

To:	Warden Milne and Members of Grey County Council
Committee Date:	October 26, 2023
Subject / Report No:	EDTC-CW-18-23
Title:	Beaver Valley Sustainable Tourism Strategy
Prepared by:	Savanna Myers
Reviewed by:	Randy Scherzer
Lower Tier(s) Affected:	All; particularly Grey Highlands and The Blue Mountains
Status:	

Recommendation

1. That report EDTC-CW-18-23 regarding the Beaver Valley Sustainable Tourism Strategy be received; and
2. That the Beaver Valley Sustainable Tourism Strategy be adopted as presented; and
3. That partners, Grey County, Municipality of Grey Highlands, Town of The Blue Mountains and Regional Tourism Organization 7: BruceGreySimcoe develop a formal memorandum of understanding (MOU) that outlines partner commitment to achieving the goals and allocating and/or securing resources to achieve desired outcomes of the strategy; and
4. That any financial commitments associated with the MOU or Strategy be included annually in the budget process for Council consideration.

Executive Summary

Visitation has been growing at a rapid pace in the iconic Beaver Valley. In response to growing concern about potential negative impacts, Grey County, Municipality of Grey Highlands, Town of The Blue Mountains and Regional Tourism Organization 7: BruceGreySimcoe (RTO7) partnered to develop the first Beaver Valley Sustainable Tourism Strategy. Following tremendous consultation, the strategy proposes a shared long-term vision and action-oriented approach to opportunities across Stakeholder Alignment and Collaboration and Tourism Development. This strategy is about finding balance among the needs of multiple stakeholders, leading to a better visitor experience, reducing visitor/resident conflict and protecting the beauty and function of our environment.

Background and Discussion

Project partners, Grey County, Municipality of Grey Highlands, Town of The Blue Mountains and RTO7 engaged Bannikin to develop the first Beaver Valley Sustainable Tourism Strategy and three-year Action Plan. The project began with endorsement of report EDTC-CW-04-23 in February 2023. Over the past eight months, it became apparent that the three-year action plan needed to be expanded to five years, given the complexity of tourism, multitude of players and work to be done in the Beaver Valley.

Visitation had been growing steadily in Grey County and the Beaver Valley leading up to the pandemic. It became clear during the pandemic, that tourists are visiting the iconic Beaver Valley in increasingly greater numbers, and an unplanned approach to tourism development puts the area and residents at risk of potential negative impacts of unfettered tourism activity.

Good tourism development takes years and involves a long-term commitment from all players in this complex marketplace. Respecting the goals and objectives of all stakeholders, organizations, and stewards of the Beaver Valley, and balancing the needs of the community and visitors, will help us collectively build a strong visitor economy that aligns with the core values and principles of the multitude of players in this space.

Tourism as a Sector

Tourism is one of the top global export sectors. Locally, tourism is one of Grey County's top five core sectors. Tourism is a major employer and exporter, bringing money into the region. Approximately 10,000 employees in Grey County are directly impacted by tourism, through more than 5400 businesses. We are now nearing three million visitors annually and with more than \$222M in visitor spending.

We know that, when not properly planned for and managed, tourism runs the risk of negatively impacting the environment and communities that host tourism products. That said, we also know that with proper planning and coordinated management, tourism can bring significant benefits that support the well-being of the local economy, communities, and the environment.

The Importance of Balance

The work to develop this strategy has been complex. There are so many stakeholders involved and the list continues to grow as new groups are established. Yet, engagement among these stakeholders is also highly varied.

Our job as public servants is to represent all stakeholders and find balance in the needs of each. This is why the project partners are so dedicated to seeing this strategy through. Everyone needs to be able to see themselves in the strategy, respect the need for each stakeholder and project partners need to take a leadership role to create and maintain balance.

This strategy is all about balance. There are only two strategic opportunities for a reason. Both sides are equally important and will take incredible attention and resources to achieve. Project

partners understand that our sphere of control is limited, so the opportunities and goals are meant to focus on our roles and responsibilities, while also leaning on others who will play an important role in collectively realizing the shared vision.

The Future of Destination Beaver Valley

Project partners recognize the need to frame tourism development and management in a way that balances the economic, social/cultural, and environmental needs and opportunities for tourism, while responding to and recognizing visitor needs. With this context in mind, we sought community input and drafted a vision for the future of sustainable tourism in our emerging destination:

The Beaver Valley provides a world-class experience for visitors and locals alike, all of whom value the spectacular geography of the region and respect the need to create a long-term legacy of economic and social vibrancy and environmental sustainability.

Given the emergence of a number of related initiatives, including the community-led Beaver Valley Destination Stewardship undertaking, the strategies and actions identified in this plan are focused on recommendations that can be undertaken by the project partners to move forward, collaboratively on a larger shared vision for sustainable tourism development in the Beaver Valley. The document and the recommendations are the start of the journey and we look forward to continuing to evolve our work as a group and working to complement other initiatives taking place across this great region, all in support of a shared vision for the long-term legacy of the Beaver Valley.

The following areas of opportunity and goals were identified, each with their own objectives, and corresponding strategies and actions. Full descriptions of the areas of opportunity and overview of actions are included in the “Future of Destination Beaver Valley” section of the attached Strategy.

Opportunity	Goals & Objectives
Stakeholder Alignment and Collaboration	<p>Goal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Destination stakeholders are working efficiently and effectively together to shape and deliver tourism sustainably. <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To grow and unite destination stakeholders into a tourism community • To align efforts to improve Beaver Valley as a destination
Tourism Development	<p>Goal:</p>

- Tourism assets and infrastructure are being responsibly and successfully used to attract visitors to the Beaver Valley.

Objectives:

- To leverage and grow demand generators
- To lay the groundwork for tourism investments that will bring long-term benefits

The Journey Ahead

This sustainable tourism strategy presents a plan for the journey ahead. None of this work can happen in isolation and despite engaging a breadth and diversity of destination stakeholders across the development of this strategy, continued conversations toward collaboration and shared understanding need to take place.

We acknowledge the importance of understanding and respecting the role and function of various organizations, destination stakeholders, landowners and visitors. We also fully respect all the great work being done across the region towards building a thoughtful, respectful, and thriving tourism industry. The opportunities and actions in this strategy are undertakings that as project partners we can commit to and to which we can deliver meaningful outcomes.

Beaver Valley has the potential to become a world-class destination – which means it needs both well planned and placed infrastructure and development, and complete care for the natural environment to ensure its beauty and function are maintained for generations to come. Without balance, no one will be further ahead and we'll chance losing the Beaver Valley we know and love.

Collectively, our pursuit of these strategies aims to enhance collaboration, inform our approach, and create a sustainable tourism sector in Beaver Valley that thrives economically, socially, and environmentally. We invite all stakeholders to join us on this transformative journey, united by a shared vision and a collective responsibility to preserve and enrich this beautiful and distinctive destination—Beaver Valley.

Financial and Resource Implications

Funding for strategic plan development was included in the approved 2023 budget and co-funded by Grey Highlands and The Blue Mountains along with a provincial grant and RTO7 partnership funds.

Costs associated with implementation of the plan will be included each year through the budget process for Council consideration. As a priority of the Economic Development, Tourism & Culture Master Plan and the Beaver Valley Sustainable Tourism Strategy, staff time required to take action will be dedicated through annual work plans.

Relevant Consultation

- Internal: Economic Development, Planning, Deputy CAO
 - AODA Compliance (describe)
 - Contribution to Climate Change Action Plan Targets – aligns with Community Action 20: Sustainable Tourism Programs and Incentives
- External: Municipality of Grey Highlands, Town of the Blue Mountains, Regional Tourism Organization 7 (RTO7), Bannikin, Landowners, Civic Agencies and Ministries, Volunteer Organizations, Community Groups, Residents

Appendices and Attachments

Beaver Valley Sustainable Tourism Strategy