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# HALDIMAND COUNTY

## Report EDT-04-2019 Economic Development and Tourism Division Draft Branding Strategy

For Consideration by Committee of the Whole on April 23, 2019

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### OBJECTIVE:

To request Council's approval of the Economic Development and Tourism Draft Branding Strategy; and to provide Council an overview and presentation of the proposed brand platform.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT Report EDT-04-2019 Economic Development and Tourism Division Draft Branding Strategy be received;
2. AND THAT the draft Economic Development and Tourism Division Branding Strategy and brand included as Attachment #1 to EDT-04-2019, be approved;
3. AND THAT the approved branding be utilized on a go forward basis for marketing and communication associated with the Economic Development and Tourism strategies and programs;
4. AND THAT the adoption of the brand as an updated Corporate Logo be approved.

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**Approved:** Donald G. Boyle, Chief Administrative Officer

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report is to provide a summary of the key insights and concepts contained within the draft Economic Development and Tourism Branding Strategy. The proposed Draft Economic Development and Tourism Branding Strategy flows from the approved Economic Development and Tourism Strategies and is found in Attachment 1. The intent of the brand is to positively represent the County, summarizing its value proposition, ensuring it is meaningful and reflective of the unique qualities of the County, while providing a mechanism to coordinate marketing and communication activities in a strategic manner. The proposed Branding Strategy will serve as the foundation for the development of accompanying brand visuals, brand style guide, implementation plan and marketing/communications plan.

### BACKGROUND:

In 2017, Council approved an Economic Development Strategy and Tourism Strategic Action Plan. During the development of the strategies, consultations revealed that stakeholders cannot easily identify or describe Haldimand's unique identity, brand, strengths, location or the economic

development opportunities that exist. This is important because for marketing purposes to attract new businesses, visitors and residents, it is critical to be able to articulate the ‘value proposition’—why invest or come to Haldimand. A brand is a key tool to help people and businesses understand this. The branding strategy supports the goals of the approved economic development and tourism strategies, and the brand implementation plan will identify short and long-term strategic tactics to maximize the brand’s value to the community and external audiences. The tie to these key strategies is as follows:

**Excerpt from 2017 Economic Development Strategy:**

Economic growth will occur from within Haldimand County, but it is also important that the County can solicit investment from outside the County as well. For the County to be able to attract investment and grow its economy, it will need to be able to describe its economic development identity through a strong brand that can anchor its marketing efforts.

Recommended actions from the Council approved Economic Development Strategy:

***Creating the “Why Invest” in Haldimand County.*** *Using the economic development strategy and situational analysis, create Haldimand’s value proposition—what are the business reasons companies should want to invest in Haldimand County.*

***Using the “Why Invest” to create a new economic development identity.*** *Utilizing Haldimand’s unique characteristics and value proposition, undertake a branding exercise to help express the Haldimand County Economic Development identity.*

**Excerpt from 2017 Tourism Strategic Action Plan:**

There is a lack of defined brand and coordinated marketing. Destinations courting the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) market have significant competition to contend with. Within a two-hour drive of Toronto there are numerous small towns, regions, and recreational areas all trading on their quaint ambiance and accessible nature. To stand out in the minds of consumers, a defined brand and clear offer is required. The goal is to identify Haldimand County’s unique selling proposition (USP), and then work to ensure that when people hear the word “Haldimand” they associate it immediately with the USP. A defined brand is fundamental to the County becoming a more successful tourism destination.

Recommended actions from the Council approved Tourism Strategic Action Plan:

***Undergo a Haldimand County brand positioning and refresh exercise.*** *Cities and surrounding regions throughout Ontario are marketing themselves directly and in defined, refreshed ways. The branding should be completed before investing more in marketing efforts as the look and the identity of the destination will guide the marketing decisions referenced in the strategy.*

***Showcase the assets that make Haldimand County a great place to live and to visit.*** *Providing a brand toolkit (style guide) that gives the County and various stakeholders the guidelines to use the brand effectively.*

The Economic Development and Tourism branding strategy was approved by Council as a one-time \$40,000 initiative within the 2018 Tax Supported Operating Budget. In an effort to offset associated expenses, a project proposal was submitted to the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) under the Rural Economic Development (RED) grant program. On April 13<sup>th</sup> 2018, Haldimand County, Economic Development and Tourism Division received notification of the approved RED application in the amount of \$20,000; with the requirement the project be complete and monies fully spent by June 30, 2019. This funding was approved by Council in 2018.

## **ANALYSIS:**

### **Branding Overview:**

Branding is the perception that a consumer has when they hear or think of a company, service, community or product. In this application, it is a picture of who we are as a County (or place) to existing and potential stakeholders.

Branding is about building and maintaining competitiveness in the market place, contributing to sustainable economic development within the community. The branding process identifies a community's strongest assets, defining the elements of the County's economic development story, and telling that story consistently through marketing and communication efforts over time.

Developing a brand strategy can be one of the most difficult steps in the marketing process, but is vital in communicating a community's unique identity. The inward facing process of developing a brand is a long-term strategy that aims to develop a comprehensive 'sense of place' through community consultation and research. It requires a series of strategic decisions, investments, collaboration, and ultimately, buy-in from a community's various stakeholders.

A brand strategy provides staff the strategic framework to coordinate individual messages and marketing activities to best leverage marketing resources and time constraints. It ensures that those areas that have the best chance of success are prioritized. A well-conceived brand strategy can provide opportunities for increased competitiveness, effectiveness and consistency in how a community is presented to its target audiences. Setting the guidelines for how the County's assets and competitive advantages should be communicated, and what marketing tactics are best suited to achieve our marketing objectives.

A strategy ensures that materials promoting the County's economic development and tourism assets are presented with consistency in their look, story, and message. It also provides guidance to assess effectiveness of the messaging (key performance indicators), avoiding the pitfall of ongoing communication changes with the hopes of finding a message that best resonates with desired audiences.

A well planned branding strategy:

- Ensures that a community has focused its brand on its most distinctive and competitive strengths;
- Addresses or overcomes dated or inaccurate perceptions of a community;
- Provides focus, clarity, consistency and market relevance; and
- Informs marketing objectives, ensuring resources are being applied in an efficient and coordinated manner.

### **Project Overview:**

The goals of the Haldimand County, Economic Development and Tourism brand strategy is to support the goals of the Economic Development and Tourism strategies with a particular emphasis on:

- a) Attracting, retaining and growing business;
- b) Building vibrant communities;
- c) Maintaining and enhancing Haldimand County's high quality of life;
- d) Becoming investment ready; and
- e) Creating a unique Haldimand County identity for residential, business and tourist attraction.

The brand strategy will be a key tool that will inform Economic Development and Tourism Division's investment attraction efforts and create greater awareness of existing assets in Haldimand County. This then will lead to the development of specific marketing strategies and initiatives to target key

economic sectors using the unique value proposition and branding to better tell Haldimand's story. From a tourism perspective, being able to effectively communicate the numerous tourism experiences and quality of place within the County will lead to increased sustainability and revenue generation for local tourism operators as well as related businesses. The outcome of the branding exercise is intended to be a concise, pragmatic and an immediately implementable strategy.

Council approval of the draft Economic Development and Tourism brand strategy and accompanying visual elements is required to enable staff to proceed with finalizing the brand positioning and visuals and adoption and use of the new logo. Upon Council's approval of the brand strategy, the next steps will include the development of the brand style guide, implementation plan and the marketing/communications plan; and ultimately, the execution of the brand on a go forward basis.

The project phases and deliverables include the following:

### **Consultant Selection:**

The Economic Development and Tourism Division formed an eight member steering committee comprised of four County staff and four external stakeholders (representing local business, a tourism stakeholder, and business supports) to complete the procurement process. The successful consultant, CQNS, was secured based on their significant expertise and specific experience in developing brands and implementing strategies for municipalities.

### **Phase One: Research and Foundation**

Phase one encompassed the initial research necessary to define target audiences, identifying what value Haldimand County offers to those stakeholders and developing the brand positioning statement.

The consultant drew from existing research and community planning documents, as well as conducted independent research and focus groups. Community engagement and input from Haldimand County residents, businesses, members of the development community, external stakeholders, and partner organizations shaped the key insights. To ensure the development of the proposed brand be based on local community insights. As a part of this process, staff along with the consultant educated stakeholder groups on what branding means, and why it is important for Haldimand County to implement a brand strategy to communicate our economic development identity.

Deliverables for phase one:

1. Stakeholder outreach and consultations; and
2. Research summary (key insights) to inform brand development.

#### *Deliverable #1: Stakeholder outreach and consultations (complete)*

- CQNS was provided with a number of recent studies and marketing materials to review.
- Five focus group sessions were held across the County with a combined attendance of 35 participants. Sessions were held in: Hagersville (5), Cayuga (8), Dunnville (4) and Caledonia (5), as well as a staff session (13).
- Online survey, open for five weeks garnered 72 online submissions.
- Six 1:1 phone interviews; with targeted key stakeholders, both internal and external to Haldimand County.
- Public awareness campaign: inclusion in County newspaper ad, circulated media release, inclusion in Corporate and Divisional newsletters, promotion on Corporate Twitter and Facebook accounts, and brand initiative along with consultation opportunities promoted on the County website.

## *Deliverable #2: Research summary (key insights) to inform brand development (complete)*

The completed primary and secondary research conducted in partnership with CQNS informed the key insights, shaping the proposed direction of the draft Economic Development and Tourism Branding Strategy (Attachment 1).

The following is a brief overview of the key insights that were formed during the research and outreach phase of project; and are presented in the attached draft Economic Development and Tourism Branding Strategy.

### **I. It's all about community.**

While very few people identify with Haldimand County, everyone described where they lived (communities within Haldimand County) as welcoming.

### **II. Mindful awareness creates authenticity.**

There is a deep pride in the community—consultations show the community is a wonderful place to work, raise a family and live. However, at the same time respondents could also identify some of the perceived barriers facing economic development in the community.

### **III. Sustainable evolution.**

Through consultation, most people indicated they understood that Haldimand County must continue to evolve in order to remain a vibrant and sustainable community. Although there is not a clear indication of what the evolution will be, feedback indicated that respondents do not want to see unchecked suburban development and unsustainable growth.

### **IV. There is a desirable way of life.**

Haldimand County represents the antithesis of harried urban life. The relaxed pace, natural beauty and small town charm are virtues that are very compelling to the right people.

## **Phase Two: Branding and Message Development**

Phase two of the project focused on the expression of the brand including visual elements that will effectively communicate Haldimand County's identity to target audiences. Consistency is key, and a brand platform that allows for use in a wide variety of settings, contexts and applications related to Economic Development programs/services is important. Visual elements will include recommended logo concepts, colours, fonts, styles and accompanying elements that are adaptable for use across a variety of channels including Haldimand County's newly updated website.

Deliverables for phase two:

1. Brand strategy development (draft), Council approval required via this report;
2. Concept market testing; and
3. Brand tool-kit and style guide.

## *Deliverable #1: Brand Strategy Development (draft completed)*

The draft Economic Development and Tourism Branding Strategy, outlines the suggested brand positioning of **"Real. Potential."**

Throughout the outreach to the various stakeholder groups what was frequently heard is that *real potential* exists in Haldimand County for those that value what Haldimand has to offer. Haldimand provides a great quality of life for those who wish to raise a family here, that the communities are welcoming, and that businesses can and do thrive within. The message or the big idea behind the tagline of **"Real. Potential."** is as follows:

Real is just how we live. How we interact with others. How we conduct business. How our word is our bond. Real is about authentic and sincere experiences with people who are proud of who they are and what they have created.

Potential is defined as Haldimand's qualities that may be developed to lead to your future success and Potential is our promise. We want to show people what Haldimand County is—a place where you can create a new business, have unique experiences, and make a real impact.

It is envisioned that moving forward the messaging will focus on authentic and sincere experiences with people and businesses who are proud of who they are and what they have created in Haldimand. Showing people what Haldimand County is—a place where you can create a new business, have unique tourism experiences, and make a real impact.

This 'big idea' or overarching brand concept of "**Real. Potential.**" and the associated value propositions included in the draft strategy, can be applied to a variety of stakeholders and audiences. Messaging for both tourism and business/investment applications could include the following:

- Business friendly municipal processes.
- A welcoming and friendly community.
- Very cost competitive environment/location.
- Advanced manufacturing sector is a by-product of the County's extensive history in craftsmanship and making things.
- Adaptive workforce.
- Emerging arts and culture scene.
- Embracing modern living; while cherishing tradition.
- Natural beauty; river, lakeshore, cycling paths, hiking trails.
- Relatively undiscovered gem.
- Agri-food business opportunities for producers and tourism.
- Convenient central location.

#### *Deliverable #2: Brand Concept Market Testing (complete)*

Phase two of the project includes market testing with key stakeholder groups. The proposed draft Economic Development and Tourism Brand Strategy has been introduced to the following groups:

- Economic Development and Tourism Division staff; October 23, 2018.
- General Manager of Community & Development Services; October 3, 2018.
- Brand Strategy Steering Committee (comprised of both Haldimand County staff and external stakeholders/business); November 1, 2018.
- Haldimand Business Network (representation from Haldimand County Chambers of Commerce, Business Improvement Areas and Board of Trade); November 7, 2018.
- Cross divisional Haldimand County staff review; November 23, 2018.
- Tourism Network meeting; December 10, 2018.
- Senior Management Team; December 18, 2018.

The feedback during the above 'market testing' has been positive. Generally speaking, participants have defined the concepts as accurately reflecting Haldimand County. Comments have included the following:

- The insights resonate.
- Potential gets people thinking; getting them to ask more questions about where the potential lies. Which from a consumer perspective, sparks intrigue.
- The periods matter. It divides the thoughts and provides opportunities to apply them either independently in the messaging/or together.
- 'Potential' has a strong business application.
- The brand concepts with well crafted messaging works in both a business/investment context, as well as for visitor attraction.

- “Real. Potential.” is something that could be successfully applied to the entire County, but also fits with each of the smaller towns. It is less limiting than something focused exclusively around either the Lakeshore or Grand River.
- Staff from other divisions stated their interest in the ability to use the brand concept across divisions.

#### *Deliverable #3: Brand tool-kit and style guide (underway)*

A proposed logo to accompany the draft strategy, along with sample execution examples (has been included as a separate cover) for approval. Proceeding to this phase of the project was critical to bring the concept of “Real. Potential.” and it’s positioning to life. Without the development of concept executions and proposed visual brand elements, it is difficult to visualize how the strategy execution, tone and unique selling proposition would resonate. The visual content provides tangible illustrations, with suggested brand elements including logo, messaging and brand personality to support the strategic brand positioning.

The brand guidelines (tool-kit) will include elements of the strategy such as: value proposition, brand values, brand personality and voice/tone. Additional visual elements will include: logo (and logo usage guidelines), brand colours and typography.

Additional market testing (using proposed logo and visuals) has been completed. Key stakeholders include:

- Senior Management Team; March 12, 2019.
- Brand Strategy Steering Committee (comprised of both Haldimand County staff and external stakeholders/business); March 18, 2019.
- Cross divisional Haldimand County staff review; March 18, 2019.

### **Phase Three: Brand Launch and Implementation**

Brands are a long-term investment in the future, and consistency of the brand message is critical to a brand’s ultimate success. To be meaningful the brand strategy for Haldimand County Economic Development and Tourism must be reflected in offers and experiences that bring the ideas to life for a range of different audiences.

Phase three will see the development of the brand implementation plan including: a review of existing use of brand assets, a brand migration plan and migration timeline. Along with the development of key performance indicators (and a review of existing marketing performance metrics).

Paired with the development of a marketing and communication plan that focuses on: SMART (S-specific, M-measurable, A-achievable, R-relevant, T-time based) marketing goals, a map of the typical customer journey, a 12-month marketing campaign roadmap and communications plan.

Deliverables for phase three:

1. Final brand strategy;
2. Key tracking metrics (performance indicators); and
3. Integrated implementation plan, including a marketing and communications plan.

### **Anticipated Timing:**

#### *Deliverable #1: Final brand strategy*

Following Council approval of the draft Branding strategy, a brand implementation plan along with a marketing/communication plan will be prepared for staff approvals in April 2019, with a final project completion required by June 2019.

### *Deliverable #2: Key tracking metrics (performance indicators) (underway)*

A review of existing marketing performance measurements and best practices took place in December 2018. This review will lead into the development of key performance indicators (KPI) and tracking metrics for inclusion in the marketing and communications plan. Defined metrics will ensure staff can measure progress and effectiveness during initial brand implementation and beyond. It is intended to include these as part of annual updates to Council.

### *Deliverable #3: Integrated implementation plan, including a marketing and communications plan*

The final deliverable will include a brand campaign roadmap; this will include an implementation plan (outlining initial brand adoption/execution) and an accompanying 12-month marketing and communications plan. Both plans will be vetted and approved through the Economic Development and Tourism division prior to project completion in June 2019.

The brand implementation plan will include the following:

- Brand renewal narrative, why change, what it represents and the value it adds;
- Economic Development and Tourism checklist, what to update and who/how to communicate the change to; and
- Launch plan, creating momentum by telling the world about the new brand.

The brand marketing and communications plan will include the following:

- Marketing goals;
- Tactics;
- Channels, content and media mix recommendations; and
- Key performance indicators.

## **FINANCIAL/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:**

The 2018 Tax Supported Operating Budget included a one-time approved initiative for the Economic Development and Tourism Branding Strategy in the amount of \$40,000, and is currently funded from the Contingency Reserve. The successful Rural Economic Development application in the amount of \$20,000 has offset the total eligible project expenditures by fifty percent (50%), resulting in a corresponding reduction of the same amount in the Contingency Reserve funding.

As, OMAFRA requires completion by June 2019, staff have ensured the extension of this ongoing project is included in the 2019 operating budget as an ongoing Council approved initiative.

The approval and implementation of the Economic Development and Tourism Brand Strategy will lead to the development of an integrated implementation plan (including marketing and communications plan).

Implementation of the approved brand will be incorporated into future operational budgets and may include the following:

1. Design and rebrand of existing marketing materials such as:
  - Tourism maps and guides;
  - Haldimand County Community Profile;
  - Rural Business and Tourism Community Improvement Plan (RBTCIP) and Community Improvement Plan (CIP) marketing materials;
  - Divisional marketing materials (including business supports); and
  - Promotional items such as: trade show displays, roll-up banners and promotional giveaways.



2. Development of a stand-alone branded tourism website for visitors and applications for the existing business content on the corporate site.
3. Enhanced and integrated marketing campaigns for tourism visitation, and sector promotion.
4. Establishment of a targeted investment program and marketing plan to position Haldimand County for key economic sectors and potential investment opportunities.

Any requests for new activities and initiatives resulting from the strategy and brand implementation will be presented for Council's approval through the annual budget review process. Future costs will be ranked and evaluated against other competing and ongoing Divisional initiatives.

### **Corporate Logo:**

As is normal practice for matters such as this, prior to the finalization of the Economic Development and Tourism Branding Strategy and Logo, this material was presented to the Senior Management Team. During this review, it was identified that the proposed brand might also provide an opportunity to update the County Corporate Logo. Since 2001, the County has had a Coat of Arms which is used for formal business as well as a Logo which is used for marketing, promotion, communication and the web site. The current logo is approximately 18 years old and there is a sense that the style of the Logo and its impact are dated. The County's Coat of Arms and Corporate Logo Usage Policy was written with the assumption that the lifespan of the Logo would be considerably less than that of the Coat of Arms with the Logo being subject to change with future County marketing and branding initiatives.

With the construction of the new administration building and the need to include corporate signage on it, as well as the need to update the address of the administration building on stationary, business cards etc., the opportunity exists to consider updating the logo. In addition, the Capital Budget identifies a number of signage replacements that will occur over the next few years. The work undertaken to define the new brand logo as described in this report has resulted in a brand that reflects the key qualities of the County as a whole (not just the Division) and has been viewed positively by the Senior Management Team and community stakeholders. It was identified that it could form the basis of an updated more contemporary brand for the County as a whole. If Council supports this, the intent would be to use the new logo initially on the new administration building and on the replacement of the various entrance signs to the municipality as they are replaced in the next few years. Other signage and marketing material would be updated with the new logo as it is replaced. Staff are recommending that the new brand logo be adopted as a new Corporate Logo for the municipality.

### **STAKEHOLDER IMPACTS:**

The Economic Development and Tourism Branding Strategy requires input from various stakeholder groups during each phase of the project, including: consultation, market testing, brand implementation and adoption.

Through the development of a recognizable brand, Haldimand County's stakeholders will benefit from the raised County profile. Leading by example, the development of a concise and defined Haldimand County, Economic Development and Tourism brand will help key partners including; Chambers, Business Improvement Area's, and businesses to refine their own key branding and marketing messages further amplifying the impact of the overall brand strategy.

### **REPORT IMPACTS:**

Agreement: No

By-law: No

Budget Amendment: No

Policy: No

## **ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Draft Economic Development and Tourism Branding Strategy.