

# The Lower Grand River Visitor Experience Strategy

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Community Engagement.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Actionable Recommendations.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Business Opportunities.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Business Cases for Development.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Strategies for Growth.....</b>	<b>18</b>



# Why the River? - The Grand River's Legacy and Potential

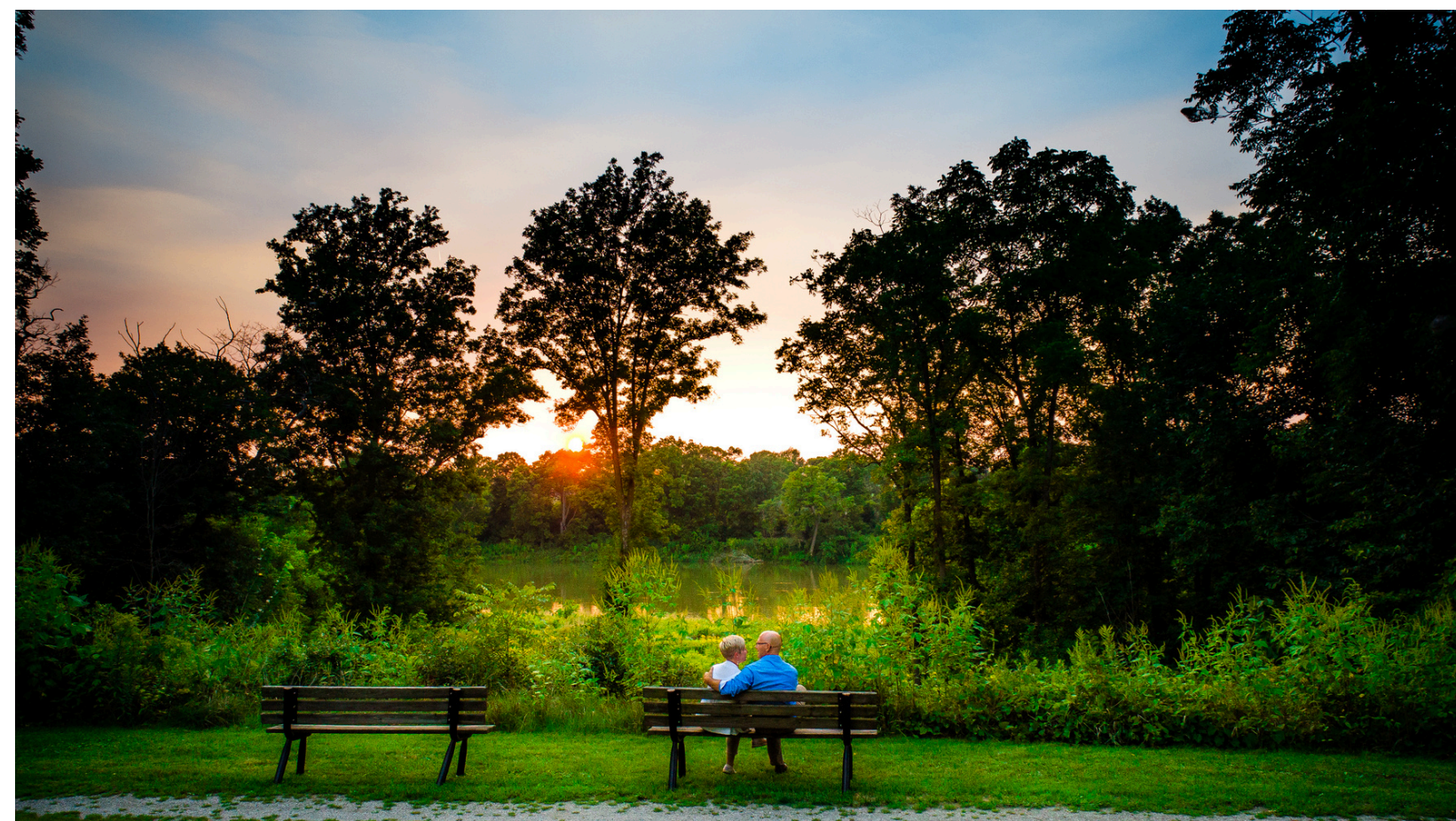
## Historical and Cultural Importance:

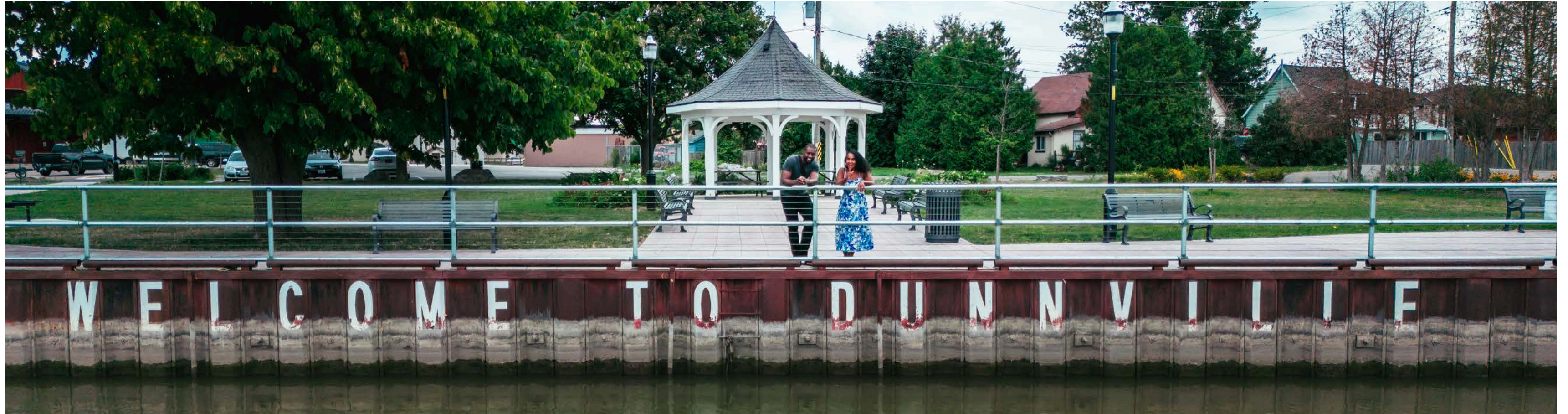
The Grand River is not just a natural feature—it's a historical and cultural landmark. Spanning 280 kilometers through Southern Ontario, it has been a vital artery for Indigenous communities and settlers alike, shaping the region's culture, economy, and way of life. It serves as the central axis for Haldimand County's tourism potential, offering opportunities for eco-tourism, cultural immersion, and nature-based recreation.

Haldimand County's Tourism Strategic Action Plan identified the Grand River as a key tourism asset, emphasizing the importance of waterfront opportunities and river access. Since then, initiatives like Great to Grand (2022), the Spark Program (2022 & 2024), and the Grand River Rafting Partnership (2024) have supported local businesses and boosted waterfront tourism. Despite this progress, significant potential remains in on-water and waterfront experiences.

## Tourism Opportunity:

The Grand River's vast biodiversity and rich history positions it as an ideal tourism draw. The region offers diverse recreational experiences—boating, fishing, hiking, birdwatching—while also preserving its cultural traditions and protecting its natural environment for future generations.





## Sense of Place - Embracing Community and Nature

### Ecological and Cultural Essence:

The river is the heartbeat of Haldimand County. The county's landscape, cradled by the Grand River, offers an unparalleled combination of natural beauty, rich Indigenous and settler heritage, and historical significance. From the vibrant, protected wetlands to cultural landmarks like Ruthven Park National Historic Site, Haldimand's "Essence of Place" thrives on a deep respect for sustainability, environmental stewardship, cultural engagement, and diverse tourism experiences such as outdoor adventures with local outfitters and unique, dining experiences that highlight the area's natural and culinary offerings.

# Consultations

During the development of the VES, a series of detailed community, stakeholder, and internal consultations were completed to capture a wide range of perspectives. This included circulation to Legal and Support Services, Building and Municipal Enforcement, Planning and Development, Community Development and Partnerships, Facilities Capital and Asset Management, Engineering and Capital Works, Facilities Parks Cemeteries and Forestry Operations, Financial and Data Services, Environmental Operations, Customer Experience and Communications, and Emergency Services. Consults also occurred with Six Nations of the Grand River, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, the Grand River Conservation Authority, local businesses, and additional organizations involved in the recreational use and stewardship of the river. Key themes that emerged include:

- **Sustainability & Environmental Protection (30%):** Emphasized integrating sustainable practices—such as regenerative tourism and conservation—to protect and enhance the Grand River’s natural environment.
- **Community Engagement & Inclusivity (25%):** Highlighted the need for broad, inclusive participation in tourism planning, particularly among Indigenous groups, ensuring local benefits and diverse voices.
- **Infrastructure & Accessibility (20%):** Addressed the demand for improved transportation, access points, and facilities to accommodate a growing number of visitors and residents.
- **Economic Development & Tourism (15%):** Focused on leveraging tourism as a driver of economic growth, job creation, and support for local businesses.
- **Cultural Heritage & Education (10%):** Stressed the importance of showcasing and integrating the area’s rich cultural heritage—especially Indigenous history—and implementing educational programs.

# Short-Term Recommendations

## Recommendation 1: Implement a Tourist Feedback Mechanism

- Reintroduce cost-effective feedback channels: Online surveys via the tourism website, QR codes on signage, and physical feedback methods like suggestions boxes and feedback cards at key locations.
- Collaborate with local businesses to collect visitor feedback, offering incentives like co-marketing opportunities to enhance engagement.
- Aggregate and analyze feedback to share quarterly reports with stakeholders, providing actionable insights to help local businesses improve their tourism offerings.

## Recommendation 2: Foster Local Business Support and Collaboration

- Facilitate networking events and workshops to encourage local businesses to collaborate, create joint marketing strategies, and enhance the visitor experience along the river.
- Leverage the municipality's resources to attract private investment through tailored outreach, high-quality promotional materials, and collaboration with local ambassadors, fostering sustainable business growth.
- Support the development of itinerary-building platforms and explore options for short-term rental accommodations by providing compliance support, educational resources, and guidance on best practices.

### Recommendation 3: Enhance Interactive Digital Engagement

- Support the development of digital experiences by facilitating partnerships, piloting new technologies like AR tours, and educating businesses on digital tool integration.
- Install QR code signage at key locations for interactive access to historical, cultural, and ecological information, including multimedia content.
- Collaborate with local experts to curate content and ensure quality, while implementing accessibility features such as multilingual support and alternative formats.

### Recommendation 4: Enhance Marketing Focused on the River

- Develop targeted marketing strategies highlighting river-based activities, attractions, and amenities through enhanced promotional materials, digital content, and visitor testimonials. Utilize online platforms, brochures, and events to engage visitors.
- Support local businesses with digital marketing through social media promotion, paid ads, and email newsletters, featuring river-related services and offering collaborative campaigns.
- Ensure consistent branding by aligning promotional materials with the Grand River Style and Signage Guide, encouraging businesses to adopt unified messaging to reinforce the river's significance.

# Medium-Term Recommendations

## Recommendation 5: Promote Sustainable and Eco-Friendly Practices

- Collaborate with environmental authorities like the Grand River Conservation Authority to implement ecological preservation efforts, including impact studies, habitat protection, and sustainable development practices for tourism operators.
- Develop sustainability guidelines for businesses, offering resources and financial incentives through programs like CIP/RBTCIP to encourage eco-friendly practices, while establishing certification programs and recognition for those demonstrating commitment to sustainability.
- Install educational signage along the river, providing information on biodiversity, conservation challenges, and visitor actions, with interactive elements like QR codes for deeper engagement.

## Recommendation 6: Monitor and Adapt Policies to Support Tourism Growth

- Regularly review and audit existing by-laws, zoning by-laws, and permit requirements to identify barriers to tourism growth, with stakeholder input and interdepartmental collaboration to ensure regulations align with tourism development goals.
- Streamline permit processes and promote flexible zoning regulations to allow diverse tourism-related uses, ensuring transparency and reducing administrative burden.
- Propose amendments to outdated by-laws and create new policies that support tourism growth, including facilitating third-party grant opportunities and fostering innovation.



# Long-Term Recommendations

## Recommendation 7: Enhance Access and Infrastructure

- Improve river access points with continued upgrades to boat launches, docks, and washrooms, prioritizing safety, environmental considerations, and accessibility, while expanding parking as opportunities arise, near high-demand river access points.
- Enhance signage and wayfinding systems by installing clear, consistent directional signs and maps, incorporating QR codes, and ensuring accessibility through multilingual and tactile elements.
- Encourage sustainable transportation options and explore alternative transportation solutions, such as shuttle services or bike rentals, to reduce parking demand and improve visitor access.

## Recommendation 8: Strengthen All-Season Tourism

- Promote all-season tourism by marketing river-related activities and events, such as spring thaw events, through digital platforms and traditional media while collaborating with local businesses and organizations for joint promotions.
- Encourage tourism packages and itineraries by facilitating partnerships among local businesses to create all-season offerings and supporting the development of shoulder-season packages with marketing assistance.

# Business in a Box - Ready, Set, Launch Opportunities

## **Ready to Launch Business Models:**

As part of Haldimand County's Lower Grand River Visitor Experience Strategy (VES), the "Business in a Box" concepts were developed to harness the Grand River's potential as a sustainable tourism asset. These actionable, well-researched, and fully formed business models are designed to attract private sector investment by equipping entrepreneurs, investors, and operators with ready-to-launch opportunities. Each model provides practical frameworks, strategic insights, and the tools needed to support informed decisions and successful ventures, contributing to the growth of Haldimand County's tourism sector.

## **What's Included:**

Each business case includes clear action plans with market research, community consultation insights, and strategic alignment with local tourism goals. These models cover various experiences such as cultural immersion, river-based eco-tourism adventures, and unique dining experiences, catering to a wide range of visitor needs and preferences.

## **Key Focus:**

These opportunities align directly with the County's commitment to sustainability, eco-tourism, and community collaboration, offering a path for long-term growth and positive impact on the local economy and environment.

# Purpose - Supporting Tourism Development and Investment

## Objective:

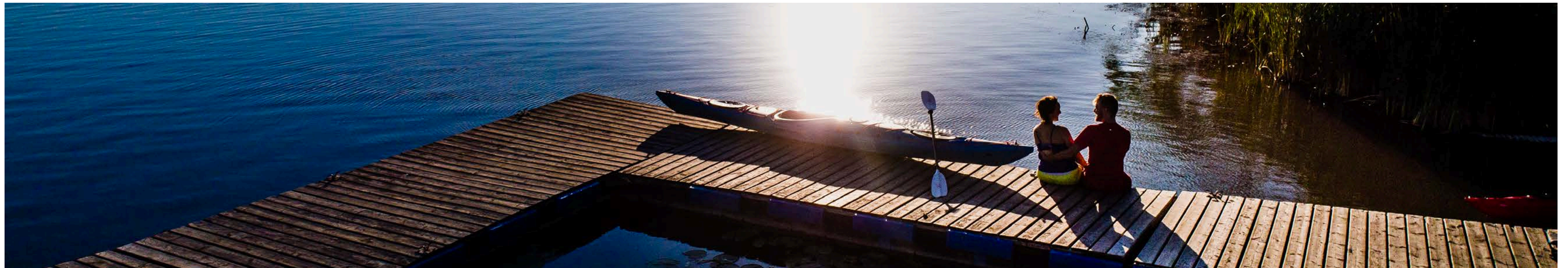
The purpose of the Business Cases document is to help business owners and investors by providing structured, market-ready business models. These cases are designed to match the goals of the Visitor Experiences Strategy, presenting practical solutions that align with community values and visitor needs.

## How It supports Investment:

Each business case provides insights into key areas such as project planning, outcome management, risk assessment, and investment considerations. This documents offers guidance for due diligence, helping potential business owners or investors confidently evaluate the viability and scalability of these opportunities.

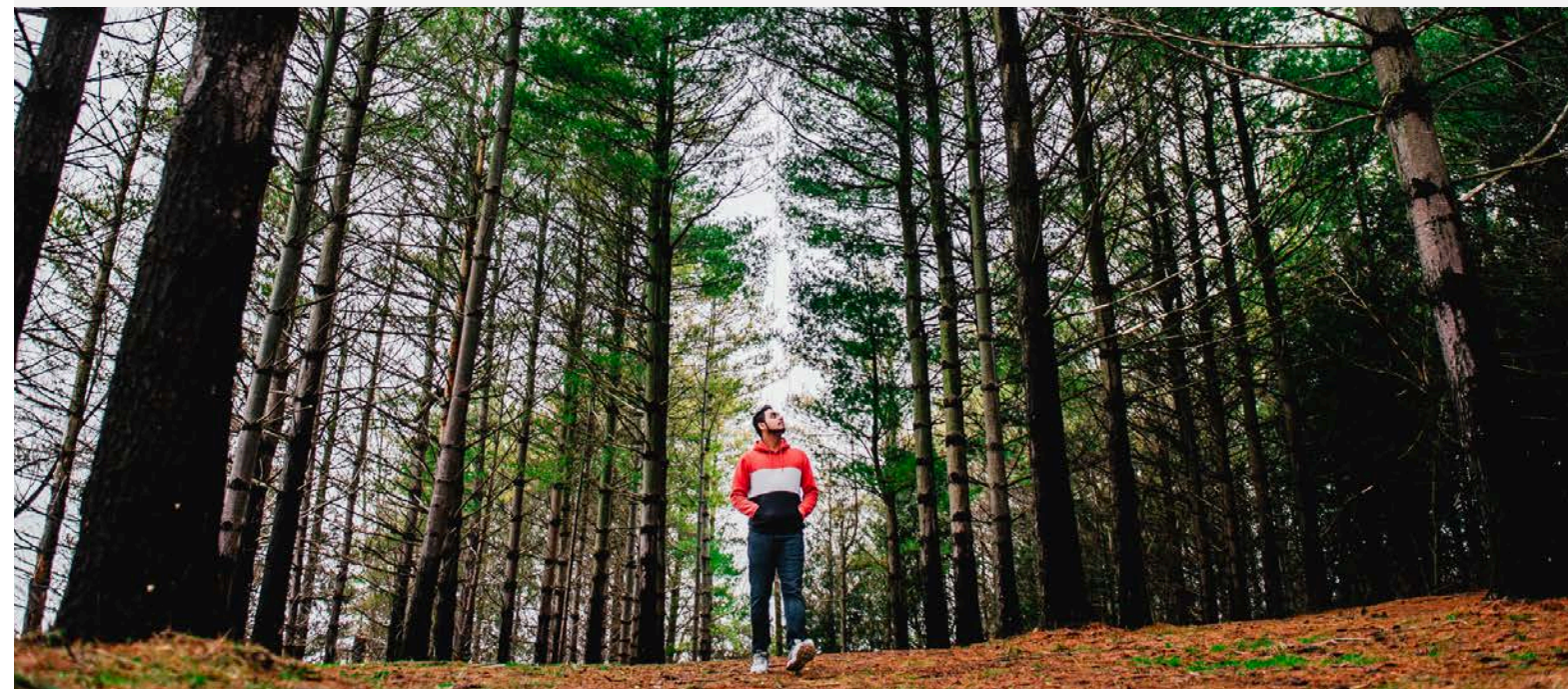
## Target Audience:

The primary audience includes investors, entrepreneurs, and business owners who are looking for tangible, ready-to-launch tourism ventures that align with Haldimand County's sustainable growth goals.



# Business Case: Cultural Experience

Step into the heart of history with the **Cultural Experience** along the Lower Grand River—a **three-hour immersive adventure** that connects visitors to either the region's Indigenous or settler heritage. Through **storytelling, guided seasonal walks, and hands-on culinary workshops**, guests experience the traditions and stories that have shaped this land for centuries.



## KEY FEATURES:

- **Immersive Storytelling:** Expert guides share the history of Indigenous peoples and early settlers, weaving their stories into the fabric of the region.
- **Guided Seasonal Exploration:** Walks explore how nature influenced local life, showcasing native plants and seasonal changes.
- **Hands-On Culinary Workshop:** Prepare and enjoy traditional dishes using local ingredients, connecting participants to the foodways of the region.
- **Cultural Immersion:** Whether focusing on Indigenous traditions or early settler life, every experience allows participants to engage directly with the region's heritage.

## Business Case: Cultural Experience Continued



### The Vision:

This program brings local culture to life, offering a **unique and engaging way to experience history**. By combining **storytelling, environmental exploration, and traditional cuisine**, it creates a deep connection to the Lower Grand River. Whether highlighting Indigenous traditions or the life of early settlers, participants are not just passive observers - they live the history through firsthand experiences.

### WHY IT WORKS:

- **Authentic and Engaging:** The hands-on, immersive approach makes history come to life, creating a memorable educational experience.
- **Small Group Format:** Intimate groups of 8-15 provide personalized attention and deeper connections.
- **Seasonal Adaptability:** The experience evolves with the seasons, offering unique ways to explore throughout the year.
- **Expert Leadership:** Led by Indigenous Knowledge Keepers, local historians, and chefs, ensuring authenticity and cultural accuracy.



## Business Case: River-Adjacent Experience

Welcome to **Shipped**, a one-of-a-kind dining destination nestled along the stunning Lower Grand River. This innovative **shipping-container-style charcuterie and wine bar** offers an unparalleled dining experience, combining eco-friendly architecture with breathtaking waterfront views. Whether you're indulging in a curated wine pairing or savoring locally-sourced charcuterie, **Shipped** delivers more than just a meal – it offers an immersive journey for your senses.

### KEY FEATURES:

- **Unique Dining Experience:** Relish artisanal cheeses, fine wines, and inventive mocktails, all while enjoying the serenity of the river from a beautifully designed patio.
- **Eco-Friendly & Scalable Design:** The use of shipping containers creates a sleek, sustainable venue with potential for future expansion, inviting more complementary businesses to transform the waterfront into a vibrant destination hub.
- **Flexible Accessibility:** Easily accessible by boat or walking, **Shipped** offers a seamless arrival experience, making it a perfect spot for both adventurers and those looking for a tranquil retreat by the water.
- **Takeaway Options:** Enjoy **Shipped's** curated pairings in nature, with a bespoke picnic experience that lets you take what you purchase to the most scenic locations in Haldimand County.

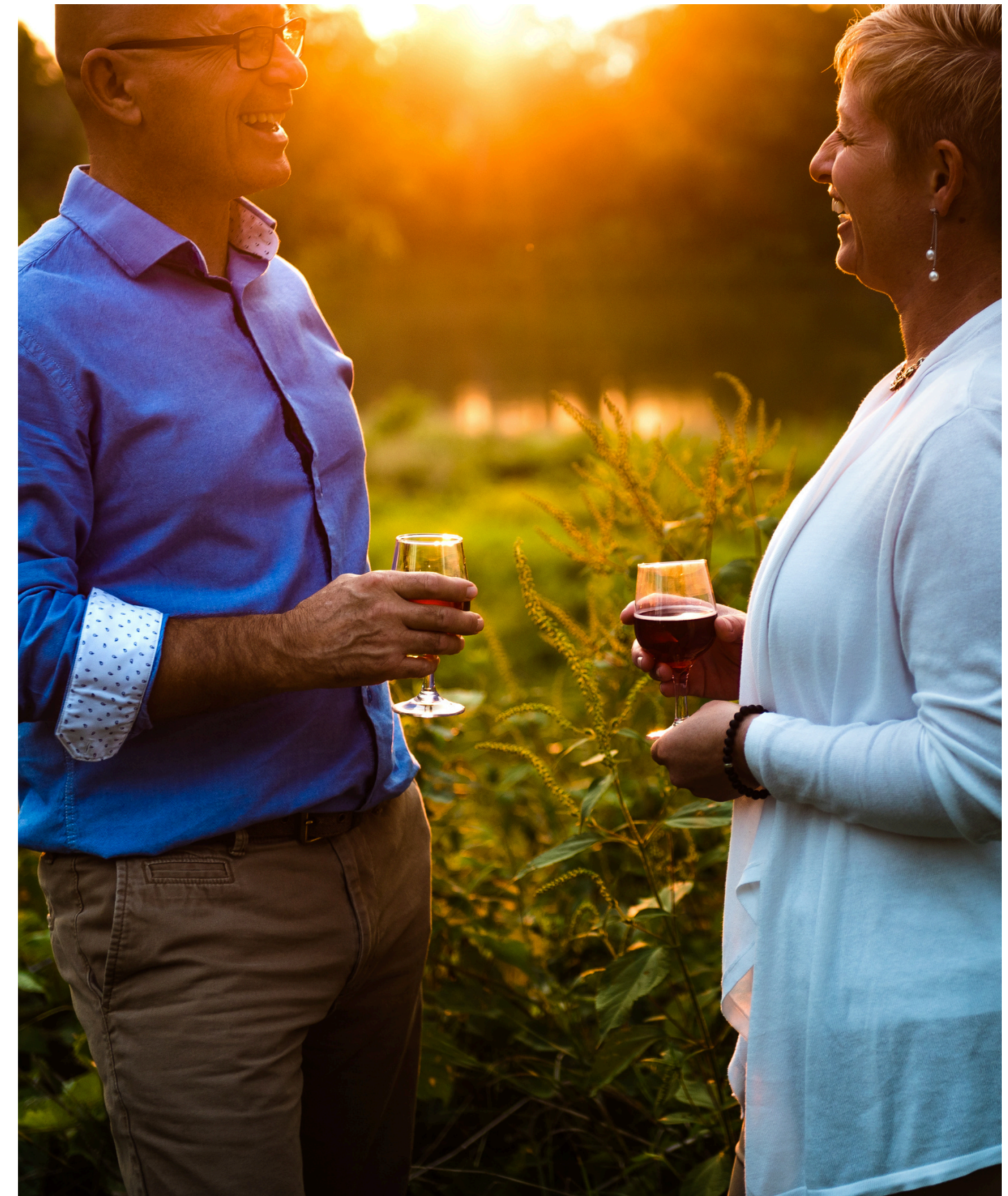
## Business Case: River-Adjacent Experience Continued

### The Vision:

Imagine a growing riverside hub where **Shipped** becomes the cornerstone of a lively community space. As more businesses join, from cafes to art galleries, the area evolves into a must-visit cultural and culinary destination, capturing the charm of the Lower Grand River like never before.

### WHY IT WORKS:

- **Stunning River Views:** A setting unlike any other, offering a tranquil yet vibrant dining experience.
- **Scalable & Sustainable:** Shipping container infrastructure allows for future expansion with minimal environmental impact.
- **Local Flavor:** A locally-sourced menu that supports regional producers and offers a genuine taste of the area.
- **Seasonal Flexibility:** The ability to potentially adapt to all seasons with a blend of indoor and outdoor experiences.



# Business Case: Outfitters Experience

## Overview:

Discover the breathtaking natural beauty of the **Lower Grand River** through **RiverQuest Adventure Co.**, an outdoor experience provider that invites visitors to immerse themselves in serene waterways, lush wetlands, and unique ecosystems. Whether you're seeking adventure, relaxation, or a connection to nature, **RiverQuest** offers **guided eco-tours, watercraft rentals, and innovative floating experiences** that allow guests to explore the river like never before.



## KEY FEATURES:

- **Watercraft Rentals:** Explore the Grand River with **kayaks, canoes, and paddleboards** suitable for all skill levels.
- **Guided Adventures:** Enjoy expert-led **eco-tours, fly fishing expeditions, and hiking/biking tours**, connecting you with the river's diverse flora and fauna.
- **Floating Experiences:** Experience **floating cinemas** and enjoy snacks or drinks at the floating café, where the adventure continues as you glide along the water.



## Business Case: Outfitters Experience Continued

### The Vision:

**RiverQuest** redefines outdoor adventure by offering **environmentally sustainable, immersive activities** that connect people with the Grand River's rich history and ecology. From **kayak tours and fly fishing expeditions** to the one-of-a-kind **floating cinema and floating café**, every experience is designed to foster a deep connection with nature, create lasting memories, and support environmental stewardship.



### WHY IT WORKS:

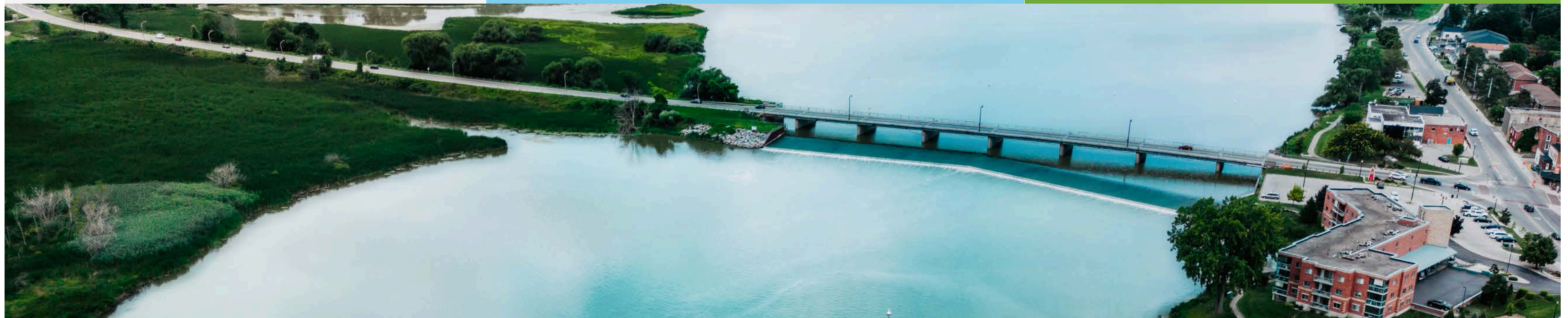
- **Sustainability Focus:** Every activity is designed with **eco-friendly** principles, minimizing environmental impact while maximizing guest immersion in nature.
- **Unique Experiences:** Offering activities like the **floating cinema and floating café**, RiverQuest provides **one-of-a-kind outdoor adventures** that blend nature with innovation.
- **Expert Guides:** Knowledgeable and passionate guides ensure a safe, educational, and engaging experience.
- **Community Integration:** Collaboration with **local Indigenous communities and conservation groups** enhances cultural awareness and environmental protection.

# Complementary Strategies for Sustainable Growth

The **Visitor Experience Strategy** offers a flexible, community-driven framework for enhancing Haldimand County's tourism by promoting eco-friendly, culturally enriched experiences along the Grand River.

The **Business in a Box** concept provides actionable, market-ready models that directly support the VES goals, offering business opportunities that align with sustainable growth, community collaboration, and environmental stewardship.

Together, the VES and Business in a Box documents form a comprehensive roadmap to foster long-term tourism development, economic vitality, and environmental protection for the Grand River region.





**Thank you for your time and participation in shaping  
Haldimand County's future tourism landscape!**

**For more information, contact:**  
Economic Development & Tourism  
[opportunity@haldimandcounty.ca](mailto:opportunity@haldimandcounty.ca)  
905-318-5932 ext. 6331