



# Staff Report

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## Strategic Initiatives – Special Projects & Strategic Initiatives

**Report To:** COW- Admin, Corp and Finance, SI, Comm. Services  
**Meeting Date:** September 15, 2025  
**Report Number:** SI.25.031  
**Title:** Overview of 2026 Strategic Initiatives Budget Requests  
**Prepared by:** Tim Hendry, Director of Strategic Initiatives

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### A. Recommendations

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THAT Council receive Staff Report SI.25.031, entitled “Overview of 2026 Strategic Initiatives Budget Requests”;

AND THAT Council directs staff to include the Communications Review, Economic Development Action Plan and Phase 1 of the Gateway & Wayfinding projects in the 2026 Budget Process for consideration.

AND THAT Council directs staff to apply for external grants to support the identified projects as funding opportunities become available;

AND THAT Council acknowledges that progress reports on the implementation status of the 2021 - 2025 Communications Strategy and the 2021 – 2025 Economic Development Strategy will be presented to Council in Q4 2025.

### B. Overview

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This report provides Council with an overview of the Strategic Initiatives department's 2026 budget requests and seeks direction to include the projects in the 2026 budget process for consideration.

### C. Background

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The following three projects have been identified as part of the Strategic Initiatives department's 2026 work plan, which staff recommends be included in the 2026 draft budget for Council's consideration. Implementation details regarding each project is included in the following section of the report.

- 1. Communications Review**
- 2. Economic Development Action Plan**
- 3. Gateway & Wayfinding Implementation**

The following chart outlines the background details and rationale regarding these three projects being recommended for implementation.

	<b>Background Details / Rationale</b>
<b>Communications Review</b>	<p>The Communications Review is being recommended for implementation in 2026 due to the conclusion of the <a href="#">2021 – 2025 Communications Strategy</a> developed by the Community Communications Advisory Committee. The strategy played a key role in establishing the Town’s current communication standards, and this review is intended to focus on refining internal processes and standards to increase communications efficiency and consistency.</p> <p>Further, following the deputation of John Milne and Paul Reale, Re: ‘Turning Learnings into Actions regarding the Campus of Care project’, Council directed staff to provide further insights into actions that will be pursued to improve communications. Based on this direction, staff recommend that undertaking a communications review would be beneficial and aligned with the direction of Council.</p>
<b>Economic Development Action Plan</b>	<p>The Economic Development Action Plan is being recommended for implementation in 2026 due to the conclusion of the <a href="#">2021 – 2025 Economic Development Strategy</a> developed by the Economic Development Advisory Committee. The strategy provided a strong foundation to support local businesses, but it would have benefited from a detailed implementation plan.</p> <p>The Action Plan being recommended is aligned with Council's priorities to support local businesses and key industries, while also creating opportunities to diversify the Town’s economic sectors through new business attraction.</p>
<b>Gateway &amp; Wayfinding Implementation</b>	<p>Phase 1 of the Gateway &amp; Wayfinding project is being recommended for implementation in 2026, following Council direction to proceed with the project based on the approval of the Gateway Concept designs in June 2025.</p> <p>This project is aligned with Council's priorities to strengthen the Town’s brand identity through updated community signage.</p>

To support this background information, staff would like to highlight that progress reports regarding the implementation status of the 2021 - 2025 Communications Strategy and the 2021 – 2025 Economic Development Strategy are being developed and will be presented to Council

in Q4 2025. If the recommended projects are approved, the details of these progress report will be used to help shape the scope of work for each of the respective projects.

## **D. Analysis**

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### **1. Communications Review**

- **Project Budget:** \$25,000
- **Project Timeline:** Launched in Q1 2026 and completed by Q3 2026
- **Strategic Alignment:** Focus on consistent communications, public engagement, strengthening public trust and transparency/accountability

#### **Project Summary - Communications Review**

The Communications Review project aims to strengthen the Town's communication and public engagement efforts by reviewing and streamlining internal processes, with a key focus on consistency. This initiative is designed to enhance accountability, transparency, and public trust by fine-tuning internal processes and standards to increase efficiency and consistency. Building upon the success of the 2021–2025 Communications Strategy, which was instrumental in establishing the Town's current standards, the review seeks to further advance these efforts. Staff recommend engaging an external municipal communications consultant for this task, ensuring a deeper analysis and fresh insights while aligning the Town's efforts with industry best practices.

The review will emphasize the Communications Division's role in supporting all Town departments and projects through project-specific communication and public engagement strategies. This comprehensive approach guarantees that public engagement is integrated across all municipal initiatives, ensuring the public is thoroughly informed and involved.

The Communications Review will focus on aligning public expectations and fostering community support, which is crucial for minimizing delays and misunderstandings.

### **2. Economic Development Action Plan**

- **Project Budget:** \$60,000
- **Project Timeline:** Launched in Q2 2026 and completed by Q4 2026
- **Strategic Alignment:** Local business support, business retention and attraction, job creation, economic diversification and community development

#### **Project Summary - Economic Development Action Plan**

The Economic Development Action Plan project will be focused on developing a five-year Economic Development work plan for the Town. The action plan will help prioritize projects and the Town's role in supporting local businesses, strengthening key sectors and encouraging business attraction and investment to diversify the local economy.

The Action Plan will build on the 2021 – 2025 Economic Development Strategy, which provided a starting foundation to address priority areas of concern. Staff recommend that the project be

led by an external economic development consultant to help prioritize initiatives and align the Town's efforts with best practices.

The scope of work will include a broad economic development review and sector-specific action plans to support the Town's three primary industries of agriculture, tourism and retail. The goal of the action plan will be to create alignment between the business associations and to ensure that there is a clear vision and plan created to help the core economic areas of the Town succeed.

### **3. Gateway & Wayfinding Implementation**

- **Project Budget:** \$210,000 for Phase 1 Town Gateway Signage
- **Project Timeline:** Signs ordered and fabricated by Q2 2026, installation completed by Q3 2026
- **Strategic Alignment:** Enhanced community identity, tourism development and management, economic development and local business support

#### **Project Summary – Gateway & Wayfinding Implementation**

The Gateway & Wayfinding Project began in 2024 with the goal of designing and implementing a uniform sign program that will instill a strong sense of character and identity throughout the Town of The Blue Mountains, establish a clear and identifiable hierarchy of signs and reduce gaps and omissions in existing Town Signage.

In 2025, Town Council approved a Gateway Signage Design that will be installed at entrances to the Town on major traffic corridors, a Town and Community design that will be placed in Primary Settlement Areas (Thornbury, Clarksburg, Craigleith) and a Hamlet/Rural Community design that will be used in smaller communities in The Blue Mountains (Ravenna, Swiss Meadows, Duncan, etc.).

The implementation will be separated into three phases for each classification of sign, beginning with the Town Gateway Signage scheduled for installation in 2026. Phase 2 for Primary Settlement Areas would be implemented in 2027, and the Hamlet signage is planned for 2028. Based on the goal of the gateway and wayfinding sign project, there may be opportunities for the cost to be funded through the Town's share of Municipal Accommodation Tax.

- **Phase 1 – Town Gateway Signs (Scheduled for 2026)**
  - Includes the fabrication and installation of six gateway signs along primary entrance routes. Identified routes include:
    - Highway 26 East
    - Highway 26 West
    - Grey Road 40
    - Grey Road 2
    - Grey Road 13
    - Grey Road 19 (Mountain Road)

- **Phase 2 – Primary Settlement Area Signs (Scheduled for 2027 - 2028)**
  - Includes the fabrication and installation of community entrance signs for Thornbury, Clarksburg & Craigleith. Location and sign planning approvals will be completed before work begins.
- **Phase 3 – Hamlet Signs (Scheduled for 2028 - 2030)**
  - Includes the fabrication and installation of entrance signs for hamlets throughout the Town. Location and sign planning approvals will be completed before work begins. Examples include, but are not limited to: Ravenna, Heathcote, Redwing, Gibraltar, Swiss Meadows, Lora Bay, etc.

## **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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No environmental impacts are anticipated as a direct result of this report.

## **G. Financial Impacts**

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The proposed project budgets are as follows:

1. Communications Review - \$25,000
2. Economic Development Action Plan- \$60,000
3. Gateway & Wayfinding Implementation - \$210,000

Funding to support these projects has traditionally been considered through general taxation. Given their nature, there may be opportunities to fund the Economic Development Action Plan

and the Gateway & Wayfinding Signs through the Town's share of Municipal Accommodation Tax.

In addition, the Town will be actively applying for grant opportunities to support these projects. Specifically, the [Rural Ontario Development \(ROD\) program](#) has funding streams to support strategy development and implementation planning.

## **H. In Consultation With**

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Adam Smith, Interim CAO  
Monica Quinlan, Director of Finance  
Allan Gibbons, Manager of Communication & Customer Service

## **I. Public Engagement**

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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](mailto:si@thebluemountains.ca).

## **J. Attached**

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None.

Respectfully submitted,

Tim Hendry  
Director of Strategic Initiatives

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

Document Title:	SI.25.031 Overview of 2026 Strategic Initiatives Budget Requests.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Aug 25, 2025

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

**Tim Hendry - Aug 22, 2025 - 4:03 PM**

**No Signature found**

**Adam Smith - Aug 25, 2025 - 5:03 PM**