REPORT

TO:	Council
FROM:	Jerri-Lynn Levitt
DATE:	September 4, 2024
REPORT:	CLS.24.15
SUBJECT:	Grey Highlands Branding Strategy

RECOMMENDATION:
That Council receive report CLS.24.15 for information; and
That Council direct staff to proceed with Phase 1: Public Engagement and Approvals (Q4, 2024); and
That Council direct staff to report back with the results and comments from the public before proceeding to Phase 2: Initial Rollout (Q1–Q2, 2025).

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS:
The Grey Highlands Strategic Plan for 2024-2027, under its Considerate Communities pillar, aims to modernize the Grey Highlands brand while fostering a sense of community-wide pride.

Collaboratively, the Corporate Services and Economic Development teams have developed a proposal to refresh the municipality's visual and communication strategy.

This initiative ensures the integrity of Grey Highlands' heritage is maintained, reflecting both tradition and progress in our community identity.

OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:
As we reach the halfway mark of our current term, now is the ideal time to embark on the Grey Highlands Branding Strategy. It offers the strategic benefit of implementing the refreshed brand during a period when community engagement and interest in municipal developments are at their peak. Furthermore, commencing the project now ensures that the deliverables will be achieved well within the term.

This strategy is the product of extensive research, thoughtful deliberation, and genuine engagement with the community's core values and visions. By choosing to develop this strategy internally rather than outsourcing, we have ensured that the final proposal deeply resonates with the true spirit and essence of Grey Highlands.

Our corporate services and economic development teams have worked collaboratively to integrate our municipality's character, heritage, and aspirations into a cohesive and vibrant brand vision. This internal development process ensures that the branding strategy authentically reflects the heart and soul of Grey Highlands, promising a brand that our community can embrace with pride and ownership.

GREY HIGHLANDS STRATEGIC PLAN:
Considerate Communities - Modernize the Grey Highlands brand and sense of community-wide pride and develop a marketing strategy to attract investment in tourism, industry and residential and commercial development.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:
There is no financial impact to Phase 1 of the project as staff will utilize our citizen engagement platform ConnectGreyHighlands.ca for public consultation.

STAFFING IMPACT:
This project is an internal collaboration among Corporate Services/Communications and Economic Development staff.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS:
0 - Phase 1

CONSULTATION:
Karen Govan, CAO
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GREY HIGHLANDS

BRANDING STRATEGY

PRESENTED TO
Council

PREPARED BY
Corporate Services, Communications, and Economic Development Staff

Municipality of Grey Highlands

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Executive Summary

This corporate rebranding plan lays a comprehensive roadmap for revitalizing the Municipality of Grey Highlands' identity, reflecting its rich heritage and aspirations for the future. It commences with a historical overview of the evolution of the current municipal branding, shedding light on the significance of adapting to changing times while retaining core values.

The document outlines a robust vision for the future and details the narrative that influenced this new direction. Central to the plan is preserving the corporate crest, symbolizing the municipality's enduring legacy and commitment to its residents and values. Furthermore, it delineates an implementation timeline to ensure the successful rollout of the new branding and key metrics for measuring its impact.

The Municipality of Grey Highlands is poised for a transformative phase. Our vision encapsulates a modern aesthetic and recommitments to community, sustainability, and growth principles. The narrative driving this vision is renewal and evolution, recognizing our municipality's geographically diverse and dynamic nature as it stands today and envisioning the thriving and vibrant community it aspires to become, supported by the 2024-2027 Strategic Plan.

Since amalgamation, Grey Highlands has experienced significant growth, and a refreshed brand that reflects its current reality and future ambitions is recommended. This revitalization is not just about updating a logo; it's about signaling to everyone that Grey Highlands is a forward-looking municipality, proud of its roots and ready to face new challenges with a fresh and invigorated spirit.

The Municipality of Grey Highlands' corporate branding strategy declares our community’s evolution, a testament to our collective history, and a blueprint for a vibrant future. It recognizes the critical balance between honoring our past and embracing change, ensuring that our branding reflects our values, people, and place in the world.

Background and History

The Municipality of Grey Highlands, a picturesque region in Ontario, Canada, was established by amalgamating several historic townships in 2001. This included the Town of Markdale, and Osprey, Artemesia, and Euphrasia Townships; the village of Flesherton was previously amalgamated with the Township of Artemesia in 1998. Each area, complete with its own unique history and local pride, was woven into the fabric of the new municipality—Grey Highlands—which was named to capture the essence of the combined geographic and cultural landscapes.

From its inception, Grey Highlands faced the intricate task of forging a cohesive corporate branding that showcased the unity of the newly formed municipality while honoring the individual legacies of the communities. The solution was a logo that symbolically embraced each area's history, values, and attributes. This emblem served as a visual representation of the collective spirit of Grey Highlands, becoming the emblematic heart of the municipality's branding.

The inaugural logo played a pivotal role as the foundational element of the Municipality's brand. Its design was conceived to act as a bridge between the past and the future, ensuring that the individual identities of the amalgamated communities were kept intact and recognized within the greater whole. Over the years, this logo has stood as a testament to the collaborative and inclusive ethos that Grey Highlands embodies.

The symbology and color palette of the Grey Highlands logo hold significant meaning, with each element carefully chosen to represent the area's natural and cultural heritage. The symbol of the Osprey pays homage to the Township of Osprey, while Old Baldy, a beloved local landmark, is emblematic of Artemesia's heritage and outdoor spirit. With its meandering path and essential role in the regional ecosystem, the Saugeen River is also represented, acknowledging its importance to Euphrasia Township through which it flows.

The Municipality of Grey Highlands embarked on a branding refresh in 2018 using a contracted company. The concepts received were presented to Council and the public through a survey. The survey results weren't conclusive, and Council felt that the concepts didn't represent the tradition, vision, or capture the essence of the municipality. It was decided not to proceed with a new look for Grey Highlands.

The 2024-2027 Strategic Plan revisits the project and includes modernizing the Grey Highlands brand to create a sense of community-wide pride. The new, modern look and feel for Grey Highlands was developed through a collaborative effort involving staff. This in-house collaboration has leveraged the unique insights and expertise of those closely connected to the community and its values, ensuring that the rebranding efforts are deeply rooted in the local context.

The Municipality Today

Since its incorporation, the Municipality of Grey Highlands has “grown” and evolved. It encompasses over 800 square kilometers of sprawling landscapes and comprises a mosaic of smaller communities, each boasting a rich history and culture. These communities form the colorful pieces of the greater Grey Highlands branding, rooted in geographic diversity, heritage, and shared values.

With bustling small towns and serene rural hamlets, the area's demographics are as varied as the landscapes. The municipality is home to a blend of ages, backgrounds, and professions, with generational farming families and new residents attracted by the area's charms.

Each community within the Municipality of Grey Highlands adds its unique cultural thread to the regional tapestry. Cultural venues, annual festivals, and historical societies celebrate their local distinctiveness while contributing to a unified cultural branding.

The socio-economic landscape of Grey Highlands is multifaceted, with agriculture, small manufacturing, and tourism serving as the main economic drivers. The rural expanse supports a strong agricultural community, while artisan and niche businesses thrive in the towns. Tourism is bolstered by the area's natural beauty and recreational offerings. However, the municipality faces the challenge of promoting economic cohesion and equal opportunities across all its communities.

While Grey Highlands celebrates the uniqueness of its smaller communities, this also poses challenges to forming a shared, unified branding. The current state, with discrete histories and cultures, risks creating a disconnected image. This can be seen as a collection of separate stories rather than a single, unified narrative.

The task is to embrace this diversity while constructing an inclusive narrative that resonates with all residents. An updated brand must address this separation, weaving the threads of individual community identities into a compelling and cohesive tapestry, celebrating a collective branding that truly encapsulates the spirit of the Grey Highlands.

To move forward, the corporate branding must reflect a sense of unity in diversity, empowering each community within the municipality to feel represented and acknowledged while fostering a sense of belonging to the larger Grey Highlands family. By focusing on shared values and collective goals, Grey Highlands can preserve the local flavors of its member communities while nurturing a shared municipal culture that is vibrant and inclusive and unites its people under one branding.

Corporate Crest: Tradition and Formality

In a deliberate endeavor to blend tradition with progress, the Municipality of Grey Highlands proposes the introduction of a corporate crest. This significant addition to our branding strategy pays tribute to the municipal logo's historical essence, ensuring continuity and reverence for our shared heritage. The corporate crest, fashioned as an exact replication of the current logo but reimagined within the formal format of a crest, serves as a bridge connecting the past, present, and future of Grey Highlands.

The design of the corporate crest mirrors the valued symbolism fundamental in the current municipal logo. It embodies Grey Highlands's rich history and diverse culture within the traditional structure of a crest. Every element is represented, ensuring the legacy of the original logo is preserved and celebrated within this dignified format.



Encasing these elements is a shield, a classical emblem of protection and solidarity. Its presence in the crest underscores our commitment to safeguarding our community's values and heritage.

The crest stands as a testament to Grey Highlands' first 23 years, preserving the memory and pride of our original logo while signaling readiness to embrace future challenges and opportunities. It is a symbol that celebrates our collective journey, echoing the unity and resilience of our community.

The corporate crest would be designated for use in formal settings and on official documentation. It exemplifies the gravity and professionalism we approach our duties and responsibilities.

In instituting a corporate crest, the Municipality of Grey Highlands boldly affirms its respect for its past and optimism for the future. This crest honors the history and pride embedded in our original logo and reinforces our commitment to unity, diversity, and excellence. As a symbol of our journey, it guides us forward, embodying the enduring spirit and collective ambition of the Grey Highlands.

Story Behind the New Look

The Municipality of Grey Highlands proudly introduces a new visual branding that captures our community's essence and aspirations. As we step forward into a future set with potential, we must reflect on who we are through a modern lens that respects our roots while embracing progress.

The Four Leaves: Representing four symbolic features of Grey Highlands

Rich Agricultural Heritage:

The leaves reflect our strong agricultural roots. They represent our flourishing farms and the bounty they produce, pivotal to our local economy and way of life.

Current and Potential Growth:

The plants are depicted in various stages of growth, symbolizing both our current state and our aspirations. This visual progression from smaller to larger leaves illustrates our focus on continual growth and advancement.



Raising Families:

The nurturing environment depicted by the plants represents Grey Highlands as a fertile ground for raising families, where community support and natural beauty thrive.

Community of Communities:

The leaves honour the four former Townships before amalgamation in 2001: the Town of Markdale and the Townships of Artemesia, Euphrasia, and Osprey. They also represent the many other communities and their integral role in the broader landscape of Grey Highlands.

A Tagline That Resonates: "grow here" represents four aspects of multidimensional growth

Familial Growth:

Encouraging young families to plant roots and thrive.

grow here

Agricultural Growth:

Expanding our robust farming traditions with innovative practices.

Business Growth:

Cultivating an environment where businesses of all sizes can prosper.

Personal and Community Development:

Fostering personal development and strengthening communal bonds.

Our new visual branding is more than a logo; it is a commitment to inclusivity, growth, and community. Through "GH: grow here" and the touching imagery of the four leaves, we encapsulate the values, ambitions, and spirit of Grey Highlands. This branding honours where we have been and, more importantly, where we are going. It is an invitation to all, a declaration that in Grey Highlands, there is opportunity to grow - in every sense of the word.

The Fresh Look: Logo and Visual Identity Reveal



The Fresh Look: Logo and Visual Identity

The updated Grey Highlands logo, characterized by its sprouting plants, elegantly symbolizes our community's core values and dynamic spirit.

Designed with simplicity and clarity, it seamlessly incorporates the abbreviated "gh" to underline the tagline "grow here," which encapsulates our invitation and promise to all who wish to grow—in family, farming, business, or personal fulfillment—within our welcoming borders.

The color scheme retains a connection to the natural and lush palette reminiscent of our landscapes yet is refreshed to reflect a more modern, vibrant future.

The typography has been updated to a cleaner, more contemporary style, ensuring the brand remains approachable and easily recognizable. Overall, while echoing the familiar, the visual elements are rendered with modernity and freshness that speaks to Grey Highlands' forward-looking aspirations. Grey Highlands aims to balance honoring our heritage and embracing progress.

The period after Grey Highlands embodies the boldness of our vision, emphasizing that the name alone stands as a definitive statement of our confidence, quality, and intent.

The green representation of the ‘gh’ reflects the leading letters of the tagline “grow here.” This could be used strategically throughout the municipality’s communications with tag lines for specific projects, i.e., gathered here.

Implementation Plan

The rollout of Grey Highlands' new branding, including the updated logo and crest, is proposed as a phased approach from 2024 to 2026. This timeline ensures a smooth transition while respecting budget considerations and operational practicalities. Since the corporate crest maintains the existing logo, assets carrying the original logo will only be updated as required, minimizing unnecessary expenditures and ensuring a resource-efficient transition.

Phase 1: Public Engagement and Approvals (Q4, 2024)

October-December 2024: Citizen engagement and Council approval on Grey Highlands' new look and feel—comprehensive Brand Guidelines document development. A project and survey would be added to the ConnectGreyHighlands.ca site to gauge the public's response to the new branding. This would also serve as the information hub for the project.

Identification of priority assets for the initial rollout. This includes digital platforms (website, social media) and key marketing materials with minimal or no cost for implementation.

Responsibilities: Corporate Services for coordination; Economic and Community Development for brand asset creation and guidelines; CAO's office for oversight and alignment with municipal goals.

Phase 2: Initial Rollout (Q1–Q2, 2025)

January- March 2025: Launch the new branding on all digital platforms and key marketing materials. Start the signage project planning, ensuring new signs reflect the updated branding.

April-June 2025: Gradual replacement of high-priority physical assets with the new branding, as current stocks deplete or as operationally feasible.

Responsibilities: Finance, Transportation and Public Spaces, Parks and Recreation for asset management and rollout coordination; CAO's office, Corporate Services, and Economic and Community Development for strategic support and communications; Transportation and Public Spaces for preliminary signage update plans; Parks and Recreation for input on signage in community spaces.

Phase 3: Continued Implementation (Q3-Q4, 2025 – Throughout 2026)

July 2024 – Throughout 2025: Continued replacement and deployment of the new branding across all municipal assets, prioritized by necessity and budget availability. Full-scale execution of the signage project.

As Needed: Since the corporate crest maintains the existing logo, assets carrying the original logo will only be updated as required, minimizing unnecessary expenditures and ensuring a resource-efficient transition.

Responsibilities: All departments involved in the phased replacement plan. Corporate Services oversees the logistical aspects; Economic and Community Development continues providing branding support; Transportation leads the signage project; Parks and Recreation assists with community-focused asset updates.

Monitoring and Adjustment (Ongoing)

Ongoing: Regular reviews of the branding rollout process, allowing for adjustments as needed to ensure the transition proceeds smoothly and remains cost-effective.

Responsibilities: The CAO's office will lead review sessions with input from all departments involved.

This carefully structured implementation timeline and phased approach to rolling out Grey Highlands' new branding ensures an efficient, cohesive transition that respects the municipality's heritage, budget, and operational realities. The collaborative efforts across multiple departments underscore our commitment to a unified and refreshed municipal image that reflects our community's values and aspirations.

Conclusion

The Grey Highlands branding strategy is a carefully designed blueprint destined to revitalize our image and strengthen our position as a community that nurtures growth. By integrating four symbolic sprouts, understated Grey Highlands, and the easily identifiable "GH" through the tagline "grow here," we have crafted an emblem that reflects our community's spirit and aspiration.

Corporate Crest:

Implementing a corporate crest maintains the history and formality of the municipality since its inception.

Updated Logo:

Incorporating elements that symbolize growth, belonging, and the potential of Grey Highlands.

Color Scheme and Typography:

A refreshed palette and modern typeface that pays homage to our roots while paving the way for the future.

Implementation Timeline:

Thoughtfully scheduled for the remainder of 2024 and 2026 in phases, beginning with digital platforms and priority assets, followed by a gradual transition of municipal assets, culminating in comprehensive signage updates, this plan respects the municipal budget while allowing us to move forward with a fresh, new look.

Collaborative Approach:

Leveraging the strengths and expertise of the CAO's office, Corporate Services, Economic and Community Development, and support from the Finance, Transportation, and Parks and Recreation departments.

As we move forward together, let's embrace this new identity with pride, allowing it to be a testament to our shared values and the bright future ahead.

We invite every community member to be an active ambassador for this new chapter as we collectively advance, innovate, and, most importantly, *grow here.*