



CONTEXT IS EVERYTHING

GRIMSBY TOURISM STRATEGIC PLAN 2026–2031

Prepared for: Town of Grimsby

Alex Mazanik, CAIP
amazanik@crg.ca
(416) 820-7026

William Schatten, CAIP
wschatten@crg.ca
(416) 388-9455

50 Carroll Street, Toronto, Ontario

Suite 200-940 6Ave SW, Calgary, Alberta

www.crg.ca

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Acknowledgment	5
2	Executive Summary.....	6
3	Introduction	6
3.1	Grimsby's Positioning	6
3.2	Purpose of the Strategy.....	7
3.3	Process to Develop the Strategic Plan.....	7
3.4	Guiding Principles	8
4	Vision.....	8
5	Potential Segments of Visitors	8
5.1	Nature and Outdoor Enthusiasts.....	9
5.2	Cultural Explorers and Heritage Tourists.....	9
5.3	Event-Based and Festival Visitors	10
5.4	Visiting Friends and Relatives	11
5.5	Urban Escapists.....	11
6	Demand Generators and Supporting Assets.....	12
7	Challenges	13
7.1	Challenge #1	13
7.2	Challenge #2	14
7.3	Challenge #3	14
7.4	Challenge #4	14
7.5	Challenge #5	15
7.6	Challenge #6	15
7.7	Challenge #7	15
7.8	Challenge #8	16
8	Economic Impact.....	16
8.1	Job Sustainability Through Tourism	17
8.2	MAT Exploration	17
9	Strategic Pillars.....	18
9.1	Pillar 1: Leadership and Governance	19
9.2	Pillar 2: Grow and Attract Visitors	21
9.3	Pillar 3: Infrastructure Improvements	25
9.4	Pillar 4: Partnerships and Collaborations	27

9.5	Pillar 5: Product Development and Capacity Building	32
10	Action Plan	36
10.1	Estimated Costs	39
11	Conclusion.....	40
12	Appendix A - Gateway Model	41
12.1	Current State & Barriers: A Functional Hub with Untapped Potential.....	41
12.2	A Front Door to Grimsby: Visions for Activation	41
12.3	Youth Ambassadors: A Homegrown Welcome	42
12.4	Beyond The Gateway: A Long-Term Vision	43
12.5	The Role of the Tourism Coordinator	44
13	Appendix B - Assets and Experiences	46
13.1	Purpose & Method	46
13.2	Arts & Culture	46
13.3	Food & Drink.....	46
13.4	Outdoor & Recreation	47
13.5	Events & Festivals	47
13.6	Implementation Pillars	47
14	Appendix C - Waterfront Improvements	48
15	Appendix D - Opportunities with Sports Tourism.....	50
15.1	Current State	50
15.2	Opportunities	51
15.3	Challenges.....	52
15.4	Realising the Potential with Sports Tourism – A Vision for the Future	53
16	Appendix E – Economic Impact.....	54
16.1	Methodology	54
16.2	Baseline Economic Context	55
16.3	Regional Visitation Patterns	57
16.4	Setting the Stage for Growth.....	59
16.5	Economic Impact Projections – Spending, GDP, and Municipal Tax Revenue	59
16.6	Strategic Takeaways	60
16.7	Job Creation.....	61
16.8	Strategic Interpretation.....	61
16.9	Municipal Accommodation Tax – Gateway to More.....	61

17	Appendix F – Wayfinding	64
17.1	Introduction	64
17.2	Methodology	64
17.3	Overview	64
17.4	Costs Discovered	64
17.5	Conclusion	65
18	Appendix G – Strategy Phases	66
18.1	Phase 1 (Quick wins 0-1 year)	66
18.2	Phase 2 (2-4 years)	66
18.3	Phase 3 (4+)	67

1 ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This strategy reflects the collective insight and commitment of the **Town of Grimsby's** Council and staff, the Business Improvement Area, tourism operators, cultural and heritage institutions, conservation authorities, and the many residents who shared their aspirations through town-hall discussions, surveys, and interviews. We are grateful for guidance from neighbouring municipalities, regional partners, and Niagara Peninsula First Nations whose stewardship of the land grounds our vision for responsible growth. Lessons were drawn from benchmarking against other municipalities to surface best practices including Kingston, St. Catharines, the Town of Lincoln and more, which informed our governance, branding strategy, and destination-management recommendations. The contributions of these communities, alongside the data support and tourism consultations received from the **Tourism Partnership of Niagara (TPN)** and **Niagara Economic Development**, have enabled a forward-looking yet locally grounded plan. We extend sincere thanks to everyone whose expertise, time, and passion will continue to shape Grimsby's journey.



2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Grimsby sits at the meeting point of Lake Ontario and the Niagara Escarpment, offering visitors a unique gateway to wine country, heritage districts, and outdoor adventure. Building on that positioning, this five-year Tourism Strategic Plan sets out a clear framework to convert pass-through traffic into longer, higher-value stays; enhance community well-being; and protect the Town's character.

The plan is anchored in robust research, stakeholder engagement, and jurisdictional benchmarking. It identifies five high-potential visitor segments — from nature enthusiasts to cultural explorers — and maps the demand generators and supporting assets that can serve them. Eight inter-related challenges are addressed through five strategic pillars: (1) Leadership & Governance (2) Grow and Attract Visitors, (3) Infrastructure Improvements, (4) Partnerships & Collaboration, and (5) Product Development & Capacity Building. Finally, a dedicated Tourism Coordinator is essential to driving this work forward, particularly in the absence of any existing structure or lead agency responsible for tourism development in Grimsby.

Key actions include expanding accommodation supply, activating the waterfront through phased programming, improving parking and mobility links between Downtown and Grimsby on the Lake (GOTL), curating bookable heritage-to-harbour itineraries, and formalising regional and in-town partnerships. Each action is paired with measurable KPIs, timeframes, and lead partners to ensure accountability.

While upfront costs in Year One are estimated between \$45,000 and \$80,000, these investments lay the groundwork for scalable, high-return programming. At even modest visitor capture rates, tourism can generate millions in annual municipal tax revenue, with estimates reaching up to \$7 million by 2031 under a 3% capture scenario. This new revenue can offset operating costs, reduce dependency on levies, and create stable funding streams for cultural, recreational, and infrastructure priorities. With a potential GDP impact of up to \$172.5 million, this plan positions tourism not just as an economic driver, but as a tool for fiscal sustainability and community resilience.

Together, these initiatives position Grimsby to capture a larger share of Niagara visitation while enhancing resident quality of life and safeguarding the town's natural and cultural assets.

3 INTRODUCTION

3.1 Grimsby's Positioning

Situated at the narrowest point between lake and cliff, at the entrance point to the Niagara region, Grimsby is more than a small town along a route to a destination. It is a gateway in both directions: the first touch of wine country and heritage, and the final breath of calm before the metropolis begins. Long before it became a quiet waypoint for millions of travellers, Grimsby played a pivotal role in forging Canada itself — its shoreline and homesteads settled by Loyalists who claimed not only the land but the vision of strong community. Today, it holds the opportunity to shine as a purposeful pause, a place that complements the rest of the Niagara region rather than competes with it, embodying a legacy of defence, perseverance, and enduring identity.

Tourism in Grimsby means revealing what is already here: a town of heart and heritage, on the doorstep of one of the world's great wonders, with a story of purpose, rootedness, and adventure for every

visitor to discover. Bringing Grimsby's tourism vision to life requires coordination, clarity, and collective will. The town already holds the ingredients for a memorable destination; what it needs now is a shared framework to bring those elements into alignment.

3.2 Purpose of the Strategy

This tourism strategy provides Grimsby with the framework to achieve its vision, touching on the different elements that could propel the future of tourism. It serves as a guide for the next five years, and it is a pivotal reference for evaluating tourism-related investments and priorities. Stakeholders can use this document to make informed business decisions. The strategy builds on Grimsby's strengths, marketing trends, primary and secondary research, as well as key learnings and insights shared by the community and stakeholders in town.

3.3 Process to Develop the Strategic Plan

The development of the Grimsby Tourism Strategic Plan followed a structured, three-phase process designed to ensure the final strategy is research-driven, community-informed, and aligned with regional best practices.

3.3.1 Phase 1: Foundational Research and Situational Analysis

Tourism Asset Inventory: Audited natural, cultural, culinary, and recreational assets to map strengths and potential gaps

Jurisdictional Benchmarking: Jurisdictional analysis of other municipalities (St. Catharines, the Town of Lincoln, Kingston, Cobourg, Fort Erie, Niagara-on-the-lake, Saugeen Shores, and Revelstoke) to surface best practices and governance models

Infrastructure & Accessibility Review: Evaluated Grimsby's accommodation capacity, transportation access, and visitor services to identify gaps and barriers to growth

3.3.2 Phase 2: Stakeholder and Public Engagement

Town Hall Meetings: Organized two public town halls to gather input from residents on tourism priorities, concerns, and opportunities

In-depth Interviews: Conducted 30+ interviews with tourism sector stakeholders, town staff and council to identify sector needs and barriers

Focus Group Discussion: Organized focus group discussion with the Business Improvement Area (BIA) to capture business perspectives

Community Survey: Explored public attitudes toward tourism and priorities for future development

3.3.3 Phase 3: Strategy Synthesis and Roadmap Development

Strategic Prioritization: Synthesized findings from phases 1 and 2 to set directions, investment priorities, and focus areas for tourism development

Internal Discussions: After developing this strategy, discussions with stakeholders from the town took place to align on tourism objectives and implementation plan

3.4 Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles capture the values, priorities, and aspirations voiced by Grimsby's residents, businesses, leaders, and operators. They anchor every strategic decision, ensuring tourism growth reflects the town's identity and supports community well-being.

Community First - Tourism should enhance the residents' quality of life and not compromise their daily experience.

Local Identity - Clearly define and promote Grimsby's distinct character, including Downtown and Grimsby on the Lake.

Responsible and Sustainable Growth - Balance visitor growth with the town's environmental, cultural, and infrastructure capacity.

Collaboration and Integration - Businesses, cultural institutions, municipal staff, and regional partners must collaborate to deliver seamless visitor experiences.

4 VISION

Grimsby aims to be a purposeful and compelling destination at the edge of Lake Ontario and the foot of the Escarpment, offering visitors a moment of pause, discovery, and connection rooted in heritage, creativity, and community warmth.

Over the next five years, success will be defined by curated, meaningful experiences and not by visitor volume, showcasing Loyalist history, lakeside charm, an artistic community, and Grimsby's role as both a standalone stop and a connector within Niagara.

Tourism growth will enhance community life, protect natural and cultural assets, and attract visitors seeking authenticity. Heritage walks, artisan tastings, escarpment trails, and the proximity to Niagara's main attractions will all reinforce Grimsby's identity as the "Gateway to Niagara".

To achieve this vision, the Town of Grimsby will focus on:

- Connecting existing assets to form a cohesive visitor journey across downtown, the waterfront, and cultural corridors
- Collaborating across sectors to prepare for a unified tourism voice and brand, aligned with the Town's new corporate rebranding (expected Q1 2026)
- Curating experiences that reflect local stories and settings in memorable ways
- Stewarding tourism with the full participation of residents, ensuring it remains true to the town's values and scale

5 POTENTIAL SEGMENTS OF VISITORS

Understanding who is already coming to Grimsby, and who could be drawn here in the future, is central to developing a robust tourism strategy. By identifying key segments based on behaviours, motivations, and travel trends, the Town can align its offerings with the interests of those most likely to engage with its experiences. The following categories represent potential audiences for Grimsby, supported by stakeholder insights and broader market trends:

5.1 Nature and Outdoor Enthusiasts

Hikers, birdwatchers, cyclists, conservation-focused travellers

Grimsby's natural assets — including the Bruce Trail, Beamer Conservation Area, and lakefront paths — position it as a destination for hikers, birders, and cyclists seeking low-impact, nature-based experiences. These landscapes support a growing interest in “gentle tourism” and outdoor wellness. To better serve this segment, the Town of Grimsby can develop curated itineraries (e.g., “Hawk & Harvest Weekends”), improve infrastructure, and partner with conservation organizations to offer guided walks and seasonal programming. With strategic coordination, the town can turn nature visits into longer stays that benefit both visitors and local businesses.



5.2 Cultural Explorers and Heritage Tourists

Visitors interested in local history, arts, and storytelling

Grimsby's layered cultural and heritage assets, from the Loyalist-era Nelles Manor to the whimsical Painted Ladies and community-driven galleries, offer rich opportunities for visitors seeking history, storytelling, and local creativity. These travellers value immersive experiences that connect them to place through architecture, art, and lived narratives. To attract and retain cultural explorers, the Town of Grimsby can collaborate with various stakeholders to develop walking tours, integrated programming across institutions, and resident-led storytelling events. Initiatives like the GLaM Gala and heritage-themed festivals can deepen engagement, while digital tools (e.g., QR codes, audio tours) expand access. When coordinated effectively, these experiences can transform Grimsby into a vibrant destination for heritage and culture tourism.



5.3 Event-Based and Festival Visitors

Regional travellers seeking the thrill of large events

Grimsby already draws thousands through well-loved events like the Santa Claus Parade and youth sports tournaments, proving its capacity to host large-scale gatherings that resonate with both local and regional audiences. In an era where people are seeking affordable, meaningful ways to connect, whether through seasonal festivals, community celebrations, music events, or amateur sports, Grimsby has a unique opportunity to position itself as a go-to destination for events that feel personal yet substantial. However, while attendance is strong, many visitors leave quickly, limiting their broader economic contribution. By developing complementary experiences — local dining, cultural offerings, pop-up markets, and family-friendly activities — and promoting them effectively, the town can transform one-off visits into deeper engagements that benefit both residents and businesses alike.

Building on this, Grimsby's modernized marriage license and civil ceremony program has emerged as a new event visitor driver. Launched in 2023, the service has attracted a growing number of out-of-town couples, particularly from the GTA, seeking affordable, scenic alternatives for their special day. The typical ceremony is a small-scale wedding (10–20 people), often held at parks or heritage sites like Nelles Manor, with online applications simplifying access. The town has seen demand more than double in a year. Many visitors are already treating it as a day-trip opportunity, with clear potential to expand into longer stays through curated packages.



5.4 Visiting Friends and Relatives

Individuals visiting friends or family members living in Grimsby or nearby

Grimsby's growing population includes many new residents who host out-of-town family and friends. These visitors often stay in local hotels and engage in casual local activities such as dining, walking trails, or attending local events. Local hotel operators indicate weekend occupancy is often driven by "social visits," with guests visiting friends and family rather than travelling for business or major events. These travellers represent a stable and recurring market.



5.5 Urban Escapists

People from all walks of life looking for a respite from city life

Urban dwellers from the GTA are increasingly drawn to meaningful, less-commercialized escapes that offer authenticity and calm. Social media trends have amplified interest in the "authentic small-town experience," where visitors seek charm, beauty, and slower-paced discovery over crowds and spectacle. Grimsby, with its lakefront setting, walkable downtown, and local artisans, offers exactly this kind of retreat. Its natural beauty and human-scale character provide both visual appeal and emotional connection — the kinds of moments people want to share and return to.

Each of these segments is drawn to different aspects of what Grimsby already offers. Attracting and retaining these visitors then depends on how the Town markets itself and on the quality and visibility of its core tourism assets. To maximize economic and social value, the Town of Grimsby must ensure its assets are accessible, connected, and positioned to support the needs and desires of these diverse audiences.



6 DEMAND GENERATORS AND SUPPORTING ASSETS

This section introduces Grimsby’s key tourism assets by category, setting the stage for a strategy that builds on what is already meaningful, accessible, and full of potential.

For this strategy, the town’s assets have been grouped into four key categories: arts and culture, outdoor and recreation, events and experiences, and food and beverage. Each category reflects a distinct facet of what Grimsby offers and what it can amplify to shape a more intentional, inclusive, and cohesive tourism brand.

High-impact attractions and experiences (i.e., **demand generators**) give visitors clear reasons to stop, linger, and return. These marquee elements drive travel decisions, spark word-of-mouth, feature in-marketing, create foot traffic, and are often a visitor’s first touchpoint.

Supporting assets are the connective tissue: walkable streetscapes, inviting cafés and shops, convenient parking, well-kept parks, and clear signage. They may not attract visitors on their own, but they decide whether people stay longer, return, and recommend the destination, thereby enhancing its overall value.

The matrix below summarizes Grimsby’s key tourism assets by four core experience types, offering an inventory and a framework for how these experiences combine to shape the visitor economy.

Experience Type	Demand Generator	Demand Supporter
-----------------	------------------	------------------

Arts & Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grimsby Public Art Gallery • Nelles Manor Museum • Grimsby Public Library • Grimsby Museum • The Painted Ladies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objects to Desire • Bruno Capolongo Fine Art • Heritage Buildings • Heritage Plaques • Grimsby Authors Series
Outdoor and Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beamer Conservation Area and Falls • Bruce Trail • Greenbelt Cycling Route • Casablanca Waterfront Park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biggar Lagoons Wetlands • Centennial Park • Coronation Park • Southward Community Park • Woolverton Conservation Area • Bal Harbour Park • Escarpment lookouts and trail access points
Events and Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grimsby RibFest • Wayzgoose Book Arts Fair • HawkWatch • Sports Matches • Santa Claus Parade • Farmers' Market • Happening in Grimsby • Triathlons and Road races 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active Living Fair • Movies in the Park • Music in the Park • Moonlight Market and Movie • Fantasy of Trees
Food and Beverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forty Creek Distillery • Commisso Estate Winery • Grimsby RibFest (happening outside Grimsby) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various restaurants in town • Local cafes and bakeries

Disclaimer: This list is not exhaustive. It reflects the best information available — local input, document review, and the current tourism landscape — at the time of writing. As businesses, events, and infrastructure evolve, the matrix should be reviewed and updated regularly to keep the strategy responsive.

7 CHALLENGES

Grimsby's strong tourism assets are offset by interconnected challenges such as limited infrastructure, poor wayfinding, community reservations, and coordination gaps among stakeholders. These challenges restrict its ability to capture visitor opportunities. Many report issues stemming from its history as a pass-through town with facilities not geared to extended stays; others reflect tensions between growth, identity, and residents' quality of life. Addressing these infrastructure, communication, and capacity gaps is essential; without them, increased tourism risks straining the community rather than fostering sustainable development. The following analysis explores these challenges in depth.

7.1 Challenge #1

Fragmented brand identity between Downtown and Grimsby on the Lake

Summary:

- Grimsby’s Downtown and Grimsby on the Lake currently operate as two distinct nodes with unique identities, serving different demographics and offering contrasting experiences — heritage charm versus modern waterfront living. However, the lack of shared branding, physical connectivity, and coordinated promotion creates a fragmented visitor experience. There is an opportunity to develop a unified brand identity that celebrates “one town with two destinations”, encouraging cross-promotion, longer stays, and a more cohesive sense of place.

Potential Impact:

- Fragmented visitor journey, brand confusion, and competition for resources rather than collaboration.
- Undermines the small-town charm and confuses visitors.

7.2 Challenge #2

Lack of packaged experiences

Summary:

- Grimsby offers a rich mix of attractions (heritage sites, wineries, arts programming, natural trails, etc.,) but these assets are currently promoted in isolation, rather than as part of cohesive, curated experiences. Visitors must piece together their own itineraries, which can limit engagement, spending, and length of stay. The lack of packaged experiences also makes it harder to market Grimsby competitively alongside other Niagara destinations that offer bundled tours, trails, or seasonal promotions.

Potential Impact:

- Visitors struggle to find “what to do” and leave after short stops, diminishing visitor spending.

7.3 Challenge #3

Inconsistent operating hours across businesses and attractions

Summary:

- Many businesses operate under irregular or unpredictable hours. Some close early or do not stay open during high-traffic periods.
- Some cultural spaces do not reflect their correct and updated working hours on websites such as Google Maps, creating confusion.

Potential Impact:

- Visitors are often met with stores that close early or operate inconsistently, resulting in a lack of vibrancy and an unreliable experience that discourages exploration and reduces overall visitor spending.

7.4 Challenge #4

Limited signage and wayfinding network

Summary:

- There is no consistent or intuitive signage network to guide visitors through Grimsby's cultural, recreational, or natural assets.

Potential Impact:

- Visitors may feel disoriented or miss key attractions even when they're just next to them.
- Frustration while searching for destinations reduces dwell time and likelihood of repeat visits.

7.5 Challenge #5

Insufficient accommodation capacity

Summary:

- Grimsby currently offers two hotel properties, with one scaling back. There's no strategy to support short-term rentals (STRs) or diversify accommodation types.

Potential Impact:

- Constricts Grimsby's ability to host overnight visitors including teams, cultural tourists, and Niagara spill-over, reducing visitor spend per trip.

7.6 Challenge #6

Limited parking capacity

Summary:

- While parking options are available in downtown Grimsby, options will get limited after the downtown redevelopment plan.
- Extremely limited parking availability in Grimsby on the Lake and Grimsby beach, causing visitors to park by the residents' houses.

Potential Impact:

- Frustration among tourists, negative reviews, and potential deterrence for repeat visits.
- Congestion on residential streets, causing increased tension among residents.

7.7 Challenge #7

Car dependence and lack of alternative mobility options

Summary:

- Grimsby is car-dependent with no other options to get there and limited public transit, bike lanes, or walkable linkages between Downtown and GOTL.

Potential Impact:

- Restricts movement between nodes for visitors without cars, lowering length of stay and spend.

7.8 Challenge #8

Resident hesitance toward tourism-related change

Summary:

- Residents have expressed concern about the pace of tourism growth, particularly around traffic, crowding at the Beach, and uncertainty about new types of cultural programming.

Potential Impact:

- Reduced community support if changes feel misaligned with local values or poorly communicated.

8 ECONOMIC IMPACT

Clarification on the two tax streams discussed under this section:

Municipal Tax Revenue: General property tax collected by the Town, which increases as tourism drives higher business activity which raises assessed values.

Municipal Accommodation Tax: A dedicated tax added to hotel and short-term accommodation stays, used specifically to fund tourism marketing and development initiatives.

Tourism represents a powerful opportunity for sustainable economic development in Grimsby. Even modest gains in visitor capture from the broader Niagara Region can translate into significant financial returns. **Detailed information is available in Appendix E.**

Based on 2023 Niagara Region's tourism data and applying current spending and GDP multipliers, the following projections illustrate the potential (note: all revenue in \$ millions):

CAPTURE RATE	2026 SPENDING	2026 GDP IMPACT	2031 SPENDING	2031 GDP IMPACT
1% (~100,000)	\$53.6 M	\$51.8 M	\$61.2 M	\$57.5 M
3% (~250,000)	\$160.9 M	\$172.5 M	\$183.5 M	\$172.5 M

These figures reflect visitors choosing to spend their time in Grimsby, underscoring the outsized potential return from even a small share of Niagara's tourism market.

Translated into direct gains for the Town, the following are projections of Municipal Tax revenue affected directly by tourism spending, representing the *best-case scenario*:

CAPTURE RATE	2026 SPENDING	2026 POTENTIAL MUNICIPAL TAX REVENUE	2031 SPENDING	2031 POTENTIAL MUNICIPAL TAX REVENUE
1% (~100,000)	\$53.6 M	\$2.1 M	\$61.2 M	\$2.4 M
3% (~250,000)	\$160.9 M	\$6.2 M	\$183.5 M	\$7.0 M

These figures are likely to fluctuate depending on the depth and quality of tourism advancement in the Town. However, even at conservative capture rates, they highlight the significant revenue potential tourism offers the Town. If current visitor spending can be increased, whether through better experiences, higher volumes, or longer stays, the resulting municipal tax revenues (e.g., through increased property value and tax collection due to tourism activities) could help offset the costs of implementing the tourism strategy, making it not only a cultural and economic investment, but a fiscally sustainable one. **More information is available in Appendix E, 16.1.**

8.1 Job Sustainability Through Tourism

Tourism's growth in Grimsby would also support local employment. Based on current employment multipliers and spending forecasts, the following jobs would be sustained:

YEAR	1% CAPTURE	3% CAPTURE
2026	479 jobs	1,437 jobs
2027	478 jobs	1,434 jobs
2028	477 jobs	1,432 jobs
2029	476 jobs	1,429 jobs
2030	476 jobs	1,427 jobs
2031	475 jobs	1,425 jobs

Considerations:

- These are not new jobs but reflect the portion of the labour market supported by tourism, including indirect and induced employment such as jobs in transportation, retail, food services, and supply chains that benefit from visitor spending.
- Projections provide a foundation for planning workforce development, supporting post-secondary programs, and aligning housing and transportation investments.

8.2 MAT Exploration

Tourism also generates recurring local revenue. A Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) provides a glimpse of what's possible:

- Annual MAT Revenue, based on current ADRs (4%): \$85,848
- MAT per Night: \$235.20
- MAT per Room per Night: \$3.92

At just under \$4 per night, MAT represents a low-burden, high-value tool to fund tourism infrastructure, marketing, and cultural programming. As tourism infrastructure expands, with potential new accommodations and event venues, MAT revenues could grow proportionally, providing Grimsby with a reliable, self-reinforcing stream to support its tourism ambitions.

Alongside the Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT), the Town should revisit the regulation and licensing of short-term accommodations (STAs) as a potential revenue source. As tourism grows, so will demand for STAs, making it important to establish a clear and fair regulatory framework. Municipalities like Lincoln and St. Catharines have successfully implemented licensing systems through extensive

consultation, addressing concerns around cost and compliance while generating steady revenue and oversight. While Grimsby has considered this in the past, renewed tourism growth presents a timely opportunity to modernize policy. An inclusive, community-informed approach would help the Town align with regional trends and support a more sustainable tourism economy.

9 STRATEGIC PILLARS

Each pillar within the Tourism Strategic Plan represents a core strategic domain essential to advancing Grimsby's visitor economy. The structure is designed to translate high-level vision into actionable initiatives that are both measurable and accountable. Pillars are broken down into the following components:

- Initiatives – Priority actions that reflect the most impactful levers for change.
- Tactical Actions – Specific steps to implement the initiative, often cross-departmental in nature.
- Timeframe – Recommended implementation window (short-, medium-, or long-term).
- Outcomes – Desired results or transformations resulting from successful implementation.
- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) – Metrics to track progress and effectiveness, used to inform future decision-making.
- Roles – Clear lead and support assignments to ensure coordination and accountability.

This structure ensures that strategic direction is operationalised, providing both a roadmap and a performance management system to guide implementation over the five-year horizon.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are tools for accountability, continuous improvement, and strategic alignment. While KPIs are established collaboratively across Town departments and with input from stakeholders, the Tourism Coordinator will serve as their primary steward.

This includes:

- Operationalising each KPI: defining what constitutes success, the unit of measurement, and the frequency of reporting.
- Determining appropriate data channels and partnerships: identifying which internal systems, partner organizations (e.g., Niagara Region, TPON), or business networks are needed to collect meaningful data.
- Establishing baselines: setting realistic benchmarks based on current-state tourism activity.
- Ensuring data integrity and transparency: maintaining consistent reporting practices and surfacing results in a format accessible to both Council and the public.
- Adapting metrics over time: refining KPIs as the tourism context evolves or new tools (e.g., MAT revenue tracking, visitor intercept surveys, itinerary uptake) become available.

By championing KPI measurement and coordination, the Tourism Coordinator will ensure that the strategy remains responsive, results-driven, and aligned with Grimsby's economic development priorities.

The pillars below form the essential framework that supports Grimsby's tourism strategy. Each tackles a challenge that was recurrently observed in the town or mentioned by stakeholders. When considering

the development of these pillars, it is crucial to recognize the importance of strategic planning across different timeframes:

- *Short-term* initiatives focus on immediate improvements, quick wins, or responses to emerging market opportunities, and their timeline is estimated between **0 – 1 year**.
- *Medium-term* initiatives typically span several years and aim to solidify gains and expand offerings. This may involve improving infrastructure and forming official partnerships and their estimated timelines is between **2 – 4 years**.
- *Long-term* initiatives are essential for wider planning and improvements with the goal to secure lasting benefits, foster innovation, and build competitive destination profile. The timeline for this one is **4+ years**.

9.1 Pillar 1: Leadership and Governance

Initiative 1: Hire A Tourism Coordinator

A dedicated, full-time coordinator is essential to unify Grimsby's fragmented visitor offerings, drive implementation of the five-year tourism strategy, and serve as the central point of accountability. However, it must be filled by a seasoned tourism strategist with a deep understanding of destination development, stakeholder engagement, and visitor economy dynamics. This individual should bring proven experience navigating the complexities of tourism planning, marketing, and cross-sector collaboration. As Grimsby's primary front-line representative for tourism, they will be responsible for building credibility, securing alignment across departments and partners, and ensuring the strategy is both initiated and sustained so that it evolves over time.

Tactical actions

- Define the scope of the coordinator's responsibilities and align with council expectations.
- Conduct region-wide recruitment with emphasis on partnership-building, coordination, and communication skills.
- Define reporting responsibilities for tracking progress on strategy implementation and tourism KPIs.

Coordinator then:

- Carries out the vision of the strategic plan and becomes a steward of the pillars.
- Develops internal coordination mechanisms with Economic Development, Recreation, Planning, and Communications, including with the Chamber of Commerce, Downtown BIA, and beyond.
- Builds and maintains active relationships with external stakeholders, including tourism-facing businesses, cultural institutions, community groups, neighbouring municipalities, and TPN
- Acts as the front-line contact for all tourism-related inquiries and initiatives, responding to residents, businesses, and partners.

Timeframe: Medium-term

Outcomes

- Cohesive visitor experiences packaged across events, dining, accommodations, and outdoor assets.
- Greater responsiveness and clarity in tourism-related communications with the public and business community.
- Increased efficiency and transparency in the delivery and monitoring of tourism programs and initiatives.
- Stronger regional profile through active liaison with Niagara partners.

KPIs

- Position filled (milestone).
- Number of integrated visitor itineraries launched (annual).
- Number of formal partnerships or collaborations established with regional tourism players.
- Stakeholder satisfaction with coordination (measured via annual short survey).
- Number of tourism-related inquiries or requests managed.
- Frequency and quality of reporting on strategy implementation progress.

Roles

- **Lead:** Town of Grimsby Economic Development, given the direct connection between tourism and economic vitality. Economic Development should oversee the recruitment and supervision of the Tourism Coordinator, ensuring alignment with the Town's broader growth and investment objectives.
- **Support:** Human Resources; TPN (on-boarding resources); Recreation, Community Services, Planning & Buildings, and Communications Departments.

The Case for a Tourism Coordinator

A dedicated Tourism Coordinator remains the strongest option for delivering this strategy. The position provides a clear point of accountability to Council, staff, partners, and residents, ensuring that initiatives across all five pillars are driven forward consistently. With a Coordinator in place, Grimsby gains capacity to measure and report on tourism performance, manage regional partnerships, and coordinate activation at the Gateway and throughout the downtown. The role is designed as a coordinating function, focused on alignment, communication, and stewardship, rather than an operational one, allowing departments such as Recreation or Community Services to continue leading on their core programs.

- **Benefits:** Dedicated leadership to push the strategy forward; cross-pillar delivery capacity already embedded in the plan; stronger regional alignment with the Niagara Region, TPN and neighbouring municipalities; transparent KPI tracking and reporting.
- **Drawbacks:** Adds an annual operating cost of roughly \$60–\$80k, requiring long-term budget commitment; risk of role creep into operational areas if boundaries are not well defined; reliance on a single role creates some vulnerability if the position is vacant.
- **Alternatives:** Distributing tasks across existing staff portfolios, including the events coordinator, embedding responsibilities within GEDAC, or contracting out workstreams can help, but these models lack a central champion. Without a dedicated Coordinator, there is no single person

responsible for keeping the strategy moving, and progress risks becoming fragmented or slowed.

Initiative 2: Tourism Collaborations with GEDAC

To ensure strong, sustainable tourism governance without duplicating committees, the Town can consider embedding formal tourism oversight within the Grimsby Economic Development Advisory Committee (GEDAC). Starting in 2026, GEDAC can add one to two members with specific tourism sector knowledge or interests, such as local tourism operators, cultural leaders, or hospitality sector representatives. Tourism will also be included as a standing agenda item at all GEDAC meetings, enabling regular updates, integrated strategic decision-making, and alignment with broader economic development objectives.

Tactical actions

- Recruit and appoint 1–2 tourism-focused members to GEDAC.
- Add “Tourism” as a standing agenda topic for every GEDAC meeting.
- Ensure tourism KPIs, action plan progress, and strategic issues are regularly reported and discussed within the committee.
- Encourage GEDAC members to champion cross-sector opportunities that link tourism with business, arts, culture, and recreation.

Timeframe: Short-term

Outcomes

- Tourism direction and feedback remain embedded in core economic development discussions.
- Enhances coordination across Town staff, Council, and stakeholders.
- Creates a clear, sustainable governance home for tourism that is responsive as the sector evolves.

KPIs

- Quarterly meetings held vs. scheduled.
- Attendance rate of designated representatives.
- Number of committee-endorsed initiatives implemented each year.
- Partnership success with other regions.
- Number of collaborations established within Grimsby.

Roles

- Lead: GEDAC (with support from Economic Development Office and the Tourism Coordinator, as available)
- Support: Town staff, Council, appointed tourism members, and relevant advisory committees.

9.2 Pillar 2: Grow and Attract Visitors

Initiative 1: Establishing Digital and Social Media Presence

Create a dedicated visitor web hub plus active Instagram/Facebook/TikTok channels curating itineraries, user-generated content (UGC) and booking links, filling today's digital gap.

Tactical actions

- As a starter, expand the Town's website to include "Visiting Grimsby" content, featuring a "things to do" section, downloadable/printable map and rack cards, and information on key attractions and events.
- Launch interactive website with trip-planner, events widget, business listings.
- Daily social storytelling; monthly UGC contests.
- Search engine optimization (SEO) for "Niagara day trips" results.

Timeframe: Short-term and ongoing optimisation

Outcomes

- Grimsby's website and social feeds become a top research source for prospective visitors, evidenced by sustained growth in qualified sessions and itinerary interactions.
- A vibrant online audience regularly produces rights-cleared user-generated content that fuels future campaigns and lowers creative costs.

KPIs

- Website users & average time spent (monthly).
- Social engagement rate (monthly).
- Click-through rates to listings including attractions, events, etc. (annual).

Roles

- Lead: Tourism Coordinator
- Support: Town IT, Corporate Communications, local SMEs, media students and interns, content creators.

Initiative 2: Regional Marketing Campaigns

Coordinated, seasonal campaigns positioning Grimsby as the authentic, small-town, complementing Niagara's high-traffic icons and leveraging outdoor, culinary and heritage stories to convert day-trippers and pass-through traffic into visitors.

Tactical actions

- Start with one seasonal campaign (e.g., summer waterfront), ensuring costs and operational impacts are covered; prepare to add further campaigns as capacity and funding allow.
- Co-op buys with Destination Ontario & partnerships with TPN for campaign delivery.
- Press/influencer familiarization tours, GO-train Out-of-Home advertising, Google/Meta ads.

Timeframe: Medium-term and ongoing thereafter

Outcomes

- Increase in day-trip visitors.

- Increase in visitor spending.

KPIs

- Impressions & reach (quarterly).
- Sessions on “Visit Grimsby” pages originating from tagged campaign sources.
- Increase in foot traffic and sales for businesses operating in the downtown area and GOTL.

Roles

- Lead: Tourism Coordinator.
- Support: TPN, Destination Ontario, Corporate Communications, local operators.

Initiative 3: Gateway Centre as Dual Entry to Niagara & Grimsby

More information available in Appendix A

Re-position the Gateway Information Centre on Casablanca Boulevard as both a Western Niagara welcome point and a launch-pad for Grimsby experiences, leveraging the site’s 3.5 million annual pass-through visitors to redirect interest and spend into town.

Tactical actions

- Design, develop and exhibit an interactive digital kiosk that will promote the Towns of Grimsby and Lincoln and St. Catharines (DMO) at the Gateway Information Centre.
- Provide training for frontline staff to inform and encourage visitors to participate in local tours, events, and festivals, helping enhance the overall visitor experience.
- Cross-sell itineraries with Lincoln wineries & St. Catharines events.
- Host rotating pop-up displays from local wineries, galleries, and events (e.g., Happening Grimsby).
- Train local secondary/college students, under “Youth Ambassador Programme” to greet travellers, distribute kits, and provide real-time recommendations.
- Also leverage the high volume of westbound visitor traffic travelling from Niagara Falls and the U.S. border toward the GTHA and beyond that has been neglected in the past.
- Refine measurement of current traffic volumes and visitor behaviour to establish a more accurate baseline for tourism performance, inform realistic targets (e.g., pass-through capture), and ensure future strategies align with infrastructure capacity and investment planning.

Timeframe: Medium-term and ongoing operations

Outcomes

- Redirect 3–5% of pass-through visitor traffic into Grimsby’s town core by 2028.
- Aim to lift Grimsby’s share of Niagara overnight stays to 5% by 2029, supported by on-site cross-selling, improved visitor servicing, and expanded accommodation options.
 - Given the potential closure of one of the hotels, achieving this target will require significant investment in new lodging infrastructure and a focused effort to attract hotel development.

KPIs

- Visitor interactions logged on kiosks & map wall.
- Number of pop-up days/vendor participations.
- Ambassador shift hours & visitor engagements.
- Ticket/package sales completed at the Centre.
- Digital referrals from Gateway QR scans to Grimsby web assets.

Roles

- Lead: Tourism Coordinator, Gateway Information Centre, Economic Development.
- Support: Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO), TPN, Lincoln & St. Catharines tourism, Gateway staff.

Initiative 4: Wayfinding & Signage Programme

Enhance highway and in-town signage to create a cohesive wayfinding experience that guides drivers from the QEW exit and future GO Station to key attractions — addressing current “hard to find” feedback. The Public Works under Town of Grimsby has identified a Wayfinding project planned for completion within two years; the Tourism Coordinator should work closely with this initiative to ensure visitor needs are reflected. Opportunities also exist to engage local business leaders in updating or sponsoring signage, including seasonal and event-specific promotions.

More details from other municipalities are included in Appendix F.

Tactical actions

- Design signage (highway blades, trailheads, parking) that follows Grimsby’s emerging branding identity.
- Secure Ministry of Transportation (Ontario) approvals; integrate digital QR-codes for maps.
- A staged implementation starting with QEW, then downtown nodes.

Timeframe: Medium-term.

Outcomes

- Improved visitor dwell-time (+30 min by 2028).
- Increased economic impact of those passing by to the Niagara region, by directing them to Grimsby DT or GOTL.
- Traffic and parking pressures on residential streets decline as visitors follow signed routes to designated lots.

KPIs

- Signage installations completion (milestone).
- Downtown footfall counters, in comparison to before signage.

Roles

- Lead: Economic Development, Public Works, and Parks departments, working collaboratively to implement and maintain cohesive signage, infrastructure, and visitor-serving improvements.

- Support: Tourism Coordinator, Ministry of Transportation (Ontario), BIA if needed.

9.3 Pillar 3: Infrastructure Improvements

Initiative 1: Enhance Regional Access to Grimsby

Position Grimsby as an easy-to-reach stop between the Greater Toronto Area and Niagara by combining highway visibility with new public-transport links.

Tactical actions

- Ensure access points to and from GO Transit rail station serve Grimsby.
- Pilot a weekend express shuttle (Niagara Region Transit) from Burlington and Hamilton GO to Grimsby waterfront attractions.
- Install advance tourism-direction signs in logical areas around the QEW exits, promoting “Exit for Grimsby’s Escarpment & Lakefront”.

Timeframe: Medium-term

Outcomes

- Increase in the number of visitors coming through public transport.
- Day-trip conversion to overnight stays rises after station opening.

KPIs

- GO station construction milestone.
- Percentage of total visitors arriving by GO rail or regional bus.
- Average weekday and weekend passenger counts at Grimsby GO station (Metrolinx data).

Roles

- Lead: Town of Grimsby Economic Development.
- Support: Metrolinx, Niagara Region Transit, Ministry of Transportation of Ontario.

Initiative 2: Improve Visitor Mobility within Grimsby

Limit the gap between Grimsby Downtown and Grimsby on the Lake through on-demand transit, cycling corridors, and a branded shuttle to reduce car dependency within the town. This could include promoting and facilitating the use of e-cars, e-bikes, rentals, and shuttles, with the Gateway serving as a central base for visitor mobility services and information.

Tactical actions

- Launch a marketing campaign for Niagara Region Transit OnDemand, adding QR-code stops at the Gateway Centre (in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce and DIA) and Grimsby on the Lake to increase awareness and visibility of the service.
- Build a north–south protected cycling lane linking the waterfront, downtown and escarpment trails; include seasonal bike-share docking stations.
- Operate a summer “Lake-to-Main Street” shuttle loop every 30 minutes.

Timeframe: Short and medium-term

Outcomes

- Greater dispersal of visitors; increase in cross-spend between waterfront and downtown.
- Reduced reliance on private vehicles for intra-town movement; hence, controlling the traffic and town congestion.

KPIs

- OnDemand (NRT) passenger trips that start or end at visitor nodes (quarterly).
- Bicycle counts on the north–south protected lane (automatic counters).

Roles

- Lead: Town Transportation Services.
- Support: Niagara Region Transit, Public Works, local cycling groups, Business Improvement Areas.

Initiative 3: Expand and Diversify Accommodation Capacity

Tackle the shortage of visitor accommodations by attracting new hotel developments and establishing clear legalization of and regulations for alternative lodging (e.g., short-term rentals). With the potential scale-down or closing of the Casablanca Hotel, Grimsby's total room inventory may fall to approximately 60 — a level insufficient to meet future demand. A dedicated push to attract a new hotel operator will be essential to support overnight growth targets and broader tourism strategy objectives.

Tactical actions

- Issue a hotel-investment prospectus highlighting market gaps (mid-scale, boutique waterfront) and available sites.
- Revisit possibility of short-term-rental licensing and safety standards to legalize existing units and capitalize on benefits.
- Offer a property-tax rebate for hotels committing to four-season operations and facility upgrades.

Timeframe: Long-term

Outcomes

- Room inventory increase.
- Visitor spending per trip increases through higher overnight ratio.

KPIs

- Total commercial rooms available (annual).
- Licensed short-term-rental units (quarterly).
- Average occupancy rate, shoulder seasons (annual).

Roles

- Lead: Town Planning & Development.
- Support: Niagara Economic Development, private hotel developers, Chamber of Commerce.

Initiative 4: Manage Parking Capacity in Grimsby on the Lake and Downtown

Ease congestion and resident tension and add visitor parking assets where none exist, especially after by finalizing the Strategic Parking Management Study.

Tactical actions

- Strengthen wayfinding and visitor information to maximize use of existing supply of parking spots.
- Investigate feasibility of parking near Grimsby Beach and the Painted Ladies area.
- Explore areas owned by the town to potentially turn into parking lots.
- Explore feasibility of weekend pay-and-display agreements with private lots (not currently in place).
- Introduce dynamic pricing and two-hour turnover limits on Main Street after downtown streetscape changes and the decrease in parking spots.
- Park-and-ride shuttle to downtown during peak events starting 2027, with the starting node to be discussed.

Timeframe: Medium-term

Outcomes

- Reduction in the congestion and on-street overflow at waterfront neighbourhoods.
- Higher visitor satisfaction on parking access.
- Lower tension levels with the residents, especially those who are living near the lake or the Painted Ladies and face parking issues emerging from tourism.

KPIs

- Number of new parking lots acquired in GOTL.
- Number of visitor and resident complaints logged about parking with by-law or 311.

Roles

- Lead: Town of Grimsby Public Works (parking portfolio).
- Support: Private lot owners, Event organisers, Tourism Coordinator.

9.4 Pillar 4: Partnerships and Collaborations

Initiative 1: Explore collaboration opportunities with neighbouring municipalities

Component 1: DMO partnership with Lincoln & St. Catharines

Reach out to the Lincoln–St. Catharines DMO Partnership to explore formalising a tri-municipal body that pools marketing funds, research and governance so West Niagara presents a single visitor proposition rather than three competing voices.

Component 2: Tourism partnership with the Town of Lincoln

Reach out to Lincoln to explore joining the Niagara Benchlands tourism brand allowing Grimsby and Lincoln to pool marketing funds, research and governance so the benchlands presents a single visitor proposition rather than two competing voices.

Tactical actions

- Draft governance model and board structure to start discussions with St. Catharines and Lincoln.
- Sign a memorandum(s) of understanding (MOU) to join the DMO and/or Niagara Benchlands. The cost and terms of participation would be determined through negotiations between the Town of Grimsby and the partner municipality and would be subject to Council approval.
- Integrate Grimsby assets into the Wander Niagara platform and launch joint storytelling campaigns.
- Integrate Grimsby assets into the Niagara Benchlands platform and launch joint storytelling campaigns.

Timeframe: Medium-term

Outcomes

- Unified brand for “Niagara West” drives longer itineraries and higher overnight stays.
- Unified brand for “Niagara Benchlands” drives longer itineraries and higher overnight stays.
- Cost-sharing reduces individual municipal spend on marketing.

KPIs

- Cross-municipality website digital referrals (quarterly).
- Growth in overnight stays across the three towns (annual).

Roles

- Leads: Town of Grimsby Tourism Coordinator, Town of Lincoln Tourism, City of St. Catharines Economic Development.
- Support: TPN, accommodation and attraction partners.

Initiative 2: Niagara West Sports Tourism Collaboration

More information available in Appendix D

Unite Grimsby, Lincoln, St. Catharines and West Lincoln to market and host small- to mid-sized tournaments that weave playing time with family-friendly itineraries, packaged dining, and wellness activities, turning existing venues such as Southward Park, Peach King Centre in Grimsby and Meridian Centre in St. Catharines into regional economic drivers rather than stand-alone local amenities.

Tactical actions

- Complete a shared facility and event-capacity inventory covering indoor arenas, outdoor fields, hotels, and dining clusters.

- Align partnerships with current allocation policy with existing leagues and schedules, recognizing that existing leagues and organizations have an agreement with the Town of Grimsby.
- Leverage existing leagues and other sports organizations in Grimsby and beyond, facilitating partnerships between the leagues and other Town assets to create a comprehensive and complete sports tourism experience in West Niagara.
- Encourage the bundling of “team experience” packages—accommodation, restaurant discounts, local attraction passes—and promote them through school boards and provincial sport organisations.
- Draft and adopt a West Niagara Sports Hosting Strategy that sets venue standards, booking protocols, and tournament bid criteria in partnership with existing leagues and organizations.
- Launch a joint bid committee that submits at least three coordinated proposals per year for provincial youth soccer, hockey, and emerging-sport events.
- Publish an online West Niagara Sports and Recreation Calendar integrating tournaments, community runs, and clinics, updated quarterly.

Timeframe: Short to medium-term

Outcomes

- Consistent off-season demand for accommodation and restaurants, extending visitor spending beyond peak months.
- Enhanced regional profile of West Niagara as a family-oriented, wellness-aligned sport destination.
- Stronger community engagement through volunteer opportunities and cross-municipal pride in hosting events.

KPIs

- Number of successful tournament bids secured (annual).
- Room nights generated by sport events (quarterly).
- Average visitors spend per tournament-attending party.
- Usage rate of “team experience” packages (seasonal).
- Web traffic to the Sports and Recreation Calendar (monthly).

Roles

- Lead: Tourism Coordinator to facilitate discussions between stakeholders. Recreation Services Departments of Grimsby, Lincoln, St. Catharines and West Lincoln (joint committee).
- Support: Town of Grimsby Tourism Office; Southward Park Management; Peach King Centre and Meridian Centre operators; local sport clubs; school boards; TPN; hotel and restaurant partners.

Initiative 3: Grimsby Stakeholder Collaboration Network

Create a formal roundtable uniting the Business Improvement Area, Grimsby on the lake, heritage and cultural groups, residents and major employers to coordinate visitor-serving initiatives and manage impacts.

Tactical actions

- Establish regular Tourism Round-table meetings (quarterly, or up to three times per year) and publish joint action lists.
- Support “Evening Grimsby” extended hours grant for downtown businesses during peak seasons.
- Develop shared visitor-welcome kits distributed via hotels.
- Engage local service clubs and community organizations — such as the Rotary Club, Lions Club, and others — to support tourism initiatives through event partnerships, volunteer capacity, and community-driven programming.

Timeframe: Medium-term.

Outcomes

- Consistent visitor experience and extended evening economy.
- Improved resident sentiment on tourism management.

KPIs

- The number of businesses and attractions participating in this network.
- Count of downtown businesses adopting “Evening Grimsby” extended hours, compared with the previous peak season.

Roles

- Lead: Tourism Coordinator and Downtown Business Improvement Area.
- Support: Economic Development Office, Heritage Advisory Committee, Painted Ladies Residents’ Committee.

Initiative 4: Strategic Partnerships with Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO) and Tourism Partnership of Niagara (TPN)

Plug Grimsby into provincial advocacy and regional funding streams to amplify market reach and influence policy.

Tactical actions

- Encourage individual participation in TPN’s Content Development initiatives.
- Join TIAO’s working groups on small-town visitation and lobby for rural-tourism grants.
- Schedule quarterly alignment sessions with TPN on campaign calendars and asset mapping.

Timeframe: Medium-term

Outcomes

- Greater visibility for Grimsby within regional campaigns.
- Access to joint research and advocacy resources.

KPIs

- Count of regional or provincial marketing campaigns in which Grimsby assets appear, divided by total campaigns led by TPN/TIAO.
- Number of Grimsby businesses or organisations contributing to TPN Content Development Initiative sessions.
- Total funding obtained for Grimsby tourism projects via TIAO-supported or provincial rural-tourism programs.

Roles

- Lead: Town Tourism Coordinator.
- Support: TPN, TIAO, local operators.

Initiative 5: Academic and Skills Partnerships with Niagara College and Brock University

Collaborate with post-secondary institutions to enrich visitor experiences and build the tourism talent pipeline through live projects and placements.

Tactical actions

- Sign memoranda of understanding with Brock University Digital Media and Niagara College Hospitality.
- Pilot a student-led “Grimsby Insider” social-media series and Gateway Centre ambassador programme.
- Integrate Brock student-developed QR-code heritage tours into the Painted Ladies tourism plan.

Timeframe: Medium-term

Outcomes

- Enhanced digital storytelling and guided experiences for visitors.
- Work-integrated learning opportunities that retain local talent.

KPIs

- Distinct live projects or placements delivered for Grimsby attractions or events each academic year.
- Total hours of student labour (placements, ambassador shifts, project work) logged per year.
- Number of QR-code scans on heritage tours (annual).

Roles

- Lead: Town Tourism Coordinator and Gateway Centre.
- Support: Brock University Digital Media Program, Niagara College Hospitality and Media programmes, high schools.

Opportunity: Twinning with Grimsby, UK (and Triplet Concept with Grimsby, US)

Grimsby, Ontario has been invited by the Mayor of North East Lincolnshire (Grimsby, U.K.) to establish a formal twinning relationship, with the Town’s Corporate Services Committee recommending staff

develop options and a modest project budget for Council’s consideration. Building on this, the Town could explore a “triplet” arrangement that adds Grimsby, Illinois, an unincorporated community in Jackson County, to enable trilateral storytelling, reciprocal event features, itinerary swaps, and youth/education collaborations. As a tourism opportunity, twinning (or tripling) can enable structured cultural exchange and co-marketing, e.g., shared “Two Grimsbys” storytelling, reciprocal event features, itinerary swaps, and youth/education collaborations, supported by clear objectives and performance tracking within the Town’s existing tourism implementation cadence. This creates a practical channel to generate earned media, develop shoulder-season programming, and drive overnight visitation tied to joint content and packages. In the initiatives below, we lay out other Canadian/ local partnership opportunities.

9.5 Pillar 5: Product Development and Capacity Building

Initiative 1: Introduce Packaged Experiences

More information available in Appendix B

Transform individual attractions into bookable packages (e.g., “Heritage-to-Harbour Day,” “Trail & Tasting Weekend”), so the town itself becomes the experience rather than a set of isolated stops.

Tactical actions

- Curate three pilot itineraries (heritage-culture, outdoor-recreation, culinary) with bundled admission, dining and shuttle tickets.
- Publish packages on a new “Visit Grimsby Experiences” page with real-time booking links.
- Offer “team bundles” for sports tournaments that pair accommodation, meals and wellness add-ons.
- Run seasonal social-media campaigns spotlighting each package and encouraging user-generated stories.

Timeframe: Short-term and ongoing refinement afterward.

Outcomes

- Longer visitor dwell-time and higher spend per trip.
- Stronger cross-sector collaboration among museums, restaurants, guides and accommodation providers.

KPIs

- Number of bookable packages available on the Tourism Grimsby website or “Visit Grimsby Experiences” (quarterly).
- Package booking conversion, calculated by the number of bookings divided by the unique page sessions on the Experiences site.
- Total confirmed package purchases.
- Number of businesses/attractions included in at least one active package.
- Average visitor post-experience rating (1–5) collected via digital follow-up survey.

Roles

- Lead: Tourism Coordinator.
- Support: Museums, galleries, wineries, Bruce Trail Conservancy, accommodation sector and other tourism-related businesses.

Initiative 2: Develop Regional Experiences

Position Grimsby as the western gateway to Niagara by co-creating cross-municipal itineraries (cycling, wine-and-art loops) that start or finish in town.

Tactical actions

- Sign a tri-municipality memorandum of understanding with the Town of Lincoln and St. Catharines.
- Launch the “Niagara West Loop” cycling route, integrating lakeside trails, vineyard paths and downtown heritage stops.
- Explore the possibility of ten Grimsby-anchored itineraries to the Wander Niagara digital platform.
- Jointly bid for regional marketing funds to produce video and photo assets.
- Introduce regional packages and advertise for West Niagara through the Gateway centre.
- Attract large-scale events to larger parks or venues in Grimsby, such as Southward Park (e.g., concerts, car shows, scout jamborees, international kite and dog shows, and tennis tournaments), as well as lake-based programming like fishing, canoeing, and boat tours to position Grimsby as a major draw in the region.

Timeframe: Medium-term.

Outcomes

- Higher share of overnight stays captured within West Niagara.
- Increased visitor flow between municipalities, spreading economic benefits.

KPIs

- Number of Grimsby-anchored itineraries published on Wander Niagara.
- Number of Grimsby businesses featured in regional packages or itineraries.
- Confirmed bookings of regional packages that start or end in Grimsby, divided by the package page sessions.

Roles

- Lead: Town of Grimsby Economic Development and Tourism Coordinator.
- Support: Municipal partners, TPN, cycling clubs, wineries.

Initiative 3: Improve Waterfront Access

More information available in Appendix C

Unlock Lake Ontario as a signature visitor draw through careful planning and phased activation of the shoreline.

Tactical actions

- Pilot summer lakefront programming: non-motorised rentals, interpretive signage, early-morning wellness classes and weekend vendors.
- Improve trail links and wayfinding from downtown to the shore; add accessible viewing platforms.
- Consider conducting a waterfront feasibility study to unlock unused portions of waterfront, install new amenities and environmental safeguards, and upgrade existing features, including those found in the marina.
- Explore partnership with regional cruise operators for a trial shore excursion stop.

Timeframe: Long-term (feasibility study, larger infrastructure upgrades 2028-2031).

Outcomes

- A clear, community-endorsed roadmap for waterfront development.
- New year-round lakeside experiences that extend visitor stays.

KPIs

- Monthly waterfront visitor counts.
- Participation in lakefront programmes and pop-up markets per season.
- Resident satisfaction with shoreline access (incorporate into an annual citizen satisfaction survey).

Roles

- Lead: Tourism Coordinator with the Planning department and Public Works.
- Support: Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, local water-sport operators, residents' advisory groups.

Initiative 4: Support Business Operations in Peak Season and Festivals

Equip local businesses to remain open later during summer weekends and event periods, creating evening vibrancy and higher visitor spend.

Tactical actions

- Deliver workshops on staffing, pricing and night-time safety for retailers and food establishments.
- Provide micro-grants to offset extended-hours labour costs during pilot "Night Market" events.
- Coordinate joint marketing (maps, banners, social posts) promoting and supporting this initiative.

Timeframe: Short to medium-term

Outcomes

-
- A lively evening economy that complements festivals and day-time attractions.
 - Increased average visitor spend and business revenues.

KPIs

- Number of businesses adopting extended hours (seasonal).
- Evening pedestrian counts on Main Street during peak season (July–August).

Roles

- Lead: Downtown BIA in collaboration with Economic Development Office.
- Support: Restaurants, retailers, Chamber of Commerce, Niagara Regional Police Service (safety planning).

10 ACTION PLAN

Timeframe	Initiative	Key Actions	KPIs	Pillar	Est. Cost
Short-term	Tourism Collaborations with GEDAC	Ensure tourism KPIs and action plan progress are regularly reported and discussed within the committee	Attendance rate of designated representatives; number of collabs established within Grimsby	Pillar 1	-
Short-term	Establish Digital and Social Media Presence	Launch interactive website with trip-planner, events widget, business listings; daily social storytelling; SEO for 'Niagara day trips'	Website users & avg. time spent (monthly); Social engagement rate (monthly); Click-through rates to listings (annual)	Pillar 2	\$15-30k Upfront
Short-term	Introduce Packaged Experiences	Curate three pilot itineraries; publish on 'Visit Grimsby Experiences'; run seasonal campaigns	Number of packages; Booking conversion rate; Package purchases; Business participation; Visitor rating (1-5)	Pillar 5	TBD
Short-term	Support Business Operations in Peak Season	Workshops on staffing/safety; micro-grants; coordinated joint marketing	Number of businesses with extended hours; Evening pedestrian counts	Pillar 5	\$15-20k Total
Short-term	Niagara West Sports Tourism Collaboration	Complete facility inventory; adopt Sports Hosting Strategy; launch joint bid committee; promote team packages	Tournament bids secured; Room nights; Avg. spend per party; Team package usage; Sports calendar traffic	Pillar 4	\$15-30k Annually
Medium-term	Hire a Tourism Coordinator	Draft job profile; secure council approval; region-wide recruitment	Position filled; Integrated visitor itineraries; Regional partnerships; Stakeholder satisfaction	Pillar 1	\$60-80k Annually
Medium-term	Strategic Partnerships with TIAO and TPN	Encourage participation in TPN Content Initiative; join TIAO working groups; quarterly alignment sessions	Campaigns with Grimsby assets; Business participation in TPN; Tourism project funding via TIAO	Pillar 4	TBD
Medium-term	Regional Marketing Campaigns	Run seasonal pushes; co-op buys with Destination Ontario & partnerships with TPN; influencer tours; Google/Meta ads	Impressions & reach (quarterly); Sessions on 'Visit Grimsby' from campaign sources; Increase in foot traffic and sales	Pillar 2	\$50-75k Annually

Medium-term	Academic and Skills Partnerships	Sign MOUs with Brock/Niagara College; pilot 'Grimsby Insider'; integrate QR-code heritage tours	Live projects per year; Hours of student labour; QR-code scan count	Pillar 4	TBD
Medium-term	Gateway Centre as Entry to Niagara & Grimsby	Interactive map wall; train staff; pop-up displays; youth ambassador programme	Visitor interactions on kiosks; Pop-up days; Ambassador hours; Ticket/package sales; QR scan referrals	Pillar 2	\$15-50k Upfront
Medium-term	Improve Visitor Mobility within Grimsby	Marketing campaign for NRT OnDemand; build north-south bike lane; operate 'Lake-to-Main Street' shuttle loop	OnDemand trips at visitor nodes; Bicycle counts on protected lane	Pillar 3	\$20k Annually Needs to be scoped by Town
Medium-term	Wayfinding & Signage Programme	Design signage; secure MTO approvals; integrate QR-codes; staged implementation from QEW to downtown nodes	Signage installations completion; Downtown footfall counters	Pillar 2	Incorporate into broader wayfinding initiatives
Medium-term	Manage Parking in GOTL and Downtown	Acquire/lease land; convert private lots; dynamic pricing; park-and-ride pilot	New lots in GOTL; Parking complaints	Pillar 3	TBD
Medium-term	Develop Regional Experiences	Sign tri-municipal MOU; launch Niagara West Loop; add itineraries to Wander Niagara; regional packages; attract large events	Itineraries on Wander Niagara; Grimsby businesses in packages; Package bookings	Pillar 5	-
Medium-term	Grimsby Stakeholder Collaboration Network	Establish round-table meetings; launch 'Evening Grimsby'; visitor-welcome kits	Participating businesses; Extended hours vs previous year	Pillar 4	-
Medium-term	Collaborations with neighbouring municipalities	Draft governance; sign council MOU; joint storytelling campaigns	Cross-municipality digital referrals; Overnight stays growth	Pillar 4	-
Medium-term	Enhance Regional Access to Grimsby	Ensure adequate Grimsby access from new GO Station (once finalized); weekend shuttle pilot; advance tourism signage	GO station milestone; Visitors by GO/bus; GO station counts (Metrolinx)	Pillar 3	TBD – Contingent on Go Station Development

Long-term	Expand and Diversify Accommodation Capacity	Issue hotel-investment prospectus; revisit STR licensing; offer tax rebate	Commercial rooms; Licensed STRs; Occupancy rate (shoulder season)	Pillar 3	\$25-50k (Prospectus Work)
Long-term	Improve Waterfront Access	Commission waterfront study; pilot rentals/signage/classes/vendors; explore cruise shore stop	Waterfront visitor counts; Program participation; Resident shoreline satisfaction	Pillar 5	\$45-150k (Consulting + Capital Pilots)

10.1 Estimated Costs

Please note that some costs remain 'To Be Discussed' in the table above and have not been allocated within the estimates presented below.

10.1.1 Short-term Cost Estimate

To support the initial implementation of the tourism strategy, first-year costs are estimated between **\$45,000 and \$80,000**, depending on the pace of rollout, resource availability, and partner contributions. This range is a realistic approach that prioritizes quick wins, achievable and high-impact actions, such as advancing tourism collaborations with GEDAC, establishing a digital and social media presence, extending business operations, participating in Niagara West sports tourism collaboration. These costs position the Town to build early momentum while maintaining a balanced and careful use of resources.

10.1.2 Medium-term Cost Estimate

To advance the next phase of the tourism strategy, medium-term costs are estimated between **\$145,000 and \$225,000**. These investments focus on building the necessary capacity, partnerships, and infrastructure to strengthen Grimsby's position within the regional tourism network. Key initiatives include hiring a Tourism Coordinator, launching regional marketing campaigns, establishing academic and skills partnerships, improving visitor mobility within the community, and more. These coordinated efforts will enable sustained growth, improved visitor experiences, and stronger regional integration beyond the first year.

10.1.3 Long-term Cost Estimate

Long-term investments are projected between **\$70,000 and \$200,000**, reflecting a commitment to expanding Grimsby's tourism capacity and enhancing key destination assets. Planned initiatives include expanding Grimsby's accommodation capacity, which starts by commissioning a hotel investment prospectus study. Additional long-term priorities include improving waterfront access through a comprehensive study, piloting amenities such as rentals, signage, classes, and vendor opportunities, and assessing the feasibility of a cruise shore stop. Together, these initiatives position Grimsby for sustained tourism growth and improved visitor experiences.

10.1.4 Recurring Fees

A subset of initiatives will require ongoing annual investment, with recurring costs projected between **\$145,000 and \$205,000** annually. These include staffing (e.g., the Tourism Coordinator), regional marketing campaigns, business support programs, and the annual operation of the Gateway Centre as a tourism entry point. These costs reflect the Town of Grimsby's commitment to sustained tourism development and integrated regional positioning, ensuring that visitor services, promotional reach, and partnership engagement are maintained throughout the strategy's lifecycle.

11 CONCLUSION

Tourism growth is most successful when it is community-led, evidence-based, and continuously evaluated. This strategic plan supplies the Town of Grimsby with a pragmatic roadmap that balances opportunity with stewardship. Its guiding principles of community first, local identity, and responsible, sustainable growth ensure that every tactical decision reinforces what residents value most. Implementation now depends on sustained collaboration among municipal departments, industry partners, neighbouring municipalities, and residents. By tracking clear KPIs, embracing adaptive management, and celebrating quick wins, the town can build confidence and momentum year over year. As new trends emerge, the Town of Grimsby will need to monitor and review progress while staying true to its vision of offering a welcoming, reflective retreat from the pace of urban life. With shared leadership and a commitment to continuous improvement, Grimsby is well-placed to convert its lakeside charm, heritage depth, and creative spirit into lasting economic, social, and cultural benefits for all who call the town home.

12 APPENDIX A - GATEWAY MODEL

12.1 Current State & Barriers: A Functional Hub with Untapped Potential

Located on the QEW, the Niagara Gateway Centre greets roughly 3.5 million travellers a year, often as their first stop entering the region and last pause before the GTA. This visibility gives Grimsby a prime chance to shape visitor impressions, direct traffic into town, and highlight its cultural, natural, and commercial assets.

At present, the Centre operates much like a standard rest stop: basic amenities, static brochures, and no interactive storytelling, booking tools, live event feeds, or data on where visitors go next. With minimal links to Grimsby's identity or activities, most travellers pass through without engaging, or spending, in town.

The main barrier is **structural**: the Town neither owns nor operates the facility, so improvements rely on negotiation and co-investment with the private operator. **Practical gaps** compound the challenge — no digital itinerary kiosks, limited staff capacity, scant Grimsby-branded signage, and weak coordination across the Niagara West tourism network.

These challenges are substantial yet manageable. Through partnership pilots, shared marketing, and light-touch activations, the Town of Grimsby can transform the site from a functional rest area into a true “gateway to possibility,” converting pass-through traffic into engaged visitors while fitting the operator's business model and the town's scale. These efforts can be further supported by the Tourism Coordinator, who can act as a bridge between the Town, Gateway operators, and tourism stakeholders, ensuring that activations align with broader strategic goals and messaging.



12.2 A Front Door to Grimsby: Visions for Activation

Stakeholders have articulated a clear and imaginative vision for how the Gateway Centre could be reactivated within existing constraints. Immediate, low-footprint improvements might include:

- Interactive kiosks with visitor itineraries
- QR-linked self-guided tours
- Curated visitor kits highlighting seasonal events, trails, and cultural venues
- Digital signage promoting local businesses, downtown events, or waterfront programming

These could be implemented through content partnerships with the Town and the broader Niagara West tourism network. The Tourism Coordinator can play a lead role in curating and delivering this content, working with local businesses, cultural institutions, and the operator to ensure materials are timely, engaging, and reflective of seasonal programming across Grimsby. Furthermore, a cost-sharing model could enable shared promotion across businesses and community assets, distributing the investment while amplifying the impact.

Looking further, stakeholders have expressed interest in transforming the site into a more immersive and experiential environment. Proposed ideas include:

- “Taste of Grimsby” pop-ups featuring restaurants, wineries, and artisan producers
- Seasonal activations with food samples, demos, or interactive stations
- LLBO-compliant wine tastings to showcase Grimsby’s vineyards
- Partnerships with regional events and cross-promotional ticketing options

Beyond Grimsby-specific efforts, stakeholders have proposed that the Gateway serve as a regional connector, reviving ties with the TPN and building new ones with Lincoln and St. Catharines. With the right infrastructure, the Centre could support ticketing, cross-municipal itineraries, and promote Grimsby as a central hub for exploring the Niagara West corridor.

12.3 Youth Ambassadors: A Homegrown Welcome

One of the most promising and community-driven ideas involves engaging local youth as volunteer ambassadors for the Gateway Centre. While the centre currently employs summer students at the information kiosk through the Federal Government Summer Students Program, expanding partnerships with local secondary schools and post-secondary institutions could offer a more sustainable support system throughout the year. By involving students as greeters, storytellers, and cultural guides, the Gateway can welcome travelers to Grimsby and showcase the community through the vibrant perspectives of its next generation.

These youth volunteers could:

- Provide personalized recommendations and event updates
- Distribute “Taste of Grimsby” kits or seasonal itineraries
- Share historical anecdotes, trail maps, or local art
- Run small-scale pop-up events or demos in partnership with local businesses or community organizations

Beyond enhancing the visitor experience, this program would offer local youth valuable experience in tourism, communication, and civic engagement. It would also humanize the Gateway Centre, transforming it from a generic service stop into a community-led invitation to explore.

This community-led approach adds warmth and authenticity to the Gateway experience, offering not just brochures and displays, but real connections with the people who call Grimsby home. Youth ambassadors bring a fresh, welcoming presence that reflects the town’s identity and pride, while gaining valuable experience in tourism, storytelling, and civic engagement. The Tourism Coordinator would play

a key role in guiding the program’s development, building partnerships with local schools, coordinating training, and ensuring the initiative grows in a way that benefits both students and visitors alike.

12.4 Beyond The Gateway: A Long-Term Vision

While the Niagara Gateway Centre is not owned by the Town of Grimsby and remains subject to existing business arrangements, there is a growing interest among stakeholders in envisioning what the site could become in the long term. Rather than functioning solely as a conventional rest stop, the Centre has the potential to evolve into a curated welcome point for the Niagara West corridor. A compelling reference point is Gloucester Services in the UK, a highway facility that has redefined the visitor experience through:

- Architecturally distinctive design
- A regional farm shop showcasing local producers, could be in partnership of the existing Farmers Market in Grimsby or could serve as a vibrant extension of it
- A community investment model that reinvests in local cause

Although Grimsby cannot replicate this model outright due to structural and ownership constraints, it can draw inspiration from its core principles:

- Place-based design rooted in regional identity
- Local sourcing that highlights Niagara West’s food and artisan economy
- Integrated storytelling that introduces visitors to cultural and historical narratives

Any future evolution must respect current ownership structures, but the Town could play a facilitative role by exploring new partnerships, co-investment models, or licensing agreements with operators. These efforts could enable seasonal events, local product showcases, or rotating cultural displays that reflect Grimsby’s unique identity and regional assets. Importantly, such initiatives would not require full redevelopment but could gradually transform the visitor experience through incremental, mutually beneficial steps. As these conversations evolve, the Tourism Coordinator can help the Town explore co-investment models, licensing agreements, and regional funding opportunities that make incremental improvements possible.

12.4.1 Niagara West Welcome Hall

Drawing inspiration from Gloucester Services, over time, the Centre could evolve into a “Niagara West Welcome Hall,” a hybrid space offering local food, curated itineraries, interactive exhibits, and orientation tools for deeper engagement with the surrounding area. Transforming the Niagara Gateway Centre into a “Niagara West Welcome Hall” would be a strategic evolution that could unlock significant economic, cultural, and regional benefits. Such a space would serve as a central orientation hub for the western Niagara corridor, repositioning Grimsby from a pass-through town to a starting point for discovery.

By offering immersive, place-based experiences, the Welcome Hall would:

- Capture the attention of high-volume QEW traffic, turning casual stops into meaningful visits
- Drive visitor dispersal into nearby towns, encouraging exploration of Grimsby’s downtown, waterfront, trails, and wineries

- Strengthen regional cohesion, presenting Lincoln, St. Catharines, and West Niagara as a connected tourism network
- Showcase local products and talent, supporting businesses, artisans, and youth engagement
- Foster a sense of arrival, with thoughtfully curated content that tells the story of the region's landscape, culture, and community
- With strategic investment and multi-stakeholder coordination, this vision could culminate in a hybrid space that offers:
- Locally sourced food and artisan goods – giving visitors a taste of Niagara before they even exit the highway
- Interactive exhibits and curated itineraries – helping guests orient themselves to what's nearby and what's worth exploring
- Seasonal events and samplings – tied to Grimsby's cultural calendar, from harvest festivals to art walks
- A regional orientation hub – connecting tourism assets across Grimsby, Lincoln, and St. Catharines in one integrated platform

With the Tourism Coordinator helping to align messaging, activate content partnerships, and coordinate regional engagement, the vision of a “Niagara West Welcome Hall” becomes more feasible through strategic facilitation and incremental implementation.

12.5 The Role of the Tourism Coordinator

The success of any activation strategy at the Niagara Gateway Centre will depend on sustained coordination between the Town, the facility operator, regional partners, and local tourism stakeholders. The newly established Tourism Coordinator role is uniquely positioned to support this coordination. While not responsible for managing or operating the Gateway itself, the coordinator will serve as the primary liaison, helping to align Grimsby's tourism messaging, content partnerships, and activation efforts with the broader Niagara West strategy.

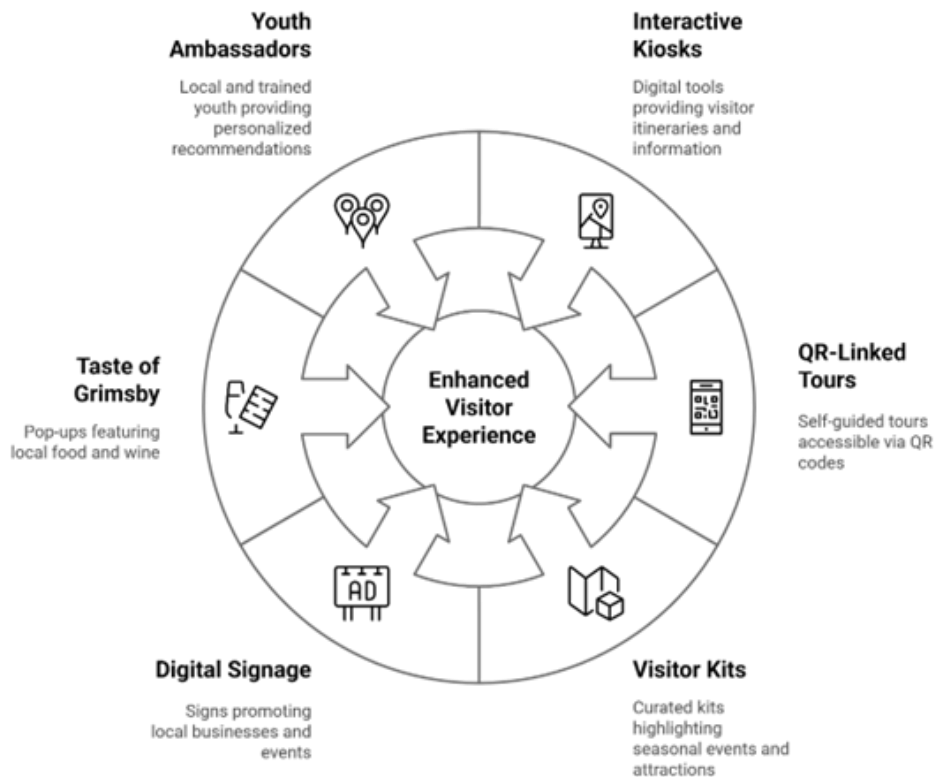
Key responsibilities related to the Gateway may include:

- Facilitating content-sharing agreements between Grimsby businesses, cultural institutions, and the Gateway operator.
- Coordinating seasonal campaign materials, digital itineraries, and local storytelling content across print and interactive displays.
- Supporting the Youth Ambassador program by connecting it with local schools, post-secondary institutions, and community organisations.
- Working with Lincoln, St. Catharines, and the TPN to ensure the Gateway's programming reflects the Niagara West corridor as a cohesive tourism region.
- Monitoring visitor feedback, digital engagement, and partner input to inform ongoing activations and co-investment opportunities.

The Tourism Coordinator's role is connective. Their ability to bring together multiple interests around a shared vision for the Gateway, one that amplifies Grimsby's voice within a regional framework, will be key to unlocking its long-term potential.

This long-term vision is less about municipal control and more about municipal leadership. By convening partners, aligning with regional tourism efforts, and creatively shaping the visitor experience, the Town can help position the Gateway Centre as a destination that introduces travelers to Grimsby's heritage, culture, and landscape. Whether through co-branded partnerships with the TPN or government-funded grant-supported pilot projects, the Gateway could eventually move beyond its current role to become a meaningful entry point to the Niagara experience, where the journey doesn't just continue, but begins with a sense of place.

Niagara Gateway Information Centre Model



13 APPENDIX B - ASSETS AND EXPERIENCES

13.1 Purpose & Method

Grimsby aims to convert a wide mix of assets into one coherent visitor journey, encouraging guests to slow down between the lake and the sky. Instead of relying on a single landmark, the town will weave sites, stories and seasonal moments into a layered destination that rewards exploration and repeat visits.

The framework groups all assets into four experience types: Arts & Culture, Food & Drink, Outdoor & Recreation, and Events & Festivals- each with short-, medium- and long-term actions designed to respect community scale while broadening economic impact.

13.2 Arts & Culture

Current strengths: A compact network of the Art Gallery, Museum, Nelles Manor and Public Library offers a “through-time” narrative that moves seamlessly from Loyalist history to contemporary creativity Assets into Experiences.

Iconic sites such as the Painted Ladies must be promoted only with resident consent and a community-first lens Assets into Experiences.

Signature opportunities:

- GLaM Gala: scale the joint Gallery/Library/Museum evening into a multi-day cultural anchor that raises Grimsby’s profile across Niagara Assets into Experiences.
- The Wayzgoose Book Arts Fair can be expanded into a weekend of workshops and artisan tours to attract niche cultural travellers.

Roadmap:

- 0-2 yrs: Activate existing venues, create self-guided culture trails, test pop-ups.
- 2-5 yrs: Grow festivals, introduce cross-institution themes, integrate Painted Ladies carefully.
- 5 yrs+: Position Grimsby as a small-town cultural anchor within a Niagara “creative corridor.”

13.3 Food & Drink

Launch “Small Town, Big Taste” and allied digital campaigns, then map a Grimsby Eats trail linking chef-owned restaurants, Forty Creek Distillery and Commisso Winery.

The seasonal Farmers’ Market already embodies community character; adding night-markets, live music and a “Taste Grimsby Passport” can turn it into a marquee draw.

Roadmap:

- 0-2 yrs: Unified culinary branding, Saturday/night market pilots.
- 3-5 yrs: Launch Grimsby Eats trail, cross-municipal itineraries, themed packages.
- 5 yrs+: Establish year-round food events and cooperative marketing across Niagara.

13.4 Outdoor & Recreation

Guiding principles: Integration with culture and food, “gentle tourism,” scalability and experience-led development.

Core assets & initiatives:

- Escarpment & Carolinian Forest – interpretive loops, stewardship messaging and limited-capacity experiences highlight a rare ecology.
- Waterfront – yoga sessions, seasonal trails and small-scale water festivals can unlock the shoreline without over-commercialising it.
- Sports tourism – package tournaments at Peach King Centre and Southward Park with dining and wellness offers, driving year-round overnight stays. More information regarding the opportunities of sports tourism is available in Appendix D.
- Nature tourism – encourage young people and schools to have guided nature tours in Grimsby (e.g. find the fairy houses, etc.).

Long-term vision: Trail-convergence hub, Escarpment Discovery Centre and a four-season outdoor events calendar.

13.5 Events & Festivals

Grimsby’s calendar should balance intimacy with regional reach:

- Community parks become stages for twilight cinema, solstice picnics and small concerts, reinforcing tradition while attracting visitors.
- A diversified line-up—winter light walks, spring endurance races, summer shoreline festivals, autumn harvest hikes—creates steady traffic and showcases every season.

13.6 Implementation Pillars

Curation & Packaging: Bundle assets into themed itineraries (culture-plus-culinary weekends, lake-to-forest wellness loops).

Partnership & Capacity: Align municipal, business and regional actors; tap provincial grants for event infrastructure and cultural programming.

Community Stewardship: Maintain “gentle tourism” safeguards for heritage districts, forests and neighbourhood assets.

Measurement: Track visitor dispersal, event attendance, overnight stays and resident sentiment to refine initiatives.

At-a-Glance Action Timeline

Years	Milestones
0 – 2 years	Culture & culinary branding; self-guided trails; pilot night markets; activate park events; “Grimsby Outdoors” promo.

2 – 5 years	Scale signature events (GLaM, Wayzgoose, Ribfest); expand sports tournament hosting; roll out Grimsby Eats trail; gentle inclusion of Painted Ladies.
5+ years	Escarpment Discovery Centre; year-round festival calendar; regional creative & culinary corridors; waterfront activation model; trail convergence hub.

14 APPENDIX C - WATERFRONT IMPROVEMENTS

Grimsby's Lake Ontario shoreline from Fifty Point to the Casablanca Waterfront mirrors the town's evolving identity and fuels debate over preservation versus development, public stewardship versus private use, and today's needs versus tomorrow's legacy. Already prized for its scenic trails and tranquil vistas, this symbolic landscape remains an under-realised tourism asset; a thorough assessment of its future use, accessibility, and role in the visitor economy is essential to unlock its full potential while safeguarding what makes it special.

Recent proposals have highlighted the opportunity to create a public-facing waterfront destination — a space that could blend natural beauty, seasonal programming, and regional connectivity. Visionaries have called for a waterfront park or promenade, citing successful models in nearby communities like Cobourg or Gananoque, where public investment in lakeside amenities spurred renewed interest in downtowns, increased foot traffic, and year-round visitation. These ideas imagine an activated shoreline experience: walking trails, pavilions for cultural events, picnic zones, winter markets, and unobstructed views that encourage repeat visitation.

Tourism operators have also identified the waterfront as a potential gateway for regional tourism. Cruise developers have explored the viability of adding Grimsby as a stop between Toronto and Niagara-on-the-Lake, offering passengers a charming small-town experience complemented by vineyards, historical architecture, and boutique downtown offerings. However, stakeholders noted the lack of existing docking infrastructure, the complexities of municipal approvals, and the need for integrated infrastructure and service offerings to make cruise-based tourism viable. Some other suggested actions include:

- Launching a waterfront visioning process that involves the Town, residents, conservation authorities, regional tourism partners, and local community support groups (e.g. Rotary Club, Lion Club, Gardening Club, etc.).
- Starting with light infrastructure improvements such as trails, benches, and interpretive signage.
- Introducing pilot programming such as sunset yoga sessions, small-scale musical performances, and cultural walking tours.
- Coordinating with wayfinding to connect the waterfront with downtown and Grimsby on the Lake.
- Over time, exploring the feasibility of welcoming small-scale cruise or boating traffic to build on the location's visual appeal and strategic position on the lakefront corridor.

This approach ensures that future iterations of the tourism strategy do not overlook or understate the waterfront's long-term potential. As trends in lakefront revitalization and water-based tourism continue

to grow in Ontario and beyond, the Town of Grimsby can shape a vision on its own terms, one that could yield a signature destination, new revenue streams, and a strengthened regional identity. By committing to this study now, Grimsby positions itself to harness future opportunities while fostering trust, stewardship, and thoughtful planning in the present.

15 APPENDIX D - OPPORTUNITIES WITH SPORTS TOURISM

Sports tourism is an increasingly valuable and sustainable segment of the tourism economy, and Grimsby is well-positioned to benefit. With a base of existing recreation infrastructure and access to regional partnerships, the town can begin leveraging tournaments, training camps, and sports-related events to support local businesses, drive overnight visitation, and diversify its visitor economy.

This opportunity does not require massive new investments. Instead, coordination, packaging, and promotion of what Grimsby already has could significantly make an impact on growth in this sector, making it one of the most cost-effective, politically palatable, and community-aligned growth areas.



15.1 Current State

Grimsby already hosts numerous sporting assets, but their role in tourism is informal and fragmented. Facilities are primarily used for local recreation without strategic alignment to tourism development.

Key assets include:

- The New Peach King Centre – The multipurpose indoor arena with potential for regional hockey, skating, and indoor tournaments.
- Southward Park – A large outdoor facility with soccer fields, with the potential for activation for playgrounds and an event/festival space with the right care taken.
- School gyms and recreation fields – Suitable for youth or amateur tournaments, though currently under-leveraged in tourism planning.

Key observations from stakeholder interviews (Expanded Analysis):

- Sports events are not coordinated with local businesses to capitalize on opportunity.
- Local hospitality and retail providers often have no advance notice of tournaments.
- There is no central, easily accessible schedule-of-events for local businesses to plan their services around.
- The lack of central knowledge or coordination with the town's businesses can sometimes lead to shortages of staff to meet the needs of the influx of visitors due to the visiting tournaments.

In short, Grimsby has the foundational infrastructure in place, and with improved coordination and strategy, is well-positioned to grow sports tourism as a key economic contributor.



15.2 Opportunities

Sports tourism offers Grimsby a reliable, repeatable, and community-supported avenue to grow its visitor economy without introducing the kinds of disruption that can generate resident pushback. With a solid infrastructure base and growing regional collaboration, the town has the chance to turn recreational assets into meaningful tourism drivers.

1. Centralized Strategy through the Tourism Coordinator

A critical enabler of this opportunity would be the proposed Tourism Coordinator who can serve as the central administrator for all tourism initiatives, including sports-based ones. This position is well-suited to bridge the gap between recreation departments, event organizers, local businesses, and regional partners. By managing a shared calendar of facility availability and scheduled tournaments, overseeing venue promotion, and coordinating provincial or regional event bids, the coordinator can ensure that Grimsby presents a professional and unified front to potential event hosts and partners.

2. Tri-Municipal Sports Tourism Partnership

Grimsby is also strategically positioned to lead a regional collaboration with Lincoln and St. Catharines. Together, these municipalities can co-host larger tournaments, pool marketing resources, and synchronise logistical planning to maximise use of facilities like the Peach King Centre and the Meridian Centre. By aligning under a shared framework, the partnership can seek out funding as a collective to support event promotion, facility readiness, and visitor services, enhancing the profile of Niagara West as a competitive sport tourism corridor. It is recommended that the Tourism Coordinator take the necessary steps to initiate this partnership to expand the possibilities of sports tourism.

3. Economic and Seasonal Diversification

From an economic standpoint, sports tourism brings multi-generational travel groups who often stay overnight, dine locally, and shop between games. These events are particularly valuable in shoulder seasons and off-peak months, helping to stabilise local revenue across the year. Businesses benefit not

just from a one-time influx, but from the potential for repeat visitation as teams return annually or spread the word among league networks.

4. Low Capital Activation

Unlike major tourism initiatives that require costly new builds, sports tourism thrives on coordination, communication, and packaging. The Town of Grimsby can activate this sector by scheduling tournaments more strategically, ensuring venues and accommodations are available concurrently, and offering simple visitor bundles, such as “Team Meal Deals” at local restaurants, or “Stay & Play” packages that pair hotel discounts with local attraction passes. These measures require minimal new infrastructure and can be supported by existing hospitality partners.

5. Community Alignment

Perhaps most importantly, sports tourism enjoys a level of community acceptance that other forms of tourism may struggle to achieve. Residents are more likely to support events that involve youth engagement, local schools, and volunteerism. Hosting tournaments builds community pride and activates venues in ways that benefit both visitors and locals. It reinforces Grimsby’s identity as a family-oriented, active-living community, while driving measurable economic value.

Taken together, these opportunities suggest that sports tourism is a practical and well-suited area of focus for Grimsby. It aligns with the town’s existing facilities, community interests, and growing partnerships with neighbouring municipalities. With improved coordination, particularly through the Tourism Coordinator role, Grimsby can shift from hosting occasional sports events to supporting a more structured and consistent stream of activity. This approach offers a manageable, incremental way to grow tourism while supporting local businesses and maintaining community support.

15.3 Challenges

While the opportunities for sports tourism are clear, their successful implementation will depend on managing a number of forward-looking challenges. These aren’t obstacles in the traditional sense, but rather conditions that must be actively addressed to ensure long-term viability and community benefit.

1. Ensuring the Tourism Coordinator Role has a Clear Scope

The appointment of a Tourism Coordinator is a foundational step, but for it to be effective, the position must have a clearly defined scope. The coordinator’s role should focus on facilitating communication, aligning calendars, and improving the overall visitor experience, not directly planning or managing the tournaments themselves. That responsibility remains with the relevant departments (e.g., Recreation Services, venue operators, school boards, etc.) Without this distinction, there’s a risk of role confusion or friction. Early efforts should focus on building relationships, clarifying mandates, and establishing the coordinator as a bridge between tourism, recreation, economic development, and the business community, rather than a new operational authority.

2. Managing Growth within Infrastructure Limits

If sports tourism is activated successfully, it could put new strain on existing infrastructure and operations capacity, especially regarding parking, accommodations, and internal mobility. A spike in tournament activity without the corresponding progress on visitor movement (e.g., shuttles, bike

routes), venue signage, or lodging capacity may frustrate visitors and residents alike. These limitations won't prevent growth, but they will need to be managed through realistic pacing and proactive communications with both the public and event hosts.

3. Aligning Regional Collaboration with Local Needs

Grimsby's partnership with Lincoln and St. Catharines has strong potential but also requires balance. Regional branding and event coordination must still reflect Grimsby's unique assets and community context. There's a risk that larger neighbours could dominate the narrative, or that shared events might draw visitors away from local businesses. To mitigate this, the Town of Grimsby will need to advocate for visibility within shared campaigns and ensure that regional wins translate into local benefits.

4. Maintaining Community Support During Busy Periods

One of sports tourism's advantages is its relative alignment with community values – it is often a family-centric endeavour. However, even well-liked events can lead to parking frustrations, crowding, or noise, particularly in residential areas near parks or facilities. As tournaments grow, it will be important to keep residents informed, listen to feedback, and adjust operations (e.g., traffic control, signage, programming) to maintain goodwill. This is especially true in neighbourhoods that have expressed concerns about tourism impacts more broadly.

These challenges are not barriers to progress, but rather key considerations that should guide the rollout of any sports tourism strategy. By anticipating points of friction, whether related to coordination, infrastructure, or community expectations, Grimsby can move forward in a way that is both effective and sustainable. Thoughtful planning, clear roles, and consistent communication will be essential to ensuring that growth in this sector supports both visitors and residents alike.

15.4 Realising the Potential with Sports Tourism – A Vision for the Future

Grimsby has a strong foundation to develop a thoughtful, community-aligned approach to sports tourism. With venues like the Peach King Centre and Southward Park already in place, and regional partnerships emerging with Lincoln and St. Catharines, the building blocks are ready. Realising this potential will require addressing a few key challenges, such as clarifying the role of the Tourism Coordinator, managing growth within infrastructure limits, ensuring local benefits from regional collaboration, and maintaining resident support during peak activity. If these are navigated carefully, the Town of Grimsby can unlock a number of low-barrier opportunities: bundling accommodations and dining for teams and families, activating the shoulder season with tournaments, and improving communication between organizers, venues, and businesses. Done incrementally, sports tourism offers a practical, repeatable path to strengthen the visitor economy while reinforcing Grimsby's identity as an active, welcoming community.

16 APPENDIX E – ECONOMIC IMPACT

Although tourism has not historically played a dominant economic role in Grimsby, the town's location at the intersection of major visitor flows across the Niagara Region, combined with its growing population and natural amenities, positions it as an emerging player in the visitor economy. To responsibly guide tourism investment, it is essential to understand both the current fiscal landscape and the potential economic contributions that could be unlocked through targeted development.

This section provides an economic framework for understanding tourism's potential impact in Grimsby, integrating financial data, regional visitation patterns, business counts, and employment multipliers. While hard tourism data for the town is limited, this analysis builds upon regional proxies and tested modeling methods to estimate the magnitude of benefits that tourism could bring to the local economy, benefits that include increased spending, job creation, GDP contribution, and long-term resilience.

16.1 Methodology

The projections and economic insights presented in this section are derived from a blend of primary municipal data and regional and national datasets. Due to the current lack of direct visitation tracking in Grimsby, proxy modeling was used to extrapolate plausible economic scenarios. All data sources have been carefully selected to ensure compatibility with the scale and nature of Grimsby's context. All numbers have been rounded appropriately, which may result in totals that do not add up to 100%.

Data Sources:

- **Visitation and Spending Estimates:** Regional visitation data has been sourced from Niagara Economic Development, supported by detailed insights from the National Travel Survey (NTS). These figures provide reliable baselines for estimating potential visitor capture rates in Grimsby under conservative and aspirational scenarios. Spending breakouts have been derived from Destination Canada's 2023 data. Spending estimates have been calculated using historical data from 2012-2022 provided by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming, and the GDP impact has been estimated with multipliers from the Government of Ontario.
- **Municipal Financial and Population Data:** Grimsby's financial condition is analyzed using figures from the Town of Grimsby's 2025 Municipal Budget and the 2023 Financial Statement. These sources provide insights into operating revenues, expenses, and levies, offering critical context for assessing fiscal room for tourism investment. Population data is also from municipal data sources, including the Municipal Budget, and population projections have been procured from a recent intensification study presented to Grimsby Town Council.
- **Business & Employment Data:** Data on local business counts and tourism-related employment has been obtained from Niagara Economic Development. This information enables estimates of existing tourism-adjacent economic activity and helps calibrate job creation projections using recognized employment multipliers.

Projection Approach:

- Visitor spending projections are calculated using average per-visitor spending data for Ontario, segmented by visitor origin (Domestic Ontario, Other Canadian, US, International).

- Economic impacts on GDP and employment are derived using conservative multiplier values for rural Ontario, typically drawn from Tourism Economics studies and provincial benchmarks.
- The municipal tax revenue figures reflect property tax impacts modeled using figures derived from the Ontario Tourism Economic Impact Model, assuming that tourism drives incremental growth in assessed commercial property values. Non-tax revenues are not included in these totals but may also contribute meaningfully to the town's fiscal position.

Scenario modeling includes 2 models:

- Conservative Case: Minimal intervention, 1% visitor capture rate of all those travelling to the Niagara Region from regional flow.
- Aspirational Case: Moderate intervention, 3% capture rate of all those travelling to the Niagara Region, with assumptions of improved experiences, marketing, and retention.

Together, these methodologies offer a structured and defensible foundation for understanding how tourism could evolve into a meaningful economic contributor in Grimsby, even with limited direct data available today.

We strongly recommend that Grimsby develop its own visitor data sources, as regional figures do not fully capture the Town's unique context. Local data will help staff and council better understand visitor profiles, track trends, and support evidence-based decisions.

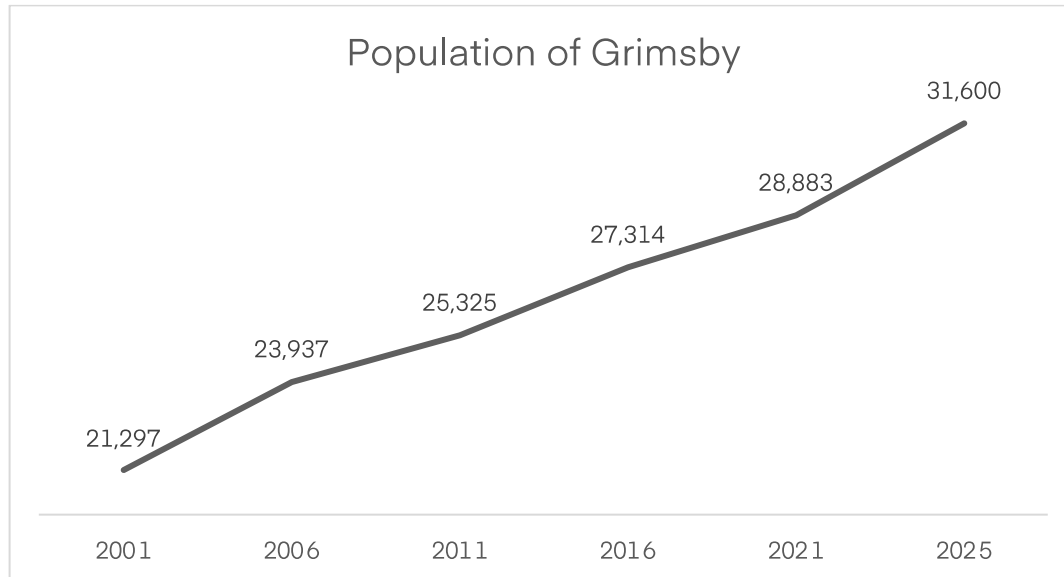
16.2 Baseline Economic Context

Tourism development must be built on a clear understanding of the Town's financial health, business landscape, and growth trajectory. Though the Town of Grimsby does not currently operate a structured tourism economy, multiple intersecting trends, from population growth and infrastructure investment to development and regional visitor flows, suggest that the foundation for future tourism activity is already being laid.

Once defined primarily by its residential character and lakeside appeal, the Town is now emerging as a community shaped by new pressures – economic, demographic, and spatial. Growth is no longer a distant prospect but a present reality, as shifting population patterns, rising investment in intensification, and regional transportation upgrades alter how Grimsby functions, who it serves, and what it might become.

16.2.1 Population Growth as a Demand Indicator

Over the past decade, Grimsby has transitioned from a slow-growth residential community into a town on the rise. The population grew from 27,314 in 2016 to 28,883 in 2021, reflecting a 5.7% increase. While this growth may appear modest in absolute terms, it is significant when placed within the context of comparably sized Ontario municipalities. More importantly, it marks the beginning of a broader transformation. Data now suggests the current population has crossed the 30,000 threshold, driven by sustained housing development, a growing commuter population, and increasing demand for lifestyle-driven living near the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA).



This demographic momentum carries important implications for the visitor economy. A larger, more urban-oriented population base increases local demand for experiences, amenities, and cultural engagement and strengthens Grimsby's position as a VFR (visiting friends and relatives) destination. New residents bring with them extended networks, meaning more friends, family members, and occasional visitors are entering the town's orbit.

At the same time, intensified residential growth in walkable nodes such as Downtown Grimsby, Casablanca, and the Winston Road neighbourhood enhances the town's ability to offer the kinds of mixed-use environments and compact mobility that modern visitors increasingly seek. When paired with strategic investments in trail systems, lakefront access, and boutique retail, these trends suggest Grimsby is increasingly positioned to benefit from regional travel spillover, particularly from Hamilton, Burlington, and the Niagara corridor.

16.2.2 Tourism Business Presence

Grimsby's business landscape is relatively modest in scale but notable in composition. According to recent data compiled by Niagara Economic Development, the Town is home to 53 businesses that self-identify as part of the tourism-related economy, encompassing sectors such as food and beverage services, retail, personal services, accommodations, arts, entertainment, and select recreation providers. While these businesses may not serve visitors exclusively, their presence signals a latent capacity for visitor-facing service delivery, especially when considered alongside regional travel patterns and Grimsby's residential growth.

The predominance of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within this mix further underscores the potential for tourism activation through local entrepreneurship. Many of Grimsby's tourism-adjacent businesses are owner-operated, experiential in nature, and embedded within the local fabric, features that align with emerging visitor preferences for authentic, place-based offerings. Independent cafés, wineries, craft stores, health spas, fitness studios, and homegrown eateries can evolve beyond mere amenities for residents – they are also the kinds of businesses that contribute to Grimsby's visitor appeal, particularly for day-trippers and short-stay explorers.

Furthermore, these businesses form a foundation upon which cross-sector collaboration can be built. With targeted supports, such as joint marketing, wayfinding investments, and trail-to-town initiatives, Grimsby could begin to stitch together an organic visitor experience that leverages existing assets. In this sense, the local business ecosystem, while not built for tourism, is increasingly tourism ready.

16.2.3 Tourism Jobs in Grimsby

Though tourism is not currently a formal pillar of Grimsby's economy, the local labour force shows signs of adaptability and alignment with tourism-related sectors. Drawing on data from Niagara Economic Development, a meaningful share of employment in Grimsby is concentrated in industries that are either directly part of or adjacent to the tourism ecosystem. These include food services, retail trade, accommodation, arts and entertainment, and personal services, all sectors that underpin the visitor experience.

Estimates indicate that there are over **2,000** jobs related to tourism in Grimsby. Notably, this includes both full-time and part-time positions, reflecting the sector's seasonal dynamics and flexibility for diverse workforce segments, including students, newcomers, and second-income earners. However, not all of these jobs are directly influenced by tourism, and projections will show jobs that are directly generated by the increase in visitor spending. As Grimsby's population continues to grow, and with it, demand for more services and experiences, the local workforce will be increasingly well-positioned to absorb tourism-oriented roles, especially if supported by training programs, employer coalitions, and small business supports.

16.3 Regional Visitation Patterns

The Niagara Region continues to serve as one of Ontario's most visited tourism destinations, attracting millions of visitors annually from across the province, the country, and beyond. The most recent and complete data for the Niagara Region is from 2023, which reflects a steady post-pandemic recovery and underscores the scale of opportunity that exists for communities like Grimsby.

In total, 8.76 million visits were recorded across the Niagara Region in 2023. Of these:

- 77% of visits originated from within Ontario, highlighting the enduring significance of regional and intra-provincial travel.
- A further 9% of visits came from other parts of Canada, making up the remainder of the 6.54 million total domestic visitors.
- The United States contributed 11% of visits, continuing to play a vital role in Niagara's international profile.
- An additional 4% of visits were attributed to international travellers beyond the United States.

While Grimsby is not yet a focal point for these visitors, its location positions it advantageously to capture passing traffic, particularly from GTA-based day-trippers and regional leisure travellers seeking quieter, more authentic experiences. This is supported by visitor origin data, which shows large portions of Niagara's traffic stemming from urban centres like Toronto.

Crucially, Niagara's visitor base is not just large, but economically influential. Data from 2023 shows that:

- Over 50% of visitors reported household incomes exceeding \$100,000

- Nearly 27% earned \$150,000 or more
- Less than 15% earned under \$50,000

Just as important as where visitors come from is how long they stay. Niagara's 2023 visitation, according to Statistics Canada, was dominated by short-stay travel, which closely aligns with Grimsby's infrastructure and service model. The proportions according to duration of visits in 2023 broke down as follows:

- Same-Day Trips: 67%
- 1 Night: 19%
- 2 Nights: 9%
- 3 Nights: 3%
- 4 Nights: 1%
- 5–10 Nights: 1%

This distribution indicates that nearly 67% of all visits were same day, a segment that could be highly responsive to signage, wayfinding, rest stops, trails, retail, and culinary experiences. The next largest group, one-night visitors, may be drawn to short-stay accommodations or events. Together, these patterns signal that Grimsby's greatest potential lies in capturing and enhancing high-quality short-duration visits, not competing with Niagara Falls or Niagara-on-the-Lake for long-haul overnight stays.

This suggests that Grimsby's proximity to the region's major visitor flow, combined with its downtown, waterfront, and recreational offerings, positions it not only to capture a small share of high-volume travel, but also to extract meaningful economic value from each visitor.

16.3.1 Visitor Spending in the Niagara Region

For a municipality like Grimsby, visitor spending can represent an important tool for economic diversification, local business stimulation, and fiscal resilience. To frame the future potential of this sector, it is essential to understand how much visitors are spending regionally, how that money translates into economic value, and what proportion of it could realistically be captured by Grimsby as its tourism offerings mature.

According to 2023 data from Destination Canada, total visitor spending across the Niagara Region was distributed as follows:

- Canadian Visitors: \$1.6 billion
- U.S. Visitors: \$1.3 billion
- Overseas Visitors: \$482 million

While Niagara's visitor economy has recovered strongly in the post-pandemic period, overall volumes remain lower than pre-2020 peaks, particularly for long-haul and international travel. The current landscape is dominated by same-day Ontario visitors, who make up more than 75% of all regional trips. These same-day travellers are highly relevant to Grimsby's evolving tourism landscape.

In the broader economic impact lens, tourism has shown to be a substantial force for GDP contributions. In total, the projected impact of visitor spending on the provincial GDP is \$3.17 Billion Dollars, almost

20% of the total GDP for the province. Even capturing a modest 5% share of total visitation to the Niagara Region represent a meaningful economic boost to Grimsby. As Grimsby continues to invest in its tourism, even incremental growth in visitation could stimulate broader business development, support job creation, and add resiliency to the local economy.

16.4 Setting the Stage for Growth

Grimsby's current tourism economy is still in its formative stages. However, key indicators suggest the conditions for growth are in place. The Town has experienced steady population growth, rising investment interest, and a slowly diversifying economic base. Business counts within tourism-related sectors remain modest, but they reflect a growing ecosystem of local food, retail, arts, and recreation. Importantly, job creation in tourism-linked industries, though currently limited, has room to expand in tandem with targeted investments.

Regionally, Niagara's tourism sector remains a multi-billion-dollar engine, with strong domestic visitation and high per-capita spending from U.S. and international travellers. With most regional visitors arriving from within Ontario and staying for the day, Grimsby is strategically positioned to intercept this flow, offering a quieter, experience-oriented alternative to more saturated destinations. By capitalizing on its natural assets and pursuing experience-driven development, the Town can begin carving out its own tourism identity. The next section explores what this could look like: spending, jobs, and GDP projections based on reasonable capture rates and scalable growth models.

16.5 Economic Impact Projections – Spending, GDP, and Municipal Tax Revenue

With its geographic proximity to the QEW, emerging tourism assets, and growing service economy, Grimsby is well-positioned to intercept a modest share of Niagara Region's tourism flow. Using 2023 visitation data as a base, we estimate the economic returns if Grimsby were to capture either 1% or 3% of total visitors to the Niagara Region over the next planning horizon.

This analysis assumes that captured visitors spend a significant portion of their time and tourism expenditures in Grimsby, effectively treating the town as a primary destination rather than a pass-through locale. While aspirational, this modeling approach provides a high-potential benchmark to inform long-term tourism and economic development strategy.

Tourism contributes to municipal revenue through both direct taxation mechanisms and indirect fiscal channels that emerge from increased economic activity. Although tourists are not directly taxed at the point of sale by municipalities — unlike with federal and provincial consumption taxes — their presence and spending generate revenue effects over time.

Tourism stimulates the local economy by driving spending at restaurants, retail outlets, cultural attractions, accommodations, and service-based businesses. Sustained growth in visitor activity can lead to:

- Higher business revenues and profitability
- Expansion or renovation of commercial properties
- Attraction of new businesses and investment

These developments contribute to increased commercial property values, which in turn raise municipal property tax revenues through higher assessments. New tourism-facing investments — such as hotels, restaurants, and retail plazas — also expand the local tax base. While this form of revenue growth is gradual and contingent on long-term visitor activity, it represents a structural fiscal benefit.

It is important to note that Ontario's property tax system does not allow municipalities to vary tax rates based on sector or use; rates are fixed by property class (e.g., residential, commercial, industrial). However, as the overall assessed value of commercial properties grows, so too does municipal tax revenue — even without rate changes.

Given that this study focuses on tourism's overall economic contribution to the municipality, the analysis includes the estimated impact on local property tax revenue. This reflects the assumption that tourism, over time, drives commercial growth and higher property assessments, resulting in incremental gains to the municipal tax base. The model therefore attributes a portion of local government tax receipts to the economic activity generated by visitor spending. To maintain methodological clarity, user fees and licensing revenues are not included in the economic impact model outputs, as these are not captured by the input-output framework. However, their fiscal relevance is discussed qualitatively to provide a comprehensive picture of tourism's potential benefits to the Town of Grimsby.

16.5.1 Scenario 1: 1% Visitor Capture by Grimsby

In 2026

Projected Spending: **\$53,644,492.91**

Estimated Total GDP Contribution:

\$51,767,150.24

Potential Municipal Tax Revenue: **\$2,059,871.66**

By 2031

Projected Spending: **\$61,169,008.92**

Estimated Total GDP Contribution:

\$57,498,868.39

Potential Municipal Tax Revenue:

\$2,348,802.29

16.5.2 Scenario 2: 3% Visitor Capture by Grimsby

In 2026

Projected Spending: **\$160,933,478.73**

Estimated Total GDP Contribution:

\$155,301,450.71

Potential Municipal Tax Revenue: **\$6,179,614.98**

By 2031

Projected Spending: **\$183,507,026.76**

Estimated Total GDP Contribution:

\$172,496,605.16

Potential Municipal Tax Revenue:

\$7,046,406.88

16.6 Strategic Takeaways

- Capturing just 1% of Niagara's visitors would inject over \$50 million in tourism spending into Grimsby's economy by 2026, alongside an estimated \$2 million in municipal tax revenue, revenue that goes directly back into Town operations and services.
- By 2031, a sustained 1% capture rate could yield nearly \$60 million in GDP impact and over \$2.3 million in annual municipal taxes, helping to support local jobs, small business growth, and infrastructure investment.
- A more ambitious 3% capture rate would quadruple economic returns, generating over \$170 million in GDP contribution by 2031 and upwards of potentially \$7 million in municipal tax revenue.

- These returns would significantly offset rising operational costs, reduce dependency on levies, and provide new revenue sources for cultural and recreational development.

16.7 Job Creation

Projecting job creation from tourism is complex. While tourism spending has a well-established economic ripple effect, the actual number of jobs supported can fluctuate over time due to shifting wage structures, labour productivity, automation, part-time work, and sectoral multipliers. In Ontario, the employment multiplier per \$1 million in tourism spending has declined slightly in recent years, reflecting efficiency gains and rising revenue per employee in sectors like accommodation and food services.

As a result, while we can't predict the exact number of new jobs that will be created in Grimsby, we can model the number of jobs directly related to tourism that would be required to sustain projected levels of tourism spending, if the Town captures either 1% or 3% of the Niagara Region's visitors each year.

<i>Year</i>	<i>1% Visitor Capture</i>	<i>3% Visitor Capture</i>
2026	479	1,437
2027	478	1,434
2028	477	1,432
2029	476	1,429
2030	476	1,427
2031	475	1,425

16.8 Strategic Interpretation

These figures do not necessarily represent newly created jobs but rather reflect the number of positions that would need to be sustained by tourism activity in Grimsby under each visitor capture scenario. As such, they serve as a valuable planning tool, helping the Town anticipate workforce development needs, local training opportunities, housing demand, and potential partnerships with schools, employment agencies, and economic development organizations. Over time, Grimsby's tourism strategy can evolve beyond job quantity toward job quality, focusing on the creation of full-time, stable, and upwardly mobile roles that embed tourism as a central pillar of the Town's broader economic diversification.

16.9 Municipal Accommodation Tax – Gateway to More

By 2026, the Town is projected to have approximately 60 hotel rooms available for overnight accommodation, and it is eligible to implement a Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT), a 4% levy on room revenues that many Ontario municipalities use to reinvest in tourism marketing, destination development, and visitor infrastructure.

Based on a 70% occupancy rate and a \$140 Average Daily Rate (ADR), the projected annual MAT revenue from the Quality Inn is:

16.9.1 Potential MAT Revenue

- Annual MAT Revenue, based on current ADRs (4%): \$85,848
- MAT per Night: \$235.20

- MAT per Room per Night: \$3.92

Because MAT revenues scale directly with visitor volume and room availability, the return on investment grows as Grimsby expands its tourism offering. As new accommodations come online or if short-term rental (STR) regulations are introduced in future, this revenue source can grow proportionally. Exploring the implementation of MAT now, while the sector is still manageable in size, allows the Town to build a dedicated tourism reserve fund and establish the financial foundation for long-term destination development. For guests, it's a small price to pay. For Grimsby, it's an opportunity to fund big ideas with minimal friction.

16.9.2 Implementation

To support long-term tourism investment without increasing the tax burden on residents, we recommend that the Town of Grimsby initiate a feasibility and readiness study into the implementation of a Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT). With the recent opening of the Quality Inn and ongoing growth in tourism activity, the conditions are now in place to explore MAT as a dedicated, sustainable funding stream.

The feasibility study should include:

- A jurisdictional scan of similar-sized municipalities (e.g. Collingwood, Owen Sound, Niagara-on-the-Lake)
- Review of sample MAT by-laws, tourism agreements, and administrative procedures
- Stakeholder interviews with hotel operators, short-term rental hosts (if applicable), the BIA, and regional tourism bodies
- Legal review of by-law authority, exemptions, and remittance enforcement
- Modelling of expected revenues and uses based on projected growth in accommodations

To establish MAT in accordance with the Municipal Act, 2001, the Town of Grimsby would follow these steps:

- Under Section 400.1 of the Municipal Act, a municipality must pass a by-law to implement MAT. This by-law should specify:
 - The tax rate (commonly 4%)
 - The effective start date
 - Which types of accommodations it applies to (hotels, motels, short-term rentals, etc.)
 - Exemptions (e.g. hospitals, long-term stays, student residences)

The by-law must clearly define:

- What constitutes a “transient accommodation” (under 30 days)
- Which operators are required to collect and remit MAT
- Any phased-in approach, such as starting with hotels and expanding to STRs later

Ontario law requires that 50% of MAT revenue be directed to an “eligible tourism entity” for the purpose of destination marketing and development.

Options for Grimsby include:

- Establishing a Grimsby Tourism Reserve Fund, administered by Town staff
- Partnering with a regional DMO or not-for-profit tourism board (e.g. Niagara West or Regional Tourism Organization 2)

A formal agreement should be developed outlining:

- How MAT revenues are distributed
- Eligible uses of the funds
- Reporting and transparency requirements

The Town will need to develop the administrative infrastructure to:

- Register all accommodation providers
- Collect MAT on a monthly or quarterly basis
- Audit and enforce compliance, including penalties for late or incomplete payments

Most municipalities use a simple online submission form paired with email reminders and a financial tracking system managed through finance departments.

Although not legally required, it is strongly recommended that the Town engage:

- Hotel owners and operators
- BIA and local business owners
- Short-term rental hosts (if included)
- Tourism-sector employers or cultural organizations

This ensures early transparency, reduces friction, and opens collaborative possibilities for how MAT revenues could be reinvested locally.

Visitors must be notified of MAT charges at the time of booking. This is standard practice across Ontario and typically takes the form of:

- A separate line item on receipts/invoices
- Informational signage or language on hotel websites
- Optional QR codes or webpages showing how the MAT supports local tourism

The Municipal Accommodation Tax presents a timely and low-friction opportunity for Grimsby to establish a dedicated, self-sustaining revenue stream that grows in step with the Town's visitor economy. With just one operational hotel, the Town already has the foundation to generate meaningful tourism funding, without placing any burden on residents or requiring tax increases. At less than four dollars per night per room, the MAT is a minimal cost to visitors but a high-leverage tool for the municipality. When implemented thoughtfully and supported by clear reinvestment strategies, MAT revenues can enable Grimsby to explore the possibility of a Tourism Coordinator who can market Grimsby more effectively, activate public spaces, and promote awareness of the tourism infrastructure needed to compete regionally, all while reinforcing tourism's long-term value to the community.

17 APPENDIX F – WAYFINDING

17.1 Introduction

Wayfinding is a critical but often underappreciated element of a successful tourism and economic development strategy. It encompasses more than signage; it involves the strategic placement of visual cues, maps, and place-based identifiers that help visitors and residents orient themselves, navigate confidently, and explore destinations more fully. For municipalities like Grimsby, which seek to grow their tourism presence while unifying fragmented visitor zones such as Downtown and Grimsby on the Lake, a cohesive wayfinding system can enhance the visitor experience, reinforce identity, and support broader economic goals.

17.2 Methodology

To understand the general scope, components, and costs associated with municipal wayfinding, we reviewed wayfinding strategies from four Ontario municipalities: Haliburton County, Vaughan, Brampton, and the City of Toronto. These municipalities were selected for their diversity in geography, population size, and tourism orientation. The review included strategy documents, design standards, implementation plans, and, where available, budget estimates. While each municipality tailored its wayfinding to specific local contexts, several consistent themes and components emerged that can inform future planning in Grimsby.

17.3 Overview

Across all case studies, wayfinding was positioned as both a functional navigation tool and a cultural storytelling medium. Municipal systems typically include a family of signage types — such as gateway signs, vehicular directional signage, pedestrian-scale signs, interpretive panels, and map kiosks. These systems often extend beyond signs to include colour schemes, branding elements, street furniture integration, lighting, and public art. In more urban contexts like Toronto and Vaughan, wayfinding also supported multi-modal mobility, encouraging active transportation, transit use, and pedestrian exploration. Haliburton’s system emphasized tourism trails, rural nodes, and destination linkage, while Brampton’s focused on standardizing and modernizing its street-level visual identity. All municipalities treated wayfinding as both a civic infrastructure project and a placemaking tool, often phasing in implementation over several years.

17.4 Costs Discovered

The County of Haliburton’s Wayfinding Strategy provides a clear cost model and sign inventory that can serve as a valuable benchmark for municipalities such as Grimsby. The report outlines a total implementation cost of approximately \$275,000, intended to cover both the design and installation of a full county-wide signage program.

The strategy proposes the installation of approximately **80 signs**, broken down into the following functional categories:

- Gateway Signs: Installed at major entry points into the county and its four municipalities (Algonquin Highlands, Minden Hills, Dysart et al, and Highlands East) to welcome visitors and establish brand identity.

- Community Arrival Signs: Smaller signs marking the entrance to towns, villages, and hamlets within the county.
- Vehicular Directional Signs: Used along main roads to direct drivers to key destinations such as downtown cores, cultural sites, trailheads, and recreational facilities.
- Pedestrian Directional Signs: Located in walkable areas (e.g., downtowns or tourism nodes) to assist on-foot navigation between amenities.
- Kiosks and Map Posts: Located at high-traffic nodes like trailheads, waterfronts, or event spaces to provide broader orientation and promote nearby attractions.
- Interpretive Panels and Trailhead Signs: Used for storytelling, historic information, or orientation at hiking, paddling, and snowmobile access points.

In addition to the upfront capital costs, the County budgeted approximately \$25,000 per year in maintenance and contingency, which includes:

- Replacement of damaged or weathered signage
- Seasonal or temporary overlays
- Cleaning and minor repairs
- Program management

While fabrication and installation costs are not broken down per sign type, the report acknowledges that prices vary depending on materials (e.g., powder-coated aluminum, vinyl-wrapped surfaces), size, complexity of foundations, and the inclusion of branding or mapping elements. The \$275,000 total includes consultant fees, full system design, and initial production and installation across all participating municipalities.

This approach — particularly its emphasis on signage as both navigational and placemaking infrastructure — is directly scalable to Grimsby's context, given Haliburton's similar size. The 80-sign system demonstrates that a phased and modular deployment, focused on key tourism assets, downtown nodes, and trail connections, is both feasible and financially manageable for smaller communities.

17.5 Conclusion

As the Town of Grimsby moves forward with a long-term tourism strategy, wayfinding represents a foundational investment in both the visitor experience and the place identity of the community. A well-planned system can bridge geographic disconnects, support local businesses, enhance walkability, and express a shared vision of place. While costs can vary widely, scalable implementation, starting with a priority zone or pilot, can make wayfinding manageable and impactful. Given the town's emerging tourism momentum, consideration should be given to a dedicated Wayfinding Strategy, integrated into broader infrastructure and branding efforts. Funding sources such as Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) revenue, Destination Ontario grants, or Federal placemaking programs may assist in covering upfront planning and installation costs.

18 APPENDIX G – STRATEGY PHASES

18.1 Phase 1 (Quick wins 0-1 year)

To coordinate this work efficiently within current resources, the Town could adopt a fractional staffing model, drawing on select staff from Planning & Development, Community Services, and other departments to oversee initial implementation and the quick wins outlined for phase 1.

Tourism Collaborations with GEDAC

Embed tourism collaboration opportunities within GEDAC: consider adding 1–2 tourism members, make tourism a standing agenda item, and report KPIs and action progress regularly.

Establish Digital and Social Media Presence

Create “Visit Grimsby” website dedicated for tourism and experiences in Grimsby. This can also be integrated under the current grimsby.ca website as a cost saving measurement. Activate social media accounts for Grimsby, and start posting about events and experiences. Start with Instagram and Facebook.

Introduce Packaged Experiences

Publish three pilot, bookable itineraries (heritage/culture, outdoor, culinary) under “Visit Grimsby Experiences” or the newly created website.

Support Business Operations in Peak Season

Support downtown and GOTL operators to extend hours during peak weekends/festivals via coordinated promotion. Engage the Chamber of Commerce and downtown BIA to encourage buy-ins.

Niagara West Sports Tourism Collaboration

With the recent renovations around The Major Refrigeration Peach King Centre, Grimsby is well positioned to leverage the upgraded, multi-use facility as a hub for sports tourism by coordinating with Lincoln, St. Catharines, and West Lincoln on tournament hosting, developing “team experience” packages that link venues with dining and attractions, and publishing a shared regional sports calendar to convert event traffic into measurable economic impact.

18.2 Phase 2 (2-4 years)

Hire a Tourism Coordinator

Create a dedicated role to coordinate delivery across pillars, manage partnerships (e.g., TPN/TIAO), measure performance, and activate the Gateway and downtown. Draft job profile, secure Council approval, and recruit region-wide.

Strategic Partnerships with TIAO and TPN

Engage TIAO/TPN to increase market reach and access joint research/funding; align on campaign calendars and content.

Regional Marketing Campaigns

Run an initial seasonal campaign using co-op buys with Destination Ontario and partnerships with TPN, plus influencers, GO-train OOH, and digital ads; scale as capacity grows.

Academic and Skills Partnerships (Brock University & Niagara College)

Sign MOUs; pilot “Grimsby Insider” student content; integrate QR-code heritage tours; involve students as Gateway ambassadors to enhance visitor experiences and talent pipelines.

Gateway Centre as Dual Entry to Niagara & Grimsby

Reposition the Niagara Gateway Centre as a Western Niagara welcome point and launch-pad for Grimsby: interactive kiosk/map wall, cross-selling itineraries, rotating pop-ups, and Youth Ambassador programme; track kiosk interactions and QR referrals.

Improve Visitor Mobility within Grimsby

Promote NRT OnDemand with QR-code stops; build a protected north–south cycling lane linking waterfront, downtown, and escarpment trails; operate a summer “Lake-to-Main Street” shuttle.

Wayfinding & Signage Programme

Design and implement a cohesive, staged system (QEW to downtown nodes) with MTO approvals and QR-coded maps; coordinate with Public Works’ existing wayfinding plan.

Manage Parking Capacity in GOTL and Downtown

Advance near-term parking measures (optimize wayfinding, private-lot agreements, introduce dynamic pricing, turnover limits) and prepare park-and-ride shuttle pilots for peak events.

Develop Regional Experiences

Co-create cross-municipal itineraries (e.g., “Niagara West Loop” cycling), add Grimsby-anchored routes to Wander Niagara, and use the Gateway to promote regional packages and events.

Grimsby Stakeholder Collaboration Network

Convene a formal roundtable (BIA, GOTL, heritage/culture groups, residents, employers) to coordinate visitor-serving initiatives; pilot “Evening Grimsby” and shared hotel welcome kits.

Collaborations with Neighbouring Municipalities

Pursue DMO collaboration with Lincoln and St. Catharines and explore joining Niagara Benchlands to pool funds, unify brand/itineraries, and launch joint storytelling campaigns.

Enhance Regional Access to Grimsby

As GO advances, ensure station access to town nodes; pilot weekend express shuttles from Burlington/Hamilton GO; add advance tourism-direction signs from QEW exits.

18.3 Phase 3 (4+)

Expand and Diversify Accommodation Capacity

Attract a new hotel operator and explore STR to address a declining room inventory; consider incentives and a hotel-investment prospectus to increase supply by 2029.

Improve Waterfront Access

Pilot lakefront programming and wayfinding links in the medium term, then pursue feasibility for larger shoreline upgrades and amenities as a long-term step.