
HALDIMAND COUNTY

Report EDT-04-2024 Grand River Outfitter – Municipal Park Operations
For Consideration by Council in Committee on April 30, 2024



OBJECTIVE:

To obtain Council approval to enter into a license agreement with Grand River Rafting Company LTD. for the operation of a river outfitting business in York Park and Cayuga Kinsmen Park.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT Report EDT-04-2024 Grand River Outfitter – Municipal Park Operations be received;
2. AND THAT the request from the Grand River Rafting Company LTD. to undertake operations in 2024 as a pilot, with the possibility for renewal for two additional one-year terms, be approved conditional upon the business entering into a license agreement with Haldimand County;
3. AND THAT the license agreement between the Grand River Rafting Company LTD. and Haldimand County be developed based upon standard practices, and be executed by the General Manager, Community & Development Services;
4. AND THAT, the fee structure as presented in report EDT-04-2024 be approved;
5. AND THAT the General Manager, Community & Development Services be authorized to amend the terms and conditions contained within the license agreement to permit expansion of operations in 2025 and 2026 subject to consultation with and concurrence of County divisions identified in report EDT-04-2024.

Prepared by: Jaymie Nelson, BComm, EcD, Project Manager, Economic Development and Tourism

Reviewed by: Lidy Romanuk, BA, EcD, Manager, Economic Development and Tourism

Respectfully submitted: Mike Evers, MCIP, RPP, BES, General Manager of Community & Development Services

Approved: Cathy Case, Chief Administrative Officer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Within its current Tourism Strategic Action Plan (2016), Haldimand County has acknowledged the pivotal role of tourism as a catalyst for economic growth. Beyond job creation and the generation of municipal taxes, tourism amenities can also enhance the overall quality of life for residents. A key element within pillar three of the tourism strategic action plan 'product development', underscores the importance of further developing and activating the Grand River to support the County's development as a tourism destination.

While numerous jurisdictions across Ontario boast river systems and lakefront access, the Grand River in Haldimand County stands uniquely positioned, both geographically and historically, to weave a compelling narrative for its tourism brand. While the County has already promoted the utilization of its water system for various activities such as fishing, boating, cruising, birdwatching, cycling, and motorcycle touring, these tourism products are not currently complemented by the presence of an on-

river outfitter. The subject report seeks to address this gap in river-based tourism through the approval of a pilot of (up to) 3 years with Grand River Rafting Company LTD., a well-established provider of paddle recreation activities within the Grand River watershed. The pilot would include use of two County properties—York Park and Lower Kinsmen Park in Cayuga—for staging, launch and finish. Use of these sites will be governed by a licensing agreement which is the key focus of the recommendations in this report.

BACKGROUND:

Currently, the Grand River represents an untapped potential for tourism within the County, remaining largely disconnected from the downtown cores it intersects. Its appeal primarily extends to isolated activities such as fishing or exclusive access for watercraft owners. To fully leverage the Grand River and its waterfront, there is a critical need to enhance its recreational allure, integrating activities such as cycling, paddling, boating, and culinary experiences. Amenities such as waterfront outfitters would significantly enhance the area's attractiveness to visitors.

Since the ratification of the Tourism Strategic Action Plan by Council in 2016, Tourism Haldimand, serving as the destination management organization, has been diligently advancing various programs and initiatives to support the tourism sector locally. These include the *From Great to Grand Experiential Development program* (2023), the Innovation Lab's *Tourism Spark Program* (2023 and 2024), and ongoing Experiential Tourism training in collaboration with Ontario's Southwest since 2017. These efforts aim to bolster local businesses in enriching their offerings. Each have included elements to support tourism development along the waterfront, but despite commendable progress in several aspects of tourism development, the effort to foster on-river product expansion has presented notable challenges for Tourism Haldimand.

To further support development in this area, the Economic Development and Tourism (EDT) Division initiated the development of a Lower Grand River Visitor Experience Strategy (VES) in 2023 – which is currently underway. The VES is intended to identify opportunities to activate the Grand River and attract tourism investment, entice outfitters and promote events and activities on the Grand River from Caledonia to Lake Erie. The objective is to connect Haldimand's target audiences with a deeper understanding of the very essence of the Lower Grand River. For nature-hungry urbanites, a getaway to a serene community incorporating these water assets is a travel incentive, but only if the waterfront is thriving, attractive, and has activity options.

In line with all of the above, EDT staff were recently contacted by Grand River Rafting Company LTD. (GRR) with a proposal to establish its paddle-based activities (kayaks, stand-up paddleboards, turbo-tubes/rafts) in a section of the Grand River between York and Cayuga. The proposal from GRR is to pilot the operation for summer 2024, with the potential to extend it for two (2) additional years thereafter. Staff from a variety of County divisions have worked together to develop a plan that allows for a safe and organized accommodation of GRR's business which would be staged from Lower Kinsmen Park in Cayuga (parking, upstream shuttle for customers), with the ride launch being located at York Park in the Hamlet of York. Staff have also worked to develop a detailed license agreement that addresses all liabilities, insurance, operation parameters and other matters of regulation. County staff view this pilot as an excellent opportunity for both parties to test the feasibility of the business and the functionality of sites.

ANALYSIS:

Through ongoing networking by Tourism Haldimand with local, and regional tourism operators, a request to explore an operational agreement to utilize municipal park locations and facilitate on-river activities for an existing river outfitter, has been presented for consideration as a pilot.

Business Overview: Grand River Rafting Company LTD.

Grand River Rafting (GRR) stands as a prominent outdoor adventure company, specializing in providing exceptional paddling and outdoor experiences across Southern Ontario. Established in 2006 as a family-operated father and son venture, GRR established its first location along the Grand River in Paris, Ontario, and has since expanded its operations to encompass five strategically located sites: Guelph Lake, Glen Morris, Paris, Five Oaks, and Big Creek near the shores of Lake Erie in Norfolk County. The company currently has 50 employees with the capacity to host 1,500 people a day across the existing five sites with an annual attendance of over 50,000 visitors. The company's level of safety is without incident hosting all sizes, skills and ages from newborns to ninety-year-olds. Grand River Rafting is ranked by TripAdvisor in the top 10% of all the outdoor adventures in the world.

In fostering its operations, GRR maintains close collaborative ties with key stakeholders, including the Grand River Conservation Authority and Six Nations Tourism, as well as provincial tourism partners such as Regional Tourism Organization 3 (Hamilton-Halton-Brant) and Regional Tourism Organization 1 (Ontario's Southwest). Recognizing the importance of excellence in service delivery, GRR has made substantial investments in staff training, emergency preparedness and customer service initiatives. Moreover, the company is deeply committed to its role as a steward of the Grand River Valley, actively engaging in educational programming to enlighten visitors about the cultural and environmental significance of the Grand River and surrounding region.

Proposed model and operational details:

Visitor Experience:

The proposed visitor experience for GRR, if expanded to Haldimand County would include:

- five types of watercraft, including tubes, stand-up paddleboards (SUPs), kayaks, tandem kayaks, and canoes, with all necessary certified safety equipment provided. They will utilize an enclosed 30-foot trailer, a canoe-kayak trailer, and a van to transport equipment to launch sites.
- Online Booking: Visitors begin their journey by booking their river adventure online. (No transactions or payments are received on location.) The business' existing user-friendly booking platform will include the new additional river route and allows visitors to select their preferred date, time, and the type of watercraft for the river exploration.
- On the day of the experience visitors will be instructed to arrive at Lower Kinsmen Park in Cayuga and directed to the assigned parking area. Upon arrival, GRR staff will greet visitors and provide a brief orientation to ensure paddlers are well-prepared for their river adventure. Before embarking, visitors receive thorough instruction on paddling techniques and safety procedures. They are then equipped with high-quality life jacket and paddle.
- Transportation to York Park: Once geared up visitors are on-boarded to Grand River Rafting's 9-person passenger van, where they enjoy a short and scenic ride to York Park, which is the starting point for their Haldimand river adventure.
- Launch from York Park: Upon arrival at York Park, visitors are greeted by a second GRR staff and provided their selected watercraft. Once all set, they launch onto the gentle currents of the Grand River and begin the journey downstream.
- Return to Cayuga Kinsmen Park: The visitor experience comes full circle as visitors paddle back to Lower Kinsmen Park, where the adventure began. Upon arrival, visitors simply return their gear and watercraft, and return to their awaiting cars.
- The entire experience covers a 10 kilometre long stretch of the Grand River.

Administration:

The County does not have jurisdiction or management responsibility over the Grand River; however, the use of County lands will require proper administration which is proposed to be addressed through a license agreement and user fees, summarized as follows:

- A one-year pilot is proposed, formalized through a license agreement between the Grand River Rafting Company LTD. and Haldimand County, with an option to renew for two additional 1-year terms, to allow for the operation of a river outfitting experience based out of two municipal park locations.
- Site fees will be charged to GRR by Haldimand County following a defined user fee schedule, with set fees aligned to various customer volumes. These fees will be indexed annually through Haldimand County's User Fee By-law. More details on fees are contained in the Financial/Legal section below.
- In subsequent renewal periods, through the authorization of the General Manager, Community & Development Services, extended hours, operational days, and adjustment to the proposed start/end date of the season may be considered within the operational terms and agreements. Prior to any approvals for extending operations (days, hours), all County divisions identified in the subject report would be consulted to ensure any operational or legal concerns can be addressed.
- Additional terms and conditions may be modified or added, based on learnings, during the first year of the pilot period.

Visitor Volumes:

GRR is planning for a low scale pilot that consists of the following details:

- GRR anticipates accommodating approximately 50-75 people per day, totaling around 2,000 visitors throughout the 2024 operational season, which spans from the long weekend in May to mid-September.
- Operations are planned for every weekend and statutory holiday (including the civic holiday), with the possibility of accommodating weekday group bookings occasionally.
- The shuttle service, provided by GRR, is anticipated to be scheduled every 45 minutes with launches (from York Park) running from 9:30am to 2:00pm, in total encompassing approximately seven launch sessions per day, with the expectation that all paddlers will conclude their journey by 6:00pm.

Parking Requirements:

Parking for visitors will be accommodated at the Lower Kinsmen Park in Cayuga. Parking arrangements will be as follows:

- a designated area for customer vehicles, accommodating approximately 30-35 cars per-day, in addition to a parking space for company vehicles and trailers.
- the parking area will be located in the grassed lawn adjacent to the existing gravel parking area (beside the tennis courts), and will be marked through temporary measures (pylons set out each day of operation by GRR) for the duration of the season.
- a system to identify permitted vehicles (i.e. signage/pass displayed in vehicles) shall be in place to allow for visual identification of permitted vehicles.
- vehicle and trailer access (to load watercraft) will be through the existing gate at the south side of the park. GRR staff will coordinate access with County Facilities staff.
- Parking in the lower area of the park shall remain available for other day users.
- In the event of extenuating circumstances such as excessive saturation of the designated grass parking area due to heavy rain, the preferred backup parking plan involves utilizing the upper gravel parking area (by the tennis courts) initially, followed by overflow into the lower gravel lot

to prevent damage to the lawn. It is understood that this space cannot be reserved for clients, ensuring fair access.

At the launch site (York Park), a trailer containing watercraft will be unloaded on operational days (between 7:00am and 9:00am). A GRR staff will remain on site. A shuttle service, will drop off visitors in approximately 45-minute increments throughout operational hours until approximately 2:00pm.

Attachment #1, provides a proposed site plan outlining the details for both York Park (launch point) and Lower Kinsmen Park (exit point), and includes a parking plan.

Washroom and Waste Facilities:

Washroom facilities enhancements will be required to address the increased usage. The following lays out the details relating to additional facility provisions, and which will be incorporated into the license agreement:

- GRR shall coordinate the placement, and maintenance, of one washroom facility at Lower Kinsmen Park, for the duration of the season. Placement location will be coordinated with Facilities staff, and be in close proximity to the lower gravel parking lot for maintenance.
- Haldimand County Facilities staff shall maintain the existing placement of one washroom facility at York Park. GRR will be responsible for additional pump outs for the existing (County provided) facility at York Park, on an as needed basis. The company shall coordinate and be directly invoiced for any associated service required, beyond the existing service provided by Haldimand County.
- GRR shall also inspect the washrooms at both park locations during operational hours providing any provisional cleaning as needed, at no expense to the County.

Impacts to waste collection are not anticipated to be significant. The existing complement and regular maintenance at York Park (1 receptacle) and Lower Kinsmen Park (3 receptacles) is expected to be sufficient. Notwithstanding, GRR will maintain 1 additional receptacle, near the river exit point in Lower Kinsmen Park. Garbage is to be bagged by GRR and brought to the receptacles near the parking lot for pick up by facilities staff.

River Entry/Exit Points:

To ensure safe entry at the naturalized river access and exit points, GRR shall upon authorization from Haldimand County Facilities staff, install the following for the duration of the season:

- Outdoor matting/carpeting with a minimal footprint, to maintain a stable path to/from the Grand River in York Park.
 - The installed carpet shall not have rips (tripping hazard), and regular inspections will be performed by GRR, as well as routine inspections by Haldimand County Facilities staff. Should deficiencies be identified by Haldimand County, GRR agrees to rectify the issues to the County's satisfaction. It is understood that responsibility for replacement due to deficiency lies with GRR, and not with the County.
- Metal staircase to improve accessibility at the bank of the river in Cayuga Kinsmen Park.
 - Regular inspections will be performed by GRR, as well as routine inspections by Haldimand County Facilities staff. Should deficiencies be identified by Haldimand County, GRR agrees to rectify the issues to the County's satisfaction. It is understood that responsibility for replacement due to deficiency lies with GRR, and not with the County.
- To ensure visitors can easily identify the exit point, located within Lower Kinsmen Park (from the river), GRR will mark the Cayuga exit with prominent flags. Installing, and removing them daily.

Proposed access point infrastructure is noted in Attachment #2, and proposed locations are noted in Attachment #1. It is acknowledged by all parties that given the access installations are on public property, the general public may legitimately access them as part of their water sport activities. Any

usage and potential wear and tear will be monitored by Grand River Rafting over the course of the operating season.

Haldimand County will continue its maintenance of invasive species on the river bank (i.e. wild parsnip). GRR, with authorization from Facilities staff, may address instances of other invasive species (i.e. stinging nettle) in the proximity of the permitted river access points to ensure customers are not impacted.

Additional Considerations:

Wayfinding signage (flags) will be installed (and removed) during operational hours at the corner of Ouse St. South, and Baird Street, Cayuga at the entrance to Lower Kinsmen Park. GRR will be solely responsible for this.

Occasional use of an inverter generator will take place which will generate some noise. The usage will last for short intermittent windows for the purpose of cleaning and setting up watercraft at the shoreline. The details around usage are as follows:

- At York Park the generator shall be used for the purpose of inflating the 'tubes', for approximately 20 minutes, between 8:30 - 9:00am.
- At Lower Kinsmen Park the generator shall be used for the purpose of cleaning watercraft at the shoreline, intermittent spray washing is anticipated between 12:30 - 5:30pm.
- No chemical cleaners are permitted due to potential environmental impacts.

Should noise complaints be received at either location, permissions may be revoked by Haldimand County at any time during the pilot period.

The provision of picnic tables in Lower Kinsmen Park and York Park, shall be considered annually by Haldimand County Facilities staff based on site specific considerations, operational capacity, and availability. Locations and installation requirements shall be determined by Facilities.

Risk Mitigation:

GRR has worked with County staff to confirm an extensive risk mitigation plan for the operation that addresses both the use of County property and the company's activities on the water. The multi-part plan is summarized as follows:

- GRR will meet with Haldimand County Emergency Services, prior to operations to review their emergency plan in Haldimand.
- The proposed 10-kilometre route from York Park (41 Front St. S., York) to Cayuga Kinsmen Park (61 Ouse St. S., Cayuga) has been selected based on its very limited use by motorized watercraft. Additional safety measures will be incorporated into GRR's Emergency Plan, as it relates to the existing municipal boat launch in Bob Baigent Park in Cayuga.
- The company's practices encompass safety and liability measures, which ensure comprehensive coverage for vehicles, staff, and customers. This includes Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) coverage, insured liability, and adherence to safety protocols such as daily equipment inspections, sanitation procedures, and orientation talks for customers.
- The staffing complement includes at a minimum one individual trained in Standard First Aid and CPR, and the company maintains awareness of local emergency takeout points for 911, supported by a contact list for prompt response.
- Daily monitoring of river flow conditions, in connection with the company's strong relationship with the GRCA, ensures safe paddling environments, supplemented by the issuance of daily weather reports to all customers. Additionally, the company has a cancellation system in place to address unsafe weather or river conditions proactively.

- Visitor safety extends to thorough orientation talks covering river routes and maps, along with personalized fittings and equipment provision for all guests according to government safety standards.
- Rigorous daily inspections and sanitation protocols, including the sanitization of safety vests, further underscore the company's practices in ensuring a safe experience for patrons.

Economic impact & coordination with local businesses:

Thoughtfully developed tourism initiatives require a multi-layered community economic development approach, and a successful product launch often requires the active participation of other local businesses. It has been recommended by GRR, they approach Ontario's Southwest (Regional Tourism Organization 1) to request support for the development of a merchant-partnership with existing Haldimand County businesses. This model has proved successful in multiple other communities, through the use of a visitor coupon program that has brought measurable economic impacts to over 70 partnering businesses. This model supports connecting new visitor audiences with existing culinary, retail and experiential tourism offerings in the County. Central to this strategy is the introduction of GRR to local businesses, facilitating strategic partnerships aimed at amplifying the economic ripple effect generated by the outfitters operations which will require a collaborative effort between the Economic Development and Tourism and GRR. Staff will work with GRR on the investigation and possible roll-out of these partnership opportunities.

Additional activities, led by Tourism Haldimand may also include the development of comprehensive itineraries, curated to showcase the offering on the river, alongside a diverse array of attractions and amenities available throughout Haldimand County. By providing participants with insights into additional points of interest, these itineraries serve as invaluable tools for enhancing visitor experiences and fostering sustained engagement with local businesses, thereby fostering a vibrant and interconnected economic ecosystem within the County.

FINANCIAL/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

Legal and Support Services shall develop, based upon standard practices, a license agreement with approval from Council. The license agreement will encompass much of the detail contained in the Analysis section above, including risk mitigation, site operations, and administration.

Should Council support entering into a license agreement with Grand River Rafting Company LTD., there would be minimal financial impacts anticipated. Operational impacts are expected to be offset by an annual fee collected, as outlined in the below schedule. The annual fee is intended to offset operational impacts associated with a potential increase to waste collection and impacts to staffing requirements, and to grassed parking areas.

Financial Implications:

Grand River Rafting Company LTD. shall be responsible to submit a fee in accordance with the following schedule, plus HST (the Annual Fee) to the County in exchange for being permitted to use the Sites to operate a Watercraft Outfitter Service for the Term of the Agreement. Annual Fee shall be paid in two installments, as follows:

- a) The first installment, equal to 50% of Annual Fee due May 15, 2024, and
- b) The second installment, equal to 50% of Annual Fee, due July 1, 2024.
- c) A final installment, equal to any remaining Annual Fee shall be due at the end of the season dependent on final visitor volumes.

The Annual Fee shall adhere to the following schedule, based on verified user volumes:

- Up to 500 people \$1,500 plus HST

- Over 1,000 people \$3,000 plus HST
- Over 1,500 people \$4,500 plus HST
- Over 2,000 people \$6,000 plus HST
- Over 2,500 people \$7,500 plus HST
- Over 3,000 people \$9,000 plus HST

A refundable damage deposit of \$500.00 shall be collected prior to the start of operations, annually, for the purpose of repairing any potential damages to the site(s). A refund shall be issued upon conclusion of the season, payment of all annual fees, and completion of a site visit and inspection by Facilities staff.

Legal Implications:

The operation of the lands shall be governed by the terms, conditions and covenants specified in the proposed license agreement. An agreement is legally binding between the parties and once signed, the contractual agreement creates a promise that certain rights and obligations will be fulfilled by each party. The agreement will be consistent with other County agreements and contain the County's standard clauses including, but not limited to, Indemnification, Hold Harmless and Insurance requirements.

The license agreement shall also reflect use authorization pursuant to the County's Public Parks and Facilities By-law 1534/15:

- Section 41 to conduct their business
- Section 37 to park commercial vehicles
- Section 32 to wash equipment
- Section 31 a. park in a designated area
- Section 31 g. to park while not actively using the park

Additionally, the license agreement shall include a clause which allows for cancellation/or pause of site use if:

- a) a large event request is received for a park (Temporary use of parking space may be revoked)
- b) a large number of complaints or issues received

Municipalities have a duty of care under the *Occupiers Liability Act, 1990* to ensure that all visitors are reasonably safe when visiting their premises. An occupier could be considered someone who has adequate control over the premises and could be more than one person.

Due to the duty of care owed under the *Occupiers Liability Act*, Haldimand secures insurance for our operational needs, protection for our assets, and owned lands. Owned lands include, but not limited to, public parks containing parking lots, pavilions, washrooms, etc. From an insurance perspective, you can not insure something that you do not own which means that Haldimand's liability policy does not extend to water activities.

The water activities are the responsibility of the on-river outfitter. Evidence of insurance (liability, automobile, WSIB Clearance, etc.) is required before any operations are undertaken on County lands. An insurance, indemnification and hold harmless clause will be included in the license agreement.

Grand River Rafting Company LTD. agrees to name Haldimand County in its Waiver/Acknowledgement of Risk Form in a manner that is satisfactory to the needs of Haldimand Legal and Support Services – Risk Management, ensuring that all participants release Haldimand County from any liability related to the water sporting activity.

Grand River Rafting Company LTD. agrees to observe, and comply with all applicable laws and regulations, all insurance and related documents, and all rules, regulations and applicable By-laws of Haldimand County, Emergency Services and Fire Departments, and of any other department of the

County, Provincial or Federal governments, but not limited to, matters affecting boating, sanitation, health, fire prevention, safety, noise and crowd control.

STAKEHOLDER IMPACTS:

This proposal was assessed and supported by a staff review team – comprised of staff from Building and Municipal Enforcement Services, Facilities, Parks, Cemeteries & Forestry Operations, Community Development and Partnerships and Economic Development and Tourism Divisions. Further circulation extended to Emergency Services, Finance and Legal and Support Services.

Haldimand County Emergency Services (EMS) will review the Grand River Rafting Company's Emergency Plans, in advance of operations, advising of any concerns or contingencies. Following the pilot period (2024), and within subsequent renewal periods, EMS will review the number of emergency calls related to the business' operations, and re-evaluate the impact to services.

The Grand River Conservation Authority, whose regulatory authority extends within the Grand River and Lake Erie floodplains, has been consulted directly by the business, and follow-up correspondence has been received by Economic Development and Tourism – to date no concerns have been submitted regarding the proposed operations in Haldimand County.

Six Nations Tourism has been made aware of the proposal directly by the business and follow-up correspondence has been received by Economic Development and Tourism – to date, no concerns have been submitted regarding the proposed operations in Haldimand County.

The Haldimand Grand River Rowing Club has been made aware of the proposal through conversations held with the Community Development and Partnerships Division.

REPORT IMPACTS:

Agreement: Yes

By-law: No

Budget Amendment: No

Policy: No

REFERENCES:

1. [Haldimand County Tourism Strategic Action Plan \(2016\)](#)
2. [Grand River Rafting Company LTD.](#)
3. [Public Parks and Facilities By-law 1534/15](#)

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Site Plan – York Park & Cayuga Kinsmen Park.
2. Access Point Enhancements – Photos.