



Committee of the Whole

Meeting Date: April 28, 2026

Submitted by: Cara Finn, Director of Economic Development
Chris Traini, County Engineer/Deputy CAO

Subject: Middlesex County Tourism Wayfinding Strategy 2026 – Receipt of Completed Strategy and Draft Council Presentation

BACKGROUND:

At the November 25th, 2025 Committee of the Whole meeting, Council received and approved the report on [the Award of Request for Proposal # MC-2025-15 – Tourism Signage Strategy](#), authorizing the engagement of Stempski Kelly Associates to develop a refreshed Tourism Wayfinding Strategy for Middlesex County.

The County of Middlesex’s previous “Discover Our Grassroutes” signage program, established under the 2013 Tourism Signage Strategy, was found to be confusing and in need of modernization. [The 2014 Tourism Signage Policy](#) continued to govern the design, placement, eligibility, and maintenance of directional signage along County Road rights-of-way. This new Strategy builds upon the 2013 work while correcting identified shortcomings and modernizing the County’s approach to tourism wayfinding.

ANALYSIS:

Stempski Kelly Associates commenced project work in November 2025 and has now completed the Middlesex County Tourism Wayfinding Strategy 2026. The consultant team undertook a comprehensive review of existing County reports, strategies, and policies, including the [2013 Tourism Signage Strategy](#), the [2014 Tourism Signage Policy](#), the [2022 Middlesex County Communications Strategy](#), the [County’s Content Style and Design Guide](#), and the [Application Form for Middlesex County Tourism Signage](#).

A site visit and high-level field inventory was conducted, covering County, Local-Tier Municipal, and Community gateway signage; Grassroutes signage; “pay-to-play” tourism signage; service club signage; Heritage Trail signage; and local-tier municipal signage. Community engagement was carried out through interest-holder interviews (representatives from all local-tier municipalities were invited), and an online public

survey in February 2026, which received 59 responses. Regular client meetings and bi-weekly progress check-ins were held throughout the project.

Key findings from the site visit and community consultation included: a lack of visual consistency across existing signage; instances of sign clutter and signs requiring replacement due to environmental factors; interpretive signage placement not optimized for the pedestrian level; signs that recede into the landscape and are not optimally legible; widespread misunderstanding of the Grassroutes route and signage; inconsistent and outdated signage across sign types; and a clear desire from interest-holders for updated sign designs for Gateways, Tourism Pay-to-Play, and Heritage Trail signage.

The resulting Tourism Wayfinding Strategy 2026 is a 66-page document (Sections 1.0 to 5.0, plus Appendices) structured as follows:

- 1) **Section 1 – Introduction** (12 pages): Community Engagement and Consultation summary and general recommendations and rationale.
- 2) **Section 2 – Sign Hierarchy** (4 pages): New Sign Hierarchy development; Grassroutes and Municipal Directional Signage removed from the program.
- 3) **Section 3 – Sign Designs** (28 pages): Design refresh for the full Family of Signs, including a Tourism Signage Design Manual to support fabrication (embedded in the Strategy and extractable as a standalone document).
- 4) **Section 4 – Sign Placement and Locations** (7 pages): Placement guidelines by sign type and sign location recommendations.
- 5) **Section 5 – Implementation Plan** (21 pages): High-level budget estimates, phasing, management, and maintenance considerations; and recommendations for updates to the Tourism Signage Pay-to-Play Policy.

Key updates within the Strategy include the following:

Heritage Trail Program: A new sign design has been developed to suit appropriate sign placement guidelines and accessibility considerations. The Strategy includes 9 implementation recommendations addressing management, design criteria, media and marketing content, and policy updates.

Tourism Signage Pay-to-Play Program: A new sign design and updated hierarchy has been developed to suit appropriate road speeds and accessibility considerations. The Strategy includes 11 implementation recommendations addressing management, policy rules and regulations, application criteria, and sign design types.

Family of Signs – Gateway Signage: Refreshed designs have been developed for the full family of gateway signs, including County Gateway (Primary and Secondary), Local-

Tier Municipal Gateway, and Community Gateway signs, all aligned with the Visit Middlesex and Middlesex County brand identity.

A draft Strategy and Presentation have been prepared by the consultant team (Stasia Stempski, Kelsey Moore, and Bethany Nelson of plural Planning, Design and Landscape Architecture) and are being presented to Council at the April 28th, 2026, meeting. Staff are seeking Council’s direction on the draft Strategy prior to finalization and adoption.


FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:



Phase 1: The Tourism Wayfinding Strategy was completed within the approved maximum 2025 County Budget of \$25,000.

Phase 2: Implementation of the Strategy will occur through the annual budget process. The existing inventory of County Gateway, Identification and Service Club Signage will be replaced as part of the regular signage maintenance program and all “Grassroutes” Signage will be removed. The Tourism Pay-to-Play Signage Program for tourism related businesses will use the new design for new contracts and for the replacement and renewal of existing contracts. Future budgets will identify any program funding, partnerships, opportunities, and initiatives that support the replacement of Highway Gateway Signage and the implementation of the new Heritage Trail Signage Program.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC FOCUS:

This report aligns with the following Strategic Focus, Goals, or Objectives:

Strategic Priority	Goal	Objectives
<p>Economic Development</p> 	<p>Enhance overall economic well-being and community prosperity by fostering a sustainable and thriving local economy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement an Economic Development approach for the County, focusing on key priorities, actions, and areas of growth while providing strong support for small businesses and entrepreneurs, including agriculture-related businesses. • Work towards providing access to ready-to-build land with the infrastructure and services needed to create jobs and grow the local economy. • Advance the County’s planning framework that balances diverse land uses while protecting farmland and natural environment.

Strategic Priority	Goal	Objectives
<p>Collaboration & Partnerships</p> 	<p>Strengthen collaboration with local municipalities and regional partners to improve economic efficiency, enhance service delivery, and support regional development in alignment with community priorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimize service delivery through inter-municipal collaboration and shared services to improve efficiency and seamless operations. • Build and enhance relationships with municipal, regional, First Nations, community, and private sector partners to align priorities, share resources, and implement joint initiatives that improve community well-being and economic growth. • Improve communication and transparency through open engagement, accessible information, and informed decision-making.
<p>Sustainable Infrastructure Development</p> 	<p>Expand and upgrade critical infrastructure to enhance resilience, efficiency, and accessibility while prioritizing sustainability and long-term cost-effectiveness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance and maintain road infrastructure to improve connectivity, traffic efficiency, and encourage active transportation, while preserving the unique character of municipal main streets. • Pursue funding and grants for infrastructure projects to deliver lasting benefits while providing predictable costs for taxpayers. • Invest in sustainable infrastructure opportunities that incorporate climate resilience measures to mitigate extreme weather impacts and reduce overall environmental impact.

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the 2026 Middlesex County Tourism Wayfinding Signage Strategy Report be received for information; and

AND THAT Middlesex County Council adopt the 2026 Middlesex County Tourism Wayfinding Signage Strategy;

AND THAT staff be directed to update the Middlesex Signage Policy for Council consideration.