

Planning and Economic Development Advisory Committee Agenda

September 8, 2026

9:30 a.m.

Council Chambers - Grey County Administration Building

	Pages
1. Call to Order	
2. Declaration of Interest	
3. Delegations	
4. Items For Direction or Discussion	
4.a EDTC-PEDAC-10-26 Economic Development, Tourism, and Culture Strategic Process Update - September 2026	2
That report EDTC-PEDAC-10-26 regarding the Economic Development, Tourism and Culture Strategic Progress Update – September 2026 be received for information.	
5. Roundtable Discussion	
5.a Sector Trends and Challenges	
6. Correspondence	
7. Other Business	
8. Next Meeting Date	
To be determined.	
9. Adjournment	

Committee Report

To:	Chair Keaveney and Committee Members
Committee Date:	September 8, 2026
Subject / Report No:	EDTC-PEDAC-10-26
Title:	Economic Development, Tourism and Culture Strategic Progress Update – September 2026
Prepared by:	Jill Paterson, Manager of Museum & Archives, Courtney Miller, Business Development Manager, Kaleena Sanford, Strategic Marketing Manager, Linnea Catalan, Economic Development Manager, Stephanie Stewart, Community Transportation Manager.
Reviewed by:	Savanna Myers, Director EDTC
Lower Tier(s) Affected:	All

Recommendation

1. That report EDTC-PEDAC-10-26 regarding the Economic Development, Tourism and Culture Strategic Progress Update – September 2026 be received for information.

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to share progress towards strategic priorities in year three of the EDTC Master Plan. Staff remain committed to the 2026 theme *market*, which, builds on the work of prior themes: *foundation* and *study* in years one and two. Under this theme, staff continue to communicate and inform, drawing attention to the tools, templates, and opportunities available to our region; while advancing a unified regional voice on priority issues.

This is the final Committee update for this term of Council. A complete year in review will be shared through the 2026 Annual Report in early 2027.

Background and Discussion

Director

The EDTC team continues to practice and trial lean mindset, process and evaluation, which is a theme that carries throughout the progress reports below.

Team Grey Memorandum of Understanding (1.4)

Staff are actively standing up the Team Grey MOU with municipal representatives appointed to the County-Municipal Economic Development Working Group. This includes shared templates, mutually agreed planning and reporting frameworks and a reframing of the 2027 workplan and budget under Team Grey.

Economic Development Leadership Series (1.1)

The Warden's Economic Development Leadership Luncheon was held May 29th, marking the fourth event of the series and final event during this term of Council. The session was ranked 9/10 by delegates, and highlights included:

- Asset mapping activity with all delegates,
- Growth, Development & Strategic Alignment with Dan Mathieson,
- Clean Energy Frontier: It Starts Here with Stellina Williams, Cait MacKinnon, Chad Richards
- Things that go Bump in the Night with Brock Dickinson

Pursuing Strategic Advocacy (1.2)

Staff have advanced three advocacy opportunities in the third quarter of 2026. This includes multiple meetings with the Ministry of Transportation regarding the Bruce-Dufferin-Grey-Wellington Regional Transit Study; a third opportunity to meet with the Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security at AMO regarding sustainable funding for Georgian College; and support of Western Ontario Warden's Caucus (WOWC) advocacy for AMO.

Economic Development

Investment Readiness (2.3-2.5)

In the last quarter, Economic Development staff have continued to advance initiatives that support business growth, entrepreneurship, workforce development, and regional collaboration across Grey County. Staff have spent significant time with site selection requests and business investment opportunities in healthcare, manufacturing and tourism. Part of this process includes the ongoing development of investment readiness materials, such as, Grey County Workforce at a Glance, Amenities Map etc. These materials are being refined and will be available for use by municipal and community partners.

Business Retention and Expansion (3.2-3.3)

Staff supported the BEC Starter Company Plus grant review process to ensure the program continues to effectively meet the needs of emerging entrepreneurs. Staff have also attended a variety of business and community events, including the Municipality of Meaford's Chamber Networking Event, SEDC's Community Synopsis Review, and the Hanover Youth Hub meeting with Elephant Thoughts, while also participating in several partner committees to better understand local challenges, opportunities, and emerging trends. In addition, staff continued work on rural employment ecosystem mapping by meeting with partner representatives to identify ways to strengthen collaboration, improve awareness of available services and resources, and support more intentional problem-solving within our network and the broader regional service ecosystem.

The Community Impact Lab (Georgian College/City of Owen Sound/Grey County) advanced its soft launch over the summer and hosted the Youth Climate Change Action Group, with an additional community group coming through the space in September.

Staff also collaborated internally to support the development of the Grey Roots Museum *Made Grey't* exhibit, helping to highlight local new and historical businesses and their contributions to the County through new products, ideas, and experiences. This exhibit commemorates Grey County's 175th anniversary and will launch February 2027.

Regional training and innovation network (4.2)

Sydenham Campus events:

- **Volunteer Fair** (May 20)- hosted by the Grey Bruce Makers (GBM) and OSAAVA, the Spring volunteer fair brought the event outside, allowing volunteer organizations and the public to connect.
- **Warden's Economic Development Leadership Luncheon** (May 29)
- **Daycare Graduation** (June 25)
- **Grey Bruce Makers Festival & Craft Show** (June 27)- the 1st GBM Festival, celebrating GBM 2nd anniversary. Free and open to the public, this outdoor event included GBM vendors, live entertainment, structured activities, and tours of the makerspace. 150 guests enjoyed the festivities and wares for sale.
- **Owen Sound Doors Open** (July 18)- welcomed 25 guests into Sydenham Campus and provided full tours to all. Visitors were very interested in the transition from the former school to what the building is now sharing positive remarks.

Sydenham activation and enhancements:

- Launched a detailed inquiry and booking tracking program. The strongest demand continues to be for flexible training and meeting spaces serving groups of approximately 10 to 40 participants. This information is being used to guide future room configurations. Future developments: there is one short-term training room and one long-term rental option coming online in the fall to accommodate future needs.
- Staff have also refreshed an under-utilized office suite and added it to the short-term rental inventory. The space is already being regularly used for client meetings and consultations and as a temporary office for groups using other facilities such as the Auditorium, though it could also be leased for longer-term business incubation.
- Several improvements have been made across campus including west wing (Grey Bruce Makers) washroom improvements, additional wayfinding and office signage and touch screen wayfinding utilizing an inherited SMART TV (repaired by GBM for \$12!). Two wall-mounted water bottle filling stations have also been installed which will reduce the reliance on third party water coolers and are expected to pay for themselves in less than two years.

Strategic Marketing

Strategic Marketing supports EDTC, including Grey County Tourism through destination marketing, industry engagement, visitor experience development, content creation, partnerships, and data-informed decision-making. Together, these efforts contribute to the

department's four core KPI areas: Website Engagement, Brand Awareness, Visitor & Business Support, and Storytelling Impact.

Activities & Accomplishments

- **Destination Marketing & Brand Awareness (5.3):** Expanded destination visibility through earned media, partnerships, and mixed-media marketing initiatives, including CTV Morning, Escarpment Magazine, Mountain Life, Mosaic, Global Heroes, RRAMPT, regional tourism publications, and social media storytelling.
- **Content Development & Storytelling (5.4):** Filmed 26 of 27 Gather 'Round That videos, completed 41 tourism business visits, published 87 social media posts, and developed 10 new blog articles, including seven authored by summer students.
- **Business Engagement & Industry Support (3.2):** Completed 24 of 50 planned tourism BR&E visits for 2026, co-hosted the Grey-Bruce Brochure Swap and hosted a Regional Partner Exchange, welcoming approximately 50 tourism operators, municipalities, and tourism-supporting organizations to strengthen industry relationships and regional collaboration.
- **Visitor Experience & Community Activation:** Delivered Imagination Station children's programming at Grey Roots, supported the Grey County Archival Merchandise Collection, the Gather Activation Wall, and the Chef Zach Keeshig Sweetgrass Ice Cream Pop-Up, which attracted nearly 200 visitors.
- **Data & Decision Support:** Continued Data-to-Action initiatives, dashboard development, KPI reporting, and analytical support for EDTC, County departments and member municipalities to advance performance measurement and evidence-based planning.

Year-to-Date KPI Reporting Overview (5.3)

The activities above contribute to measurable outcomes across Grey County Tourism's four core performance areas:

1. **Website Engagement:** VisitGrey.ca: 58,400 visits, 76,800 pageviews, 1.32 pages per visit, 1:00 average visit duration, and a 76% bounce rate.
2. **Brand Awareness:** All Digital Platforms: 233,378 combined impressions across paid, earned, and owned channels.
3. **Visitor & Business Support:** 3,479 trip idea views, 2,566 event page views, 1,500 story clicks, and 136 active event listings, demonstrating continued interest in local experiences, attractions, and operators.
4. **Storytelling Impact:** 8,378 YouTube impressions, 1,891 video views, a 62% completion rate, 1-minute average itinerary engagement, and 10,224 social interactions, including likes, comments, follows, shares, saves, and link clicks.

Grey Roots Museum & Archives

Between May and July, Grey Roots Museum & Archives offered a broad range of programming and visitor experiences, including school programs, new exhibitions, historical demonstrations, as well as community-led presentations and art projects. Summer 2026 combined the return of many well-established favourites with the introduction of new initiatives designed to engage a wide range of audiences.

Following a particularly strong 2025 season, visitation in 2026 remains ahead of 2024 levels and on par with 2023. Revenue-generating activities show a similar pattern. While revenues are currently tracking below the exceptional results achieved in 2025, they remain ahead of 2024 and 2023 levels, reflecting ongoing strength in visitor engagement and earned revenue opportunities.

- **Education Programs,** In May and June, Grey Roots welcomed more than 1,200 students through its doors. To enhance curriculum-based programming, staff partnered with the Bluewater District School Board's SHSM Agriculture Program to offer opportunities for students to observe real agricultural learning activities. These enhancements complemented popular programs such as Doing the Chores, Time Travellers' Trek, and Wild Weather Wranglers, providing students with hands-on, experiential learning.
- **Artwork in Grey County Gallery,** Following an evaluation process that included members of the Grey Roots Indigenous Advisory Circle and support from staff at the Tom Thomson Art Gallery, Saugeen First Nation artist, Jeannette Ladd was selected to create *What We Carry, What We Grow*. The proposed artwork consists of three interconnected 4' x 6' panels. Grounded in Anishinaabe teachings, the work's visual narrative moves from past to present to future, emphasizing continuity, stewardship, and the importance of carrying knowledge forward to support future growth.
- **Grey County Archives,** As of August 12, 2026, Archives staff responded to 360 research inquiries from individuals, organizations, and government partners. Archival reference and information services were provided to the Township of Chatsworth, Town of The Blue Mountains, Township of Georgian Bluffs, Municipality of Meaford, City of Owen Sound, and Municipality of West Grey. Staff also supported Grey County departments, including Planning, Clerk's Services, and the CAO's Office, by providing access to archival records, historical information, and research assistance.
- Grey Roots hosted ***Wild Weather***, a hands-on travelling exhibit developed by Science North with the Ontario Science Centre, in summer 2026. *Local Stories: Changing Weather* was a complementary exhibit developed in collaboration with the Georgian Bluffs Climate Action Team. The exhibit connected extreme weather and climate change to Grey County experiences, including agricultural impacts, adaptation strategies, and community resilience. The exhibit supported public education, preparedness, and dialogue on local climate action.
- **Spring into Moreston/Voices for Climate Action Concert,** This enhanced our annual event welcoming more than 450 attendees for a day of music, community engagement, and family activities. A highlight of the event was the Voices for Climate Action Concert, featuring performances by Luke Wallace and David Sereda and supported by the Community Foundation Grey Bruce. The event also marked the launch of *Local Stories: Changing Weather* by the Georgian Bluffs Climate Action Team and featured community partner exhibits, heritage demonstrations, and volunteer-led activities throughout the historical village.

- **Facing the Flames: A Firefighter's Story** was featured at Moreston Heritage Village throughout summer 2026. This condensed version of Grey Roots' 2019 Ontario Museum Association Award winning exhibition explored Grey County's firefighting history through artefacts, equipment, archival photographs, and interpretive displays highlighting the evolution of local fire services.
- **Northern Terminus: The African-Canadian History Journal, Volume 21**, This year's issue developed by Grey County Archives and the Northern Terminus Editorial Committee was launched at Grey Roots on June 12. The packed theatre was treated to a program that featured a presentation by Naomi Norquay on Priceville's early Black residents, updates from community organizations promoting local Black history, refreshments and fellowship.
- **Moreston Heritage Village**, During July and August, Moreston Heritage Village offered visitors an immersive living history experience across its 10-acre site, featuring more than a dozen historic buildings, costumed interpreters, and artefacts from the Grey Roots collection. Daily programming included guided and self-guided tours, access to key heritage structures, audio tours, and hands-on historic demonstrations such as tin smithing, archaeology, and natural dyeing.
- **Train Days and Wheels Wednesdays**, Train Days offered visitors opportunities to ride the Bob McDowall Memorial Railway, enjoy G-scale train demonstrations, and connect with members of the Bluewater Railroaders. Throughout the summer, Grey Roots' vehicle restoration volunteers showcased antique cars, trucks, and tractors, bringing automotive history to life through engaging displays and demonstrations.
- **KidsCamp**, Grey Roots' well attended summer camp offered a range of themed programming that encouraged creativity, skill development, and community connection. Neighbours & Nature explored belonging and shared responsibility. Cooking Quest III developed practical kitchen skills. Gizmos & Graphics combined art and S.T.E.A.M. through hands-on projects, while Dice & Dragons fostered teamwork, storytelling, imagination, and problem-solving through roleplay and adventure.
- **Old City Hall Clock**, Grey Roots has accessioned the City of Owen Sound's Old City Hall Clock which includes 10 pieces. The items will be moved to Grey Roots in October. Space is already being made to store and display these impressive artefacts.
- **The Emancipation Festival**, in partnership with Grey Roots Museum & Archives, hosted **Speaker's Corner** event in the Thomas Wheildon Theatre, bringing together educators, historians, descendants of freedom seekers, and community members for an evening of learning and reflection. The event featured live music by Bobby Dean Blackburn, presentations by Dorothy Abbott, Lesa Walker, and Carolyn and Sylvia Wilson of the Sheffield Park Black History Museum, as well as a performance by the Mellish Dancers. The following morning, participants joined the **Freedom Walk** from Grey Roots Museum & Archives to Harrison Park, promoting awareness of local Black history and the legacy of freedom seekers.
- **Antique and Classic Car Show**, Despite being postponed by one day due to inclement weather, the annual Car Show attracted approximately 650 attendees. Beautifully restored vehicles from the Grey Roots collection were displayed alongside entries from the Bluewater Region Antique and Classic Car Club of Canada. Visitors also enjoyed train rides, food vendors, Wild Weather exhibits, and Moreston Heritage Village.
- **Community Canvas: A Roger Mooking Experience**, This large-scale collaborative art initiative engaged residents and visitors in creating a shared visual story of Grey County.

The project was conceptualized and led by Grey County Creative Director Roger Mooking, with contributions from artists Lonny Doherty and Sarah Rose Irwin. The project invited public participation from July 18 to August 16, 2026. The completed artwork was unveiled at a public reveal event on August 26.

Upcoming highlights:

- **Flat Root Replacement**, Guided by the Building Condition Assessment (BCA) and approved 2026 capital projects, roof work will begin this September on the final remaining section of the flat roof at Grey Roots' main museum building. The museum will be closed to the public while work takes place above the main gallery spaces, with reopening anticipated in early October.
- **The Wood Symposium 2026**, The symposium will be hosted at Grey Roots from October 16 to 18, 2026 by Intersections Wood Collaborative. The event will bring together beginner and experienced woodworkers and woodturners to explore traditional techniques and contemporary innovations through presentations, exhibitions, demonstrations, international speakers, vendor displays, and hands-on workshops.
- **Fall Lectures**, The Fall 2026 Lecture Series will feature four Tuesday afternoon presentations exploring winter birding, climate communication in museums, remembrance, and Canadian military history. Speakers include David T. Chapman, Dr. Soren Brothers, Bonita deMatteis-Johnston, and Dave Alexander.
- **Moreston By Candlelight**, The signature seasonal event is taking place slightly earlier in the holiday season on November 28 and December 5. As always, visitors will enjoy horse-drawn wagon rides, live music, heritage building tours, seasonal refreshments, and family-friendly activities in the historic village.

Business Development

Business Enterprise Centre as leader in entrepreneurship support (4.1).

From May to July 2026, the Business Enterprise Centre (BEC):

- Responded to 88 inquiries;
- Completed 42 consultations (29 new and 13 existing businesses); which,
- Supported the launch of 19 new businesses;
- Helped sustain 7 businesses; and
- Contributed to 5 business expansions and 1 business purchase.

Summer Company Program. For 2026 program delivery, the BEC received \$24,000 in grant funding, which was distributed among eight program participants. Staff began promoting the program in early 2026 through high school visits, job fairs, and digital, print, and radio advertising. The program received 43 initial applications and 26 completed business plan submissions, almost double the amount received in 2025. Due to the high number of applications and the overall quality of the submissions, a new evaluation matrix was developed to support a fair and comprehensive review process. Applicants were assessed based on the feasibility and level of detail in their business plans, as well as their overall engagement with the program. The following businesses were selected:

- Sound Pressure Washing - Pressure washing business in Owen Sound
- Dock2Deck Delivery - Boat delivery service in Georgian Bluffs
- Dylan's Lawn Care & Services - Lawn care business in West Grey
- Pretty & Polished Nail Boutique - Nail salon in Grey Highlands
- Luxury by Mya - Nail artist in Hanover
- GabeBenderFilms - Sports videography and photographer in West Grey
- YourTune - Piano tuner offering in person and online training in West Grey
- Mexican Corn - Mexican corn stand in Owen Sound

Starter Company Plus Program. For the 2026 program year, the BEC received \$60,000 in grant funding to support Starter Company Plus participants. A total of 45 businesses applied to participate in the training component of the program. Upon completion of the training, 28 business plans were submitted for review by the grant review committee. Following the committee's evaluation, 16 businesses were awarded grants of up to \$5,000 each to assist with start-up and expansion costs. The following businesses were selected:

- Ash Audio – Voice acting, Georgian Bluffs
- Bafana Bafana Foods – South African inspired catering, Owen Sound
- First Health Counselling – Counselling services, Owen Sound
- Katie Crosby Graham – Health coaching and pilates, Hanover
- Northern Strike Fishing Co. – Fishing tackle, Georgian Bluffs
- On Solid Ground Footcare & Orthotics – Chiropody clinic, Hanover
- Pink Rooster Refreshments – Smoothie shop, The Town of the Blue Mountains
- Radiance Design Studio & Events – Event design and décor rental, Georgian Bluffs
- Rusty Rosco Maple Syrup – Maple syrup producer and on-farm store, West Grey
- SonoScholar – AI learning and research platform, The Town of the Blue Mountains
- Sutton Laser Cleaning – Mobile surface restoration, Georgian Bluffs
- TeeterDesigns – Architectural designs, Grey Highlands
- The Bark and Barrel – Pet supply, Owen Sound
- The Corner Kitchen – Café, West Grey
- THE CORNER Studio Café – Coffee shop, West Grey

Fall Training Schedule. The BEC has three workshop series planned for the fall. The first is a four-part succession planning series. This series is being offered in support of the broader Succession Ontario initiative, which promotes succession planning resources for micro and small businesses across the province. This series will discuss the steps involved in succession planning, how to estimate the value of a business, exit options, and how to prepare a business for sale. To strengthen their capacity to support local businesses preparing for succession, BEC staff have been participating in Queen's University's Succession Planning Micro-Credential program. The other two workshop series planned for the fall will have a financial focus. The first will cover tax preparation for small businesses, while the second will focus on financial forecasting and cash flow management for service and product-based businesses.

EDTC Facilities: Sydenham Campus and Grey Roots

The Facilities team continued to advance remaining 2026 capital projects at both Sydenham Campus and Grey Roots. At Sydenham Campus, the boiler replacement project has been

completed, the HVAC project has been awarded and is scheduled for completion in late fall, and a new digital work order system has been implemented. At Grey Roots, the schoolhouse roof, museum building flat roof, and pressure tank replacement projects are all underway and remain on track for completion by the end of fall 2026.

Community Transit

The Bruce–Dufferin–Grey–Wellington (BDGW) Regional Transit Study is nearing the end of its phase one study, to design and assess the feasibility of a unified regional transit network. The proposed network is intended to provide a seamless passenger experience, identify efficiencies through inter-county collaboration, and improve service in areas with limited transportation options. The project team continues to work with Dillon Consulting to finalize the plan, which is planned to come forward for information this fall.

Following report EDTC-CW-09-26, Council endorsed the pre-approval phase which enabled the extension of GTR Route 2 and GOST contracts, as well as the reintroduction of GTR Route 5 between Owen Sound and Wiarton until a decision is made on the unified network. These services are accommodated within the approved 2026 County budget and supported by the Ontario Transit Investment Fund (OTIF). In addition, staff released a request for information (RFI) to assess technology solutions and operator interest, and are beginning to explore the requirements and potential of a unified rideshare bylaw.

Financial and Resource Implications

All items are included in the approved 2026 budget, with staff resources assigned through departmental workplans.

Relevant Consultation

- ☒ Internal: EDTC Team
 - ☐ AODA Compliance
 - ☐ Contribution to Climate Change Action Plan Targets
- ☐ External

Appendices and Attachments

[Economic Development, Tourism & Culture Master Plan](#)