste collection diversion rate Greenspace per capita





MAINTAINING PROGRESS

The overall success of the Economic Development Strategy will be determined through the completion of each of the economic development goals. Town Staff will refer to these goals while maintaining the progress through weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual actions that will assist in the research and analysis for the metrics developed and identified in the Economic Development report card.

TIMING	METRIC
Weekly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic Development Staff meetings to maintain timeline and provide updates on projects
Monthly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner with Grey County and lower-tier municipalities to align work plans and priorities Participating in monthly Economic Development Advisory Committee meeting to ensure timelines are maintained and needs are being met
Quarterly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host quarterly meetings with business associations to review work plans and priorities Meeting with Senior Management Team to provide an update on the progress of the Economic Development Strategy
Annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct annual Business Survey Host annual meeting with the Blue Mountains Public Library and local museums to strengthen partnership and identify opportunities to celebrate community history and heritage Host annual meeting with local education institutions and businesses to identify co-op placements, apprenticeships and business-related learning opportunities Review online Community Profile content Review online Business Welcome Toolkit content



For more information and business inquiries, contact:
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