



Subject:	Lincoln's Tourism Destination Brand Identity
To:	Committee of the Whole – Planning & Economic Development
From:	Office of The Chief Administrative Officer

Report Number:	AD-22-21
Wards Affected:	ALL
Date to Committee:	October 18, 2021
Date to Council:	October 25, 2021

Recommendations:

Report AD–22–21 regarding the Town of Lincoln's Tourism and Destination Brand Identity be received for information; and

Approve and adopt Niagara Benchlands as the Tourism and Destination Brand Identity for the Town of Lincoln.

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a recommendation for a new strategic tourism destination brand name and visual identity. This deliberated recommendation intends to leverage Lincoln's distinct tourism attributes, intentionally increasing visitation and visitor spending, setting Lincoln's tourism sector; one of our economy's greatest opportunities for growth, on a trajectory for competitive post-pandemic emergence, future investment attraction, job creation, and continued economic prosperity.

Background:

The Town of Lincoln has one of the most diversified economies in the Niagara Region, tourism-related jobs, and the economic value of the industry in our community, cannot be understated. In 2019, tourism-related jobs in our community accounted for close to 1,700 jobs and were poised to continue a promising trajectory in 2020, until the COVID-19 pandemic slowed growth. In total, Lincoln has seen an 11% increase in tourism jobs since 2015, while Niagara has seen a 17.9% increase overall. Regionally, tourism contributes \$2.4 billion to the local economy.

As a Greenbelt community with agriculture and value-added agriculture being the largest segment of our economy, growing our tourism industry and attracting additional tourism-related employers and investment is paramount to Lincoln's plan for economic growth. Our mandate is to offer visitors unique tourism experiences built around an award-winning

craft beverage sector in a spectacular natural setting, targeted at high-yield, small group, and independent travelers; sensitive to preserving the unique character of place.

As the natural tourism gateway for visitors entering Niagara, there's great potential for the Town to increase its overall destination awareness, thereby attracting a greater portion of the Ontario tourist market, including culinary tourists, eco-tourists, agri-tourists, and sports and recreation enthusiasts alike.

Since its adoption in June 2020 by Council, the Town's Tourism and Economic Development teams have been working in partnership with our public and private sector partners to activate our Tourism Strategy and Action Plan. This 5-Year strategic plan lays the groundwork for making Lincoln a leading tourist destination in Ontario.

As a reminder, two of the key takeaways from the Town's Tourism Strategy included:

- Redeveloping the Twenty Valley Tourism Association (TVTA) into a new Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) that will focus solely on promoting the community.
- Developing a new tourism destination brand identity that is unique to Lincoln and differentiating ourselves from the rest of Niagara's tourism destinations.

While the redevelopment of the TVTA is an ongoing project that will be discussed with Council at a later date, the importance of developing a new tourism destination brand identity was a paramount first step in ensuring Lincoln's tourism economy is on a path towards economic prosperity. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a detrimental effect on our local tourism community, directly affecting the ongoing viability of tourism businesses. The City of St. Catharines and the Town of Lincoln are currently in the process of remaking the TVTA into a new rural/urban Destination Marketing Organization to oversee the marketing and promotion of the new collaborative destination that is, the City of St. Catharines and the Town of Lincoln. This joint tourism marketing initiative will ensure that both destinations are well-positioned for a faster re-emergence and successful recovery from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Report:

Lincoln's Five-Year Tourism Strategy and Action Plan (2020-2025) provides the strategic guidance and public-sector investment required to present Lincoln as a competitive and sustainable destination locally, provincially, nationally, and internationally.

With outspoken support from Town Council, our local tourism businesses, and strategic stakeholders; the Town's commitment to this legacy-building project cannot be understated. A strong, adaptable, and distinct tourism destination brand identity for the Town is integral to support the growth of Lincoln's tourism sector.

Continuing forward with the positive momentum of 2020's stakeholder research and tourism audit, Town staff have been working alongside project consultants, Trajectory Brands, and the industry-lead Tourism Strategy and Implementation Team ("TSIT"), to develop and implement a strategic tourism destination brand for Lincoln, as well as a comprehensive marketing strategy focused on COVID-19 economic recovery, job creation, and sustainable sector growth.

To be successful in activating our five-year Tourism Strategy and Action Plan, we recognized that Lincoln would need to develop a strong place brand first, before activating any of the strategic growth plans such as gateway, wayfinding, or the creation of a new DMO.

A strong tourism destination brand can help shape a community and increase its economic opportunities for residents and businesses of all sizes. A strong destination brand creates competitive commercial advantages, communicating why people should visit, open a business in a specific place, or invest their money there. By activating a strong tourism destination brand for the Town, we can leverage our key competitive advantages (craft beverage, value-added agriculture, wide-open spaces, welcoming communities) and celebrate these differences as a point of distinction from fellow like-destination competitors such as Niagara-on-the-Lake and Prince Edward County.

The Town's tourism destination brand will act as a strategic guidance system, over the next five years, as Town staff looks to activate the following strategic priorities identified in this impactful plan:

- Create and build an identity for Lincoln that stands out from other competitive destinations and communicate its benefits and strengths to potential investors, visitors, and residents.
- Attract skilled labour, lucrative investment, and visitation
- Make decisions around Town planning and infrastructure spending, investment attraction/retention, and public policy creation.
- Create a unified voice and vision for the Lincoln-centered destination that focuses on the strengths of our diverse tourism sector
- Bring the Town to life, by seeking inspiration from our unique culture, cuisine, technology, architecture, heritage, art, and future vision.

When it comes to creating an identity for Lincoln, it's about revealing who we are (brand pillars), who we want to become (brand vision), celebrating what makes us different (positioning). When we activate this message in unison, the Town of Lincoln will resonate as an attractive destination for people to live in, work in and visit.

This impactful development project and its various components were broken down into three phases to allow for consistent, continuous stakeholder and community consultation throughout the development process.

Project Overview: December 2020 – Fall, 2021

**All development work completed with guidance from the Tourism Strategy and Implementation Team, consultation with local, Lincoln Tourism businesses, and key stakeholders.*

Phase One- Inform and Audit

- 1.1 Project Kick-Off
- 1.2 Strategic Review
 - Strategic plan and existing research, comparable and competitive review.
- 1.3 Asset Discovery and Readiness Assessment
 - Completed in January 2021; 42 local tourism operators, key stakeholders, and community groups were interviewed to provide niche sector insights and market research to inform the positioning and brand narrative development for Lincoln's tourism and destination place brand identity.
- 1.4 Brand Workshop 1 - Insights; draft positioning and tourism product opportunities.

Phase Two – Define and Design

- 2.1 Brand Strategy Development
 - Includes name, positioning, and key messaging
- 2.2 Brand Workshop 2
 - Includes name and strategy recommendations, creative brief, and discussion)
- 2.3 Visual Identity Exploration
 - Includes logo, colours, fonts, graphics, sample applications
- 2.4 Brand Workshop 3
 - Includes visual identity review and product development prioritization
- 2.5 Community Consultation
 - Included online survey to key stakeholders and the community at large

Completed: Summer 2021

Phase 3- Implementation

- 3.1 Product Development
- 3.2 Brand Workshop 4: Final Brand Recommendations
 - Included product recommendations, and marketing plan review

Completed: Timelines: Fall 2021

- 3.3 Three Year Marketing and Communications Plan Development
- 3.4 Brand Applications and Templates
- 3.5 Brand Guidelines and Artwork

*In Process - Fall 2021 *Requires adoption of tourism destination branding*

Project Steering Committee - Tourism Strategy and Implementation Team

The Tourism Strategy Implementation Team (TSIT) was formulated to help aid in the activation of Lincoln's 5-Year Tourism Strategy and Action Plan. The TSIT provided niche sector insights and sector expertise to assist Lincoln's Tourism team to make informed, strategic decisions as it pertains to this destination brand identity project, as well as provide insight into the redevelopment of the TVTA into a new DMO.

The project's TSIT members encompass most of the tourism asset categories identified in the *Tourism Strategy and Action Plan (TSAP)*. This multi-sector representation created an environment for greater stakeholder collaboration that are invaluable to the success of promoting the Lincoln-centered destination.

TSIT Member Composition

Committee Member	Affiliated Business
April Brunet	Lais Hotels Properties Limited, Vintage Hotels
Whitney Rorison	Dillon's Small Batch Distillers
Anthony D'Aprile	Bench Brewing Company
Heidi Fielding	Fielding Estate Winery
Sue-Ann Staff	Sue-Ann Staff Estate Winery
Justin Downes	Farmhouse Kitchens, TVTA Chair
Dorian Anderson	Niagara Wine Festival
Alicia Powell, BSc, MA, PhD	Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority
Jessica Wilson	Lincoln Museum & Cultural Centre, Town of Lincoln
Stephanie Hicks	Downtown Bench Beamsville BIA, TVTA
Karen Doyle	City of St. Catharines
Britnie Bazylewski	Town of Lincoln
Paul Di Ianni	Town of Lincoln

The TSIT contributed their active feedback and guidance to the project, through ongoing collaborative workshops hosted by Town staff and the consultant. Each workshop was developed and hosted with a strategic brand development element in mind (see below)

- Project Kick-Off
 - Hosted December 22, 2020
- Workshop 1- Industry insights, draft positioning, and tourism product opportunities.
 - Hosted February 18, 2021
- Workshop 2- Destination naming and strategic creative briefing.

- Hosted March 12, 2021
- Workshop 3- Visual identity review and product development prioritization
 - Host May 6, 2021
- Workshop 4- Final Brand Recommendations (Includes product recommendations, and marketing plan review)
 - Hosted September 8, 2021

Positioning Lincoln as a Competitive Destination

To begin the development process, we engaged our local tourism businesses, strategic tourism stakeholders, local dignitaries, and Town Staff to identify Lincoln's unique attributes and uncover the points of differentiation that could position the Town as a competitive destination. Over 47 one on one and group interviews were conducted, and 10 positioning proof-points emerged for the destination.

Following the completion of this interview consultation phase, the TSIT committee was presented with the collection of positioning statements shared by their fellow industry peers, and the following three positioning pillars were validated with their guidance and expertise:



Figure 1. Positioning Pillars

Pillar 1: Terroir of Tastemakers

- Exceptional craft wine, drinks & culinary bench strength
- Destination fueled by its bounty of 50+ small-batch, boutique wineries making exceptional, award-winning vintages
- Growing complement of artisanal tastemakers in beverages (craft beer, cider, and spirits) and culinary arts, from top chefs to epicurean products, that are stirring up Canada's food world

Pillar 2: Niagara's Other Natural Wonder - Deeply Rooted in Nature

- In the heart of UNESCO-designated Niagara Escarpment Biosphere, our lush backcountry of benches and escarpment embraces world-renowned parks, trails, and lakeshore sites.
- Lively rural communities and heritage villages are the bedrock of this multi-generational agricultural powerhouse, renowned for its soft fruit orchards.
- Exceptional geologic, indigenous, African Canadian and immigrant heritage experiences tell the story of our place.

Pillar 3: Wanderers Welcome - Celebrating come-as-you-are explorers

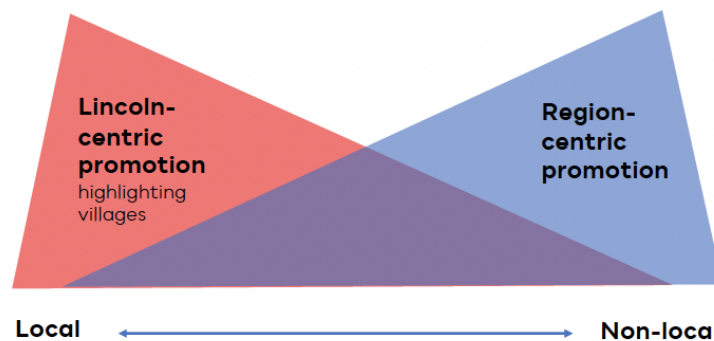
- Curious meandering is our local specialty. Our less-traveled paths are ideal for serendipitous discovery... spaces to connect, linger and learn.
- So close, but so surprising... a world-class, gastro-wine country getaway for unhurried adventure with four seasons of natural delights.
- Come as you are, whoever you are. Our welcome is warm and unstuffy. We're passionate about sharing the richness of this special place in meaningful ways.

Branding for Scale and Beyond

Recognizing that both visitors and residents alike do not recognize the Town's soft municipal boundaries, this challenge needed to be addressed early in the brand development process. Aligning with the key priorities of the Tourism Strategy and Action Plan, a strong brand name would be required to address this challenge while still allowing for scalable growth both locally and non-locally. Throughout two TSIT workshops, Town Staff worked alongside the consultant and industry experts to address the following considerations, to uncover the ideal naming solution for the Lincoln-centered destination.

Branding considerations

Build awareness of Lincoln as a whole
Promote distinct destinations within Lincoln
Position Lincoln as region's hub



Branding considerations

Build brand from visitors' lens
Integrate adjacent rural/agricultural areas
Complement Niagara's global brand awareness

Several naming models were tested with the TSIT committee with the above considerations in mind:

- West Niagara Winelands;

- Niagara' Escarpment Winelands;
- Niagara Winebench;
- Lincoln Benchlands;
- Twenty Valley Winelands;
- Iroquois Shorelands/Benchlands

Options were tested against the branding considerations above and proof points were calculated to validate the Town's naming recommendation to the local tourism sector. It was determined that the destination be named **Niagara Benchlands**, and be presented as the naming solution because it:

- Leveraged Niagara's tourism awareness and global brand equity
- Was complimentary, but distinctly different from other Niagara experiences
- Contained a meaningful geographic descriptor to help external audiences better geo-locate the Town of Lincoln
- Reflected the world-class stature of Lincoln's wine and craft beverage industry
- Encompassed the diverse tourism landscape that is the Town of Lincoln - local agriculture, culinary, nature, and heritage.
- Differentiated the Town of Lincoln from other tourism destinations in Niagara by leveraging Lincoln's unique landscape and sense of place.

Unlike, other Niagara tourism destinations, the Town can leverage, and own its, connectivity to the Niagara Escarpment and Lake Ontario shoreline. Regardless of what micro-destination (Campden, Tintern, Rockway, Jordan, Jordan Station, Vineland, Beamsville, Prudhommes) you visit or own a business within, the Niagara Benchlands narrative creates an identity that is inclusive of Lincoln's diverse micro-destinations, tourism businesses, attractions, and experiences, while still being able to strongly represent each of these diverse tourism assets individually.

Example Wine Tourism Narrative

Over 50+ boutique wineries call the Niagara Benchlands home. Rooted in Lincoln, Ontario; these talented Tastemakers honour the unique micro-climates of Lincoln's landscape and pay homage to the land by crafting wines that showcase the Benchlands' unique topography from the beautiful Lake Ontario shoreline to the top of the awe-inspiring Niagara Escarpment.

Bringing the Lincoln Destination to Life – Visual Identity

When designing the visual brand identity, creating a comprehensive visual language that can be applied to everything from wayfinding signage to advertisements and beyond, is an important element. Defining the visual elements of the brand brings the destination to life and ensures that all future applications, whether they are digital or traditional, will be

a seamless extension of the destination's story; including the composite of businesses, attractions, and experiences that it represents.

Working in conjunction with the TSIT committee and Trajectory Brands, staff's goal was to ensure that the Niagara Benchlands visual identity could:

- Reintroduce the Lincoln-centered destination - tell a new story!
- Be authentic and convey Lincoln's sense of place
- Be memorable and distinctive
- Adaptable for local and non-local audiences
- Flexible for a full range of media/applications, as well as potential sub-brands, campaigns, events
- Supported collaborations and partnerships
- Connects diverse experiences
- Be easy, and interesting, to work with

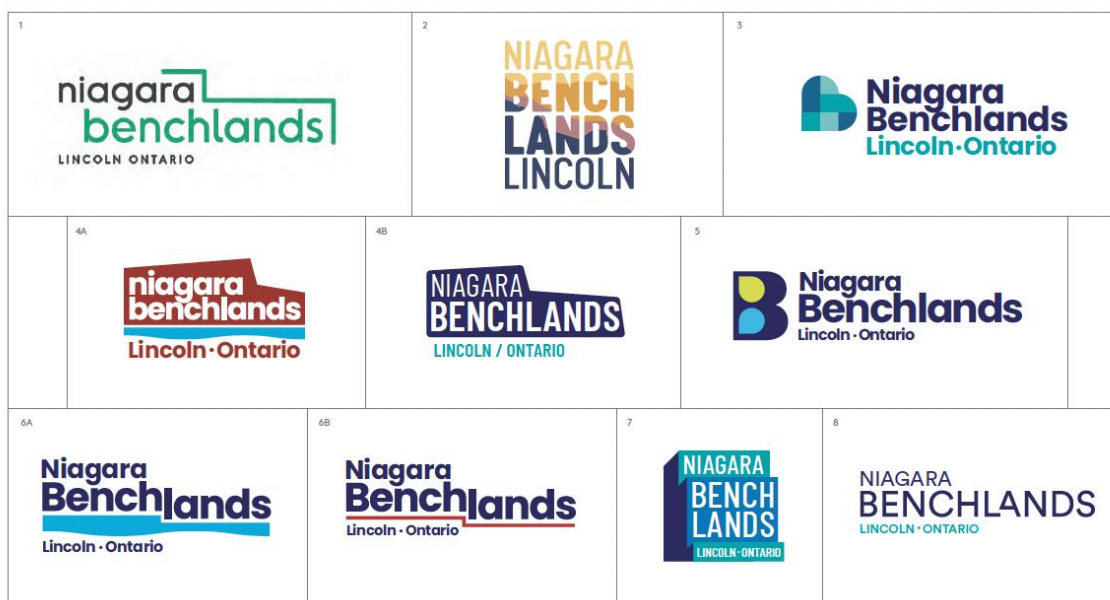


Figure 3. Visual identity solution exploration, version one.

Exploration of the Niagara Benchlands visual identity began with a TSIT committee review of the eight options demonstrated in figure 3 above. Committee members provided feedback and comments for enhancement during the workshop setting and were asked to provide an additional anonymous review in a follow-up survey.

Based on these results, the top three visual identity options identified by the TSIT committee were updated and brought forward for further private and public tourism stakeholder consultation.



Figure 4. Visual identity exploration, version 2.

Delivered through Zoom, Town Staff presented the potential visual identity options demonstrated in figure 4 above. The goal of this consultation was to capture candid feedback from our local private sector tourism stakeholders, as well as discuss opportunities for improvement/refinement that could further aid staff in defining a destination brand that would help the Town to achieve the following strategic goals:

- *attract tourism investment and support job creation*
- *advocate for greater tourism support*
- *create a Lincoln-centered destination that is compelling through a visitor's lens locally, nationally, and internationally.*

All attendees were provided with a copy of the presentation deck following their participation and encouraged to contribute additional feedback through an anonymous survey that was also included in the follow-up.

Town staff leveraged the candid feedback and survey results received through this process and prepared the top-two preferred visual identity solutions for further exploration and consultation with our Lincoln community at large.



Option 1.

Option 2.

Figure 5. Visual identity exploration, version 3.

A Speak Up Lincoln community engagement page was created to showcase the various development and consultation activities associated with this project to engage a wider community audience in Lincoln. Staff employed local newspaper ads, social media ads,

e-newsletter campaigns, and various traditional communication channels to encourage community participation in this final public consultation round.

In total, staff received close to 120 responses to this survey call-out and with community input, it was made clear that option 2 was the most preferred visual identity solution for Niagara Benchlands destination brand, and the recommended option for formal adoption:

Based on the data collected, through the survey results:

- 67% of respondents felt that visual identity option 2, made them most proud to be a resident or business owner in Lincoln
- 67% of respondents found that visual identity option 2 was the most unique and distinct
- 70% of respondents option 2 had the most compelling representation of the Lincoln-centered destination.

With Council's support, staff will launch a variety of marketing assets to introduce the new Niagara Benchlands destination identity.

Staff also intend to launch the new Niagara Benchlands brand to the local tourism community and strategic stakeholder groups using a variety of tactics during the lead-up to the high tourism season in Q2/Q3 or 2022.

Council can expect to see elements of the new Niagara Benchlands branding and visual identity strategically used to launch Lincoln's new tourism. Examples can include:

- Social media creative - profile images & headers, imagery
- Administrative products - stationery, presentation templates, and digital newsletter masthead templates, business cards
- Outfitting – co-branded clothing, retail point of purchase promotional tools for local businesses
- Program promotional efforts - posters, paid advertisements, and marketing efforts,
- Creation of a standalone Niagara Benchlands website
- Community signage – banners, wayfinding design updates
- Tourism product development – Destination Development fund encouraging the creation of collaborative and innovative experiences, festivals, and events with local tourism businesses

Additionally, unique social media platforms will be developed to reflect the destination's new identity, and a strategic marketing and communications plan will support the creation and growth of these platforms over the next four years.

Leveraging Lincoln's Tourism and Destination Place Brand

The intent is to activate the following key development projects with the new Niagara Benchlands branding over the next four years while providing the ongoing support and

resources that our local tourism operators need to return to their pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels of business.

Setting the Stage:

- Accommodation attraction
- Urban design
- Transportation opportunities
- Attracting strategic investment

Creating Reasons to Visit:

- Tourism event development and calendar
- Stimulate new attractions
- Development of compelling itineraries/experiences

Branding:

- Determine sense of place, imagery
- Develop guidelines and control of brand use
- Position in target markets

Marketing:

- Research and analysis
- Traditional and digital platforms
- Maps, brochures
- Media relations

Visitor Services:

- Sense of arrival
- Gateway and wayfinding signage
- Information for all steps of the visitor journey (before, during, and after)

Financial, Legal, Staff Considerations:

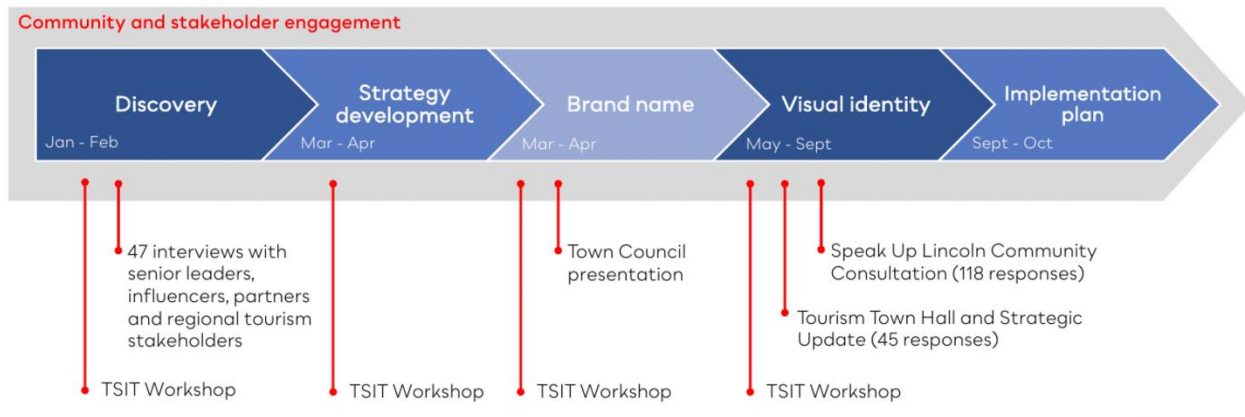
Financial: N/A

Staffing: N/A

Legal:

If approved, Town staff will begin the process to capture a destination trademark to protect the use of the Niagara Benchlands brand and prevent duplication in other local, domestic, and international markets.

Public Engagement Matters:



As part of the development of Lincoln's Tourism and Destination Brand Identity, numerous stakeholder engagement sessions, strategic Town Hall Webinars, and surveys were held/conducted with of our tourism sector, as well as the public.

Stakeholders were broken down into various groups:

- Tourism Strategy and Implementation team, the project's steering committee made up of Town staff, local tourism stakeholders, and the consultants, Trajectory Brands.
- Key stakeholders made up of public and private sector representatives from the tourism industry in Lincoln and the broader Niagara
- Related businesses included craft beverage, retail, culinary, accommodations, eco-tourism, agri-tourism, and adventure travel.
- Special interest groups which included representatives from the heritage, recreation and culture sectors, as well as members of Town advisory committees
- Town of Lincoln Council
- Lincoln residents

Public Consultation Activities

Stakeholder Interviews- January 2021

- Number of Interviews completed: 47

Tourism Town Hall and Strategic Update

- Number of Town Hall Session delivered: 25 - (30 unique local tourism businesses engaged, as well as Town Senior Management Team and Council)
- Number of surveys completed: 45

Speak Up Lincoln Community Consultation

- Number of surveys completed: 118

Consumer Brand Perception

To further validate the Niagara Benchlands destination branding, Town Staff has committed to participating in the upcoming Ball's Falls Thanksgiving Festival; October 9 and 10, 2021, as a tactic to capture important visitor feedback and their valuable insights on the Niagara Benchlands destination brand.

Conclusion:

Based on staff's research, engaged community consultation and industry validation, staff recommend that Council adopt the Niagara Benchlands name and visual identity solution as the Town of Lincoln's new tourism destination brand.

By adopting this recommendation, we can leverage the destination's distinct attributes to increase visitation and visitor spending, setting Lincoln's tourism sector; one of our economy's biggest opportunities for growth, on a trajectory for competitive post-pandemic emergence, investment attraction, job creation, and continued economic prosperity.

Respectfully submitted,

Britnie Bazylewski
Tourism Coordinator
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Appendices:

Appendix A Niagara Benchlands Destination Brand Presentation
Appendix B Letters from the Public

Report Approval:

This report has been reviewed the Director of Economic Development and Communications and the Director of Special Projects. Final approval is by the Chief Administrative Officer.