



Staff Report

Strategic Initiatives

Report To: COW- Admin, Corp and Finance, SI, Comm. Services
Meeting Date: April 13, 2026
Report Number: SI.26.012
Title: Sale of Explore Blue Brand Assets
Prepared by: Tim Hendry, Director of Strategic Initiatives

A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report SI.26.012, entitled “Sale of Explore Blue Brand Assets to Destination Marketing Organization”;

AND THAT Council approves the sale of the Explore Blue brand assets, inclusive of the Explore Blue name, logo rights, social media handles and website URL (www.exploreblue.ca) for \$1.00 to the Blue Mountain Village Association for use by the Destination Marketing Organization in a manner consistent with the terms of the Municipal Accommodation Tax agreement between the Town of The Blue Mountains and the Blue Mountain Village Association;

AND THAT Council approves the preparation of an agreement based on the terms outlined in this report and directs the Mayor and Clerk to execute the agreement with the Blue Mountain Village Association.

B. Overview

This report provides Council with details regarding the recommendation to transfer ownership of the Explore Blue brand assets to the Blue Mountain Village Association for use by the Destination Marketing Organization for the purposes of tourism marketing and promotion.

C. Background

Through the process of approving the Destination Strategy and implementing Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT), Council selected the Blue Mountain Village Association (BMVA) to serve as the Town’s Destination Marketing Organization (DMO).

For context, a DMO are recognized as not-for-profit organizations that work to promote and market tourism for specific geographical locations, communities or regions. In Ontario, DMOs generally rely on funds generated by MAT, along with municipal contributions.

Through this new partnership, the BMVA DMO has been working with its MAT Advisory Committee to establish and confirm the public-facing brand presence to promote and market

tourism for the Town of The Blue Mountains. These discussions have been productive and resulted in a clear and focused commitment to build a distinct brand identity centered around the word “Blue,” along with establishing a DMO website and social media accounts. Based on this direction, BMVA inquired about the option of leveraging the Town’s existing Explore Blue brand to support the DMO’s marketing efforts.

If approved by Council, the BMVA has expressed that this would significantly accelerate time-to-market for the DMO and reduce the need for duplicative brand development. This approach also aligns with the Town’s Destination Strategy, which identified either discontinuing Explore Blue or transitioning the tourism brand function to the DMO.

In addition, through the implementation of Municipal Accommodation Tax and the establishment of the DMO, there is no longer a direct operational need for the Town to maintain the Explore Blue brand as a separate tourism marketing channel. As a result, staff are recommending the sale of the Explore Blue brand assets to BMVA for the DMO’s use, while entering into an agreement that establishes appropriate governance to protect Town interests related to the representation and promotion of Town-owned tourism assets. This approach leverages the destination's strong, anchored brand identity while enabling visitor mobility through a sense of exploration.

D. Analysis

The Explore Blue website and brand were developed in early 2020 by the COVID-19 Community Recovery Task Force to serve as a public-facing tool to share community information and support local businesses.

When launched, the website featured a local business directory highlighting businesses open and operating in the Town of The Blue Mountains, along with instructions for online ordering, curbside pickup, and delivery and video experiences that residents and visitors could enjoy from home. As COVID-19 restrictions loosened, Explore Blue transitioned into a local business support and community information website featuring shop-local campaigns, business profiles, community events, and outdoor recreation opportunities. Today, the Explore Blue website continues to be maintained but has limited traffic due to the absence of active external marketing and promotion.

During the development of the Destination Strategy, the future of Explore Blue was considered and staff identified that the most appropriate direction would be either shutting down the website or transferring its ownership to the DMO, based on the understanding that the DMO’s role is to promote and market tourism for the Town and that the Explore Blue brand and URL could be leveraged to avoid duplicative brand development.

Through ongoing discussions with BMVA, if the sale proceeds the DMO has committed to operating the Explore Blue brand in alignment with the DMO mandate and the contractual MAT agreement with the Town, including the requirement to promote the entire community. In addition, the DMO has agreed to an approach whereby the Town would retain oversight of how Town-owned tourism assets (e.g., parks, beaches, trails, and related visitor messaging) are

represented and promoted. This will be further supported by seasonal content guidelines intended to support safe and sustainable visitation and emphasize broad recreational themes without directing visitors to specific sensitive locations.

Separately, maintaining ownership of the existing Explore Blue website platform and underlying technical infrastructure would allow the Town to repurpose the site for other strategic priorities, with the specific future use to be determined through the Economic Development Action Plan project.

If the recommendation is approved by Council, staff will work with external legal counsel to develop an agreement aligned with the terms outlined in this report, including but not limited to the asset transfer terms, governance and approvals for Town-owned tourism asset content, risk allocation (including insurance and indemnities), transition timing and a coordinated communications approach.

E. Strategic Priorities

1. Communication and Engagement

We will enhance communications and engagement between Town Staff, Town residents and stakeholders

2. Organizational Excellence

We will continually seek out ways to improve the internal organization of Town Staff and the management of Town assets.

3. Community

We will protect and enhance the community feel and the character of the Town, while ensuring the responsible use of resources and restoration of nature.

4. Quality of Life

We will foster a high quality of life for full-time and part-time residents of all ages and stages, while welcoming visitors.

F. Environmental Impacts

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

Seasonal content guidelines discussed with BMVA are intended to support safe and sustainable tourism visitation.

G. Financial Impacts

The recommendation to proceed with a nominal sale of the Explore Blue brand assets for \$1.00 does not result in a material financial gain for the Town.

The sale will reduce ongoing staff time required to maintain the existing Explore Blue website.

Costs associated with maintaining the website infrastructure will continue to be supported by the Strategic Initiatives department budget until a future use of the website platform is determined.

H. In Consultation With

Adam Smith, Chief Administrative Officer

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, Director of Strategic Initiatives si@thebluemountains.ca.

J. Attached

None.

Respectfully submitted,

Tim Hendry
Director of Strategic Initiatives

For more information, please contact:
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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SI.26.012 Sale of Explore Blue Brand Assets to Destination Marketing Organization.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Mar 26, 2026

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

Tim Hendry - Mar 26, 2026 - 4:20 PM