



# Staff Report

## Strategic Initiatives

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**Report To:** COW- Admin, Corp and Finance, SI, Comm. Services  
**Meeting Date:** May 26, 2025  
**Report Number:** SI.25.015  
**Title:** Approval of 2025 – 2030 Destination Strategy  
**Prepared by:** Tim Hendry, Director of Strategic Initiatives

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### A. Recommendations

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THAT Council receive Staff Report SI.25.015, entitled “Approval of 2025 – 2030 Destination Strategy”;

AND THAT Council approves the 2025 – 2030 Destination Strategy as presented;

AND THAT Council acknowledges that staff will provide an annual report to Council regarding the implementation and progress of the strategy.

### B. Overview

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This report seeks Council endorsement and approval of the 2025 – 2030 Destination Strategy, which serves as the Town’s first formal strategy to guide and manage tourism in The Blue Mountains.

### C. Background

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Tourism is an important economic driver in the Town of The Blue Mountains. Locally, the tourism sector employs more than 1,780 people across 160+ tourism-related businesses and drives more than \$170 million in annual sales. In addition, the Town welcomes more than three million visitors each year as a leading four-season tourism destination in Ontario.

The process of developing the Town’s first tourism and destination strategy began in 2024 with the consideration of implementing Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT). The MAT feasibility assessment made it clear that the Town required a strategy to ensure that the tourism sector is sustainably developed and that the MAT funds are strategically invested. Through research and speaking with local stakeholders, it’s evident that the success of tourism has been driven by the private sector, including the efforts of key attractions, tourism operators, accommodation providers, hospitality businesses and small businesses throughout the community. As The Blue Mountains established itself as a tourism destination, the Town has played an important role in the evolution of tourism through strong sector partnerships and proactive planning. However, with the exponential growth of tourism over the last two decades, the Town has often been put

in a reactive position, responding to tourism growth pressures and trying to manage service expectations and infrastructure investment with limited budgets and resources.

To ensure the Town's tourism sector remains strong and is proactively managed, the Town engaged Bannikin to develop a Destination Development Plan focusing on tourism infrastructure management, tourism marketing and product development. The strategy was supported through a collaborative relationship with the Blue Mountain Village Association, serving as the Town's Destination Marketing Organization (DMO). The strategy aims to provide a road map that addresses key tourism-related issues and positions The Blue Mountains to succeed as a destination through proactive tourism management and planning and strategic infrastructure investment in support of the tourism sector. The strategy provides recommendations regarding how the Town and DMO can best enhance the experience of both visitors and residents, creating jobs and increasing local revenue.

The project was initiated by Council in September 2024 through report [FAF.24.105](#). Bannikin was responsible for completing comprehensive steps to understand and assess the current state of tourism and to identify the opportunities and strategic path forward to build a sustainable tourism sector, strong visitor experience and a resilient visitor economy. Importantly, the strategy was developed through direct public and tourism sector stakeholder engagement. The 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.

It's important to highlight that this strategy focuses on achieving balance. The Town's economy and many small businesses rely on tourism and visitor spending to keep their doors open. However, it is important that the sector does not negatively impact the community due to overtourism and unsustainable practices. Actions like growing tourism during mid-week and shoulder seasons and understanding the Town's carrying capacity are vital to the continued success of the sector and to ensure a positive visitor and resident experience.

Five strategy objectives were confirmed at the start of the project to guide the research and recommendations and to inform the anticipated outcomes of the strategy. The objectives are outlined below:

1. Identifying and engaging a diversity of local and regional tourism organizations and businesses, tourism and municipal partners, residents, Council members, and others as identified across the research process and toward understanding the Town's tourism ecosystem.
2. Establishing a baseline of the current context of tourism products, services, and infrastructure toward identifying a sustainable and strategic direction for destination development, management, and tourism marketing that responds to identified challenges.

3. Understanding and prioritizing the sustainability of the environment, society, and the tourism economy and four-season hosting capacity of the destination when exploring the future of destination development and tourism marketing.
4. Identifying tourism development and marketing solutions/initiatives that mobilize resources to enhance the built and natural environment, elevate the experience of the Town of The Blue Mountains as a place to visit, and support the well-being of the community.
5. Exploring and providing considerations for the positioning of the Town's tourism brand with a focus on promoting the entire municipality, while building on well-established brands

## D. Analysis

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The Destination Strategy builds upon existing Town strategies and reports, considering tourism's intersections with economic development, transportation, sustainability, recreation and planning. The strategy emphasizes the tourism sector's role as a significant economic driver. It highlights important infrastructure considerations such as visitor and resident amenities, transportation, signage, parks and trails, downtown areas, recreational spaces, and waterfront development.

It's important to highlight that not all actions within the strategy are the responsibility of the Town. Given the complex and connected nature of the local tourism sector, the strategy includes specific actions related to the Town, specific actions related to the DMO and shared actions between the Town and DMO. In addition, some actions are also related to partnering with external organizations and community groups. This shared responsibility structure calls on the importance of alignment between the Town, DMO and tourism sector partners.

Collaboration is fundamental to achieving the goals and anticipated outcomes of the strategy. The Town will actively seek opportunities to partner with neighbouring municipalities, external organizations and community groups to amplify resources and expertise and to address common challenges and leverage opportunities through shared knowledge and joint initiatives. This mindset and approach is vital for aligning strategic objectives and maximizing the potential of tourism development across the region.

The Strategy is organized into four pillars with 29 recommended actions. Full details regarding the pillars, actions, key projects and anticipated outcomes can be found within the strategy document. A summary of the pillars is included below, and a visual summary is included in Attachment#2 of this report.

### Pillars:

1. **Connected and Empowered Destination Network**—The first pillar recognizes the need to further clarify organization-specific roles and responsibilities among industry partners and actively foster destination-wide relationship building, connections and awareness.

2. **An Accessible and Quality Destination Experience** - The second strategic pillar involves the infrastructure maintenance, development, and services for the Town and the DMO to ensure the consistency of an accessible and quality visitor experience.
3. **Cohesive and Inspirational Destination Identity** - The third pillar gathers and aligns the work of the DMO to ensure the entire destination is represented in marketing efforts by one tourism brand.
4. **Compelling and Diversified Destination Offering** - The fourth strategic pillar outlines the path forward to identify, encourage, and support the development and enhancement of the destination and visitor experience offering.

Given the complex and connected nature of the tourism sector, tracking the implementation of the Strategy is arguably more important than the plan itself. The Strategy includes anticipated outcomes for each pillar that will serve as a north star to guide implementation and to keep focus on the long-term vision. In addition, the Strategy includes clear measures of success for each action that will be tracked and used to assess progress or the need for attention, flexibility, and adaptability.

Importantly, the measures of success are starting points for the development of the planned monitoring and evaluation framework for collective progress tracking. As referenced in the motion, staff will provide Council with an annual report on the implementation status of the Strategy and an annual work plan to outline the planned actions in support of the local tourism sector.

## **E. Strategic Priorities**

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### **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**

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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**

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The Destination Strategy includes strategic objectives and recommended preliminary actions with a clear focus on anticipated outcomes.

It's important to highlight that not all actions and objectives within the strategy are the responsibility of the Town. Given the complex and connected nature of the local tourism sector, the strategy includes specific actions related to the Town, specific actions related to the DMO and shared actions between the Town and DMO. In addition, some actions are also related to partnering with external organizations. This shared responsibility structure calls on the importance of alignment between the Town, DMO and tourism sector partners.

To implement the strategy, Town staff will develop and present a work plan to Council annually as part of the budget process. This process will determine and detail the cost associated with the actions.

In addition, the DMO will develop and present an annual work plan to Council for information regarding destination marketing. The work plan is developed by the DMO through direct input from the Municipal Accommodation Tax Advisory Committee.

Municipal Accommodation Tax is intended to be a core funding source to support the implementation of this strategy. The Town's portion of Municipal Accommodation Tax is intended to support investment in tourism-related infrastructure and strategic objectives as detailed and prioritized within the strategy. The DMO's portion of Municipal Accommodation Tax will be invested in destination marketing to grow and enhance tourism where capacity exists.

Additional funding through local and Provincial grants will also be leveraged as opportunities become available. Town and DMO staff are actively tracking available funding opportunities.

## **H. In Consultation With**

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

## **I. Public Engagement**

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The topic of this Staff Report has been the subject of a Public Open House which took place on April 3, 2025. Any comments regarding this report should be submitted to Tim Hendry, Director of Strategic Initiatives, [si@thebluemountains.ca](mailto:si@thebluemountains.ca).

## **J. Attached**

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1. 2025 – 2030 Destination Strategy

Respectfully submitted,

Tim Hendry  
Director of Strategic Initiatives

For more information, please contact:  
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### Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SI.25.015 Approval of 2025 – 2030 Destination Strategy.docx
Attachments:	- 2025 – 2030 Destination Strategy.pdf
Final Approval Date:	May 14, 2025

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

**Tim Hendry - May 14, 2025 - 12:09 PM**