



# Staff Report

## Strategic Initiatives

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**Report To:** COW- Admin, Corp and Finance, SI, Comm. Services  
**Meeting Date:** April 13, 2026  
**Report Number:** SI.26.013  
**Title:** MAT Evaluation Results and Funding Recommendations  
**Prepared by:** Tim Hendry, Director of Strategic Initiatives

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### A. Recommendations

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THAT Council receive Staff Report SI.26.013, entitled “MAT Evaluation Results and Funding Recommendations”;

AND THAT Council approves the following application for funding through the Town’s portion of Municipal Accommodation Tax:

- Application 1: Destination Marketing Organization - Tourism Branding: \$25,000
- Application 2: Thornbury Business Improvement Area - Downtown Beautification, Infrastructure and Placemaking: \$100,000
- Application 3: Blue Mountain Village Association – Winter Lights: \$169,300
- Application 4: Clarksburg Village Association – Public Washrooms and Beautification: \$140,000
- Application 5: Blue Mountain Chamber of Commerce – Refill and Recharge Project: \$40,000
- Application 6: TBM Tree Tail – Town of The Blue Mountains Tree Tail: \$8,350

AND THAT Council directs staff to prepare agreements related to the following projects and authorizes the Mayor and Clerk to execute the agreements based on the performance deliverables as outlined within this report.

### B. Overview

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This report provides Council with the results of the evaluations conducted to review the Municipal Accommodation Tax applications submitted for consideration through the 2026 external application process.

### C. Background

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Through report [SI.25.036](#), Council provided direction to staff to conduct an open Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) application process for external groups and Town Council-established Committees, Working Groups, and Task Forces.

Following the direction, a [call for external applications](#) was issued on February 11, 2026. The notice outlined that the MAT funding program is intended to support community-based projects, initiatives, and requests that align with Town priorities, including the Destination Strategy, Corporate Strategic Plan, and Economic Development Strategy, with a focus on delivering benefits for both residents and visitors. In addition, the notice outlined that applications may be submitted by external organizations, including not-for-profit organizations, registered charities and Council-established Committees, Working Groups, and Task Forces. The application period closed on Wednesday, March 4, 2026, with 14 applications received.

As approved through report [SI.25.036](#), a detailed evaluation was completed for each application by the Town's Senior Management Team based on the approved evaluation criteria, (Attachment #2). As a reminder, the evaluation criteria was developed through feedback received from local tourism businesses/representatives, resident and Council member feedback. The evaluation criteria was established to ensure that MAT funds are used appropriately to support tourism and for projects that align with the Town's Corporate Strategic Plan and that support the goals and objectives of the Destination Strategy and the Economic Development Strategy.

In addition, the Town's Use of MAT Funds is also governed by the ["Town Use of Municipal Accommodation Tax"](#) Corporate Policy (POL.24.07), which establishes funding principles to guide the use of the Municipal Portion of funds collected through the Town of The Blue Mountains Municipal Accommodation Tax program.

Notwithstanding the above and the outcome of the evaluation results presented through this report, it's important to highlight that pursuant to Ontario Regulation 435/17: TRANSIENT ACCOMMODATION TAX, Council reserves the right to use the Town's Portion of Municipal Accommodation Tax funds at its sole discretion. In plain language, this means that Council has the authority to use the Town's share of MAT funds in any manner that they collectively deem appropriate and as directed by certified resolution.

## **D. Analysis**

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Evaluations were conducted by the Senior Management Team through consensus scoring on Wednesday, March 25, 2026.

As a general comment, the evaluation team would like to express gratitude to all applicants for the quality of their applications. The applications received reflected a wide range of meaningful community priorities and demonstrated the strong interest of local organizations in advancing initiatives that benefit the Town and community as a whole. While not all submissions aligned closely with the specific requirements of the Municipal Accommodation Tax framework, several may be well-positioned for consideration through other funding sources, partnership opportunities or broader strategic initiatives that are better suited to their objectives and intended outcomes.

The ranked results and evaluation details are below. The detailed analysis is included as Attachment 1.

<b>Application</b>	<b>Amount Requested</b>	<b>Weighted Score (Out of 5)</b>	<b>Recommended for MAT Funding</b>
1. Destination Marketing Organization - Tourism Branding	\$25,000	3.65	Yes
2. Thornbury BIA - Downtown Beautification, Infrastructure and Placemaking	\$100,000	3.62	Yes
3. Blue Mountain Village Association – Winter Lights	\$169,300	3.62	Yes
4. Clarksburg Village Association – Public Washrooms and Beautification	\$140,000 in 2026, with \$120,000 to be requested in 2027	3.29	Yes
5. Blue Mountain Chamber of Commerce – Refill and Recharge Project	\$40,000	3.26	Yes
6. TBM Tree Tail – Town of The Blue Mountains Tree Tail	\$8,350	3.11	Yes
7. BMRA Housing Strategy Working Group – Workforce Housing	\$250,000 per year as an annual allocation	3.06	No  *Minimum score for 'Tourism Benefit and Visitor Experience' was not achieved.
8. Family Physician Recruitment Working Group - Recruitment of Family Physicians	\$100,000	2.92	No  *Minimum score for 'Tourism Benefit and Visitor Experience' was not achieved.
9. Climate Action Now Network - Beaver River Trail	\$17,000	2.89	No  *Minimum score for 'Tourism Benefit and

			Visitor Experience' was not achieved.
10. Craigleith Community Working Group – Pedestrian Safety Improvements	\$70,000	2.85	No  *Minimum score for 'Tourism Benefit and Visitor Experience' was not achieved.
11. Ironworks – Metal Sculpture Trail	\$30,000	2.6	No  *Minimum score for 'Tourism Benefit and Visitor Experience' was not achieved.
12. Marsh Street Centre – Executive Director	\$120,000 per year for three years	2.33	No  *Minimum score for 'Strategic Alignment', 'Tourism Benefit and Visitor Experience' and 'Feasibility and Risk' was not achieved.
13. Georgian Triangle Humane Society - Regional Centre for Pets & People	\$86,655	2.19	No  *Minimum score for 'Strategic Alignment', 'Tourism Benefit and Visitor Experience' was not achieved.
14. Monarch & Co. – Business Leadership Festival	\$32,500	0	Application Disqualified

**Next Steps (Agreements, Implementation and Reporting)**

Subject to Council approval, staff will prepare funding agreements for the approved projects. Following execution of the agreements, funding will be issued to the proponents in accordance with the agreement terms (tied to defined milestones and/or submission of required documentation).

Project delivery will be tracked through quarterly implementation status updates from each proponent, supplemented by staff monitoring against the approved scope, schedule and deliverables.

A final report will be required to be submitted by each proponent when the project is complete to document outcomes, including measures related to visitor experience and tourism/economic benefit where applicable.

Staff will provide Council with periodic summary updates as part of the consolidated MAT status update/reporting cycle identifying progress to date, any material schedule/budget risks and any recommended adjustments required to protect the Town's intended outcomes and accountability for the use of MAT funds.

### **General Evaluation Observations**

The following observations are provided to summarize key takeaways from the Town's first year of implementing an external MAT application and evaluation process and to support continuous improvement and applicant understanding in future intakes.

- **Evaluation approach:** through a consensus scoring process to support consistent interpretation of the Council-approved criteria and to apply a municipal-wide lens across tourism objectives, strategic alignment, operational impacts, and risk. Beginning next year, evaluations are anticipated to be completed by the Destination Advisory Committee, supporting a more fulsome tourism and resident lens to the evaluation process based on the Council-approved evaluation framework.
- **Learning value for applicants:** This first-year external intake provides valuable insight for proponents into how the evaluation team interpreted and applied the criteria. Particularly the importance of meeting minimum scoring thresholds and demonstrating alignment across the weighted categories (for example, "Tourism Benefit/Visitor Experience" as the highest-weighted area at 40%)
- **Readiness and accountability:** Applications were generally stronger when they included clear deliverables, realistic timelines, a practical plan for measuring outcomes and reporting results, and time-limited investments reducing the risk that MAT becomes an ongoing operating subsidy or creates long-term operating pressure.
- **General scoring feedback:** Given the category weighting and minimum thresholds, the following observations are shared to provide insight behind the scoring rationale:
  - Low scores were most often driven by gaps in the Tourism Benefit and Visitor Experience evaluation category, particularly where applications did not clearly demonstrate tangible visitor-facing improvements (or were primarily planning/administrative in the funding year), and where the tourism impact was indirect, asserted, or difficult to attribute to improved destination performance. This category carries the highest weighting at 40% and requires a minimum 3/5 score to qualify.
  - Applicants also commonly faced challenges in the Economic Benefit evaluation category when there was no clear pathway to increasing overnight visitation (especially mid-week/shoulder season) and limited return on investment evidence or measurable MAT-growth potential. This category carries a 20% weighting and requires a minimum 2/5 score to qualify.

- A few applications faced lower scores related to the Strategic Alignment evaluation category, which were generally driven by applications that described broad community development goals in principle but did not connect the proposal to specific priorities/actions in the Town's current strategic documents (Corporate Strategic Plan, Destination Strategy, and/or Economic Development Strategy). Where alignment was clearer, it was because the application demonstrated direct support for multiple strategic priorities and articulated that linkage in a way that was easy to verify against the Town's plans, consistent with the Strategic Alignment scoring guidance and minimum threshold.
- In addition, applications scored lower in the Feasibility and Risk evaluation category where approvals, ownership/jurisdiction, timelines and ongoing operating/resource impacts were not fully addressed or costed over the long term.

## **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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Environmental impacts associated with the MAT-funded projects are generally expected to be neutral to positive, particularly where initiatives support more sustainable tourism practices. The MAT evaluation framework also recognized environmental stewardship as part of tourism-related infrastructure and sustainable tourism best practices, and the consideration of environmental impacts was reflected both within the Tourism Benefit and Visitor Experience and Feasibility and Risk categories.

## G. Financial Impacts

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The Municipal Accommodation Tax funds are limited to what is collected each year. Total collection for 2025 was \$2.9 Million, with the Town's share being just over \$1.4 Million.

Through report, [SI.25.036](#), \$770,000 was allocated from the Town's share to support the following Town-initiated and led projects:

- Destination Strategy Implementation (\$150,000)
- Transit Service (\$175,000)
- Comprehensive Parking Strategy (\$50,000)
- Gateway Sign Project (\$210,000)
- Parks and Open Space Master Plan & Leisure Activity Plan Update (\$125,000)
- Economic Development Action Plan (\$60,000)

After subtracting these projects from the \$1.4 Million, approximately \$630,000 remains available to support the external MAT applications presented in this report.

The six projects recommended for funding as part of this report total \$482,650. If all six projects are approved, approximately \$147,350 would remain available for use by Council.

A chart illustrating this breakdown is included below:

<b>Total Town Share of MAT</b>	\$1,400,000
<b>Less Pre-Approved Town Projects</b>	\$770,000
<b>Subtotal</b>	\$630,000
<b>Less external MAT funding recommendations</b>	\$482,650
<b>Amount remaining</b>	<b>\$147,350</b>

## H. In Consultation With

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Adam Smith, Chief Administrative Officer  
Senior Management Team Members  
Allan Gibbons, Manager of Communications

## 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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1. MAT Evaluation Results – Detailed Analysis
2. MAT Evaluation Criteria

Respectfully submitted,

Tim Hendry  
Director of Strategic Initiatives

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

Document Title:	SI.26.013 MAT Evaluation Results and Funding Recommendations.docx
Attachments:	- Attachment 1 – Detailed MAT Evaluation Analysis.pdf - Attachment 2 - MAT Evaluation Criteria.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Apr 2, 2026

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

**Tim Hendry - Apr 2, 2026 - 10:23 AM**