

**THE VAN HORNE ESTATE**

*an*  
**Ministers Island**

**WHERE INNOVATION AND HISTORY THRIVE**



# **SIX-YEAR BUSINESS PLAN**

November 2024



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## A. INTRODUCTION

Ministers Island is an historical and cultural gem set in the jewel of an environment. The history of the island includes a rich Indigenous and loyalist heritage, as well as being the former summer estate of Sir William Van Horne, a recognized nation builder responsible for the completion of the transcontinental Canadian Pacific Railway. In recent years, the island's unique heritage, culture and environment have all been showcased to the public through tourism.

Van Horne Estate on Ministers Island Incorporated (VHEMI) is an independent, community based, not-for-profit organization working in partnership with the local community and provincial government to manage the island. In 2008, VHEMI signed a twenty-five-year lease with the province with the mandate to *manage, restore, and operate* the island. This *Six-Year Business Plan for Ministers Island* (Business Plan) is VHEMI's strategic direction for the island.

VHEMI's Business Plan follows an extensive consultation process undertaken between the months of January and October 2024 with our members, our volunteers, our partners, local community and civic leaders, the local general public and both provincial and federal government

officials. VHEMI wishes to thank all individuals and organizations who contributed the development of this Business Plan.

## B. SIX-YEAR BUSINESS PLAN

The future success of Ministers Island lies in building on the themes of innovation and history. We can build and secure the future of the Island on the innovations and legacies of the past. As we move forward with our members, the community and our partners, we all need to see the island through Van Horne's innovative eyes and mind: *What would Van Horne be doing on the island if he were here today?* We also aspire to the values of stewardship for the earth with a view toward protecting and sustaining the lands and waters of the island for future generations.

The Six-Year Business Plan for Ministers Island will be tabled for approval by the VHEMI Board of Directors on November 20th, 2024. The Board views the Business Plan as a *living document* which may be amended from time to time based on new information and circumstances.

### i. Vision

A nationally and provincially designated historic site, Ministers Island is a multi use venue showcasing history, culture and the marine



environment while offering modern tourism and agriculture opportunities.

The Infographic below illustrates how the six pillars interact, the specific nature of which is further discussed on the next page:

## ii. Slogan

*Where Innovation and History Thrive*

## iii. Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles will guide the management, restoration and operations of Ministers Island.

- The island's environment and eco-systems must be protected.
- The heritage and cultural assets of the Island must be protected and maintained for future generations.
- Van Horne's legacy and innovative spirit must be celebrated and used as a beacon for the Island's future.
- The Indigenous heritage of the island must be celebrated and respected.
- The local community must be as fully engaged as possible.

## iv. Goals and Pillars

The Business Plan for the Island focuses on six (6) key pillars:

- Environmental Sustainability
- Heritage and Culture
- Tourism and Recreation
- Agriculture
- Education and Training
- Leadership, Management and Administration





## Key Pillars Of The Business Plan For Ministers Island





## v. Environmental Sustainability

Environmental Sustainability is the foundational rock for all of the other pillars in the plan. Protecting and sustaining the environment for future generations is the lens through which all other activities on the island will be undertaken. All activities taking place on the Island will do so in a manner that protects the island's natural biodiversity and marine ecosystem.

With respect to climate change, increasing incidences of severe weather and storm surge are negatively impacting on the Bar Road and the coastline, with damaging erosion being the prime impact. VHEMI will work with the province, federal government, local authorities and other partners to identify potential mitigation measures aimed at reducing these impacts.

VHEMI will also work with its partners to develop a *Biodiversity and Woodlot Management Plan*. The goal of the plan will be to protect the Island's natural environment. This will include identifying the best means to address any invasive species on the island as well as the ongoing loss of trees from storms. In the case of the woodlot, the first step will be to conduct an inventory and forest analysis. This inventory will allow for the assessment of the current forested areas and will lay the groundwork for future sustainable forest management of the island

including the identification of any old growth trees. The plan will also need to address any opportunities to regenerate the Island's woodlot through a thinning and/or replanting program and mitigate any climate impacts and threats of disease and infestation, coastal erosion, blow downs and fires.

The plan will attempt to document and identify all biological species living on the island. When addressing the biodiversity of the island, the plan will address any threats to any part of the island such as climate change, pollution, habitat loss, overexploitation of species and invasive species.

## vi. Heritage and Culture

Ministers island is a designated national and provincial historic site and is protected through legislation (i.e. New Brunswick Parks Act and the New Brunswick Heritage Conservation Act). VHEMI will work with provincial and federal authorities to protect the island's historical assets. This work will include the ongoing identification and protection of archeologically significant sites, the proper curation of historical artifacts, and the restoration and maintenance of the historic buildings on the island. Specifically, the following actions will be undertaken in concert with VHEMI's partners:



- 1) Identification and protection of the island's archeological sites.
- 2) Creation of a **Museum and Curation Policy**.
- 3) The development of a multi-year Historic **Building Restoration and Maintenance Plan**.
- 4) Ensure the furnishings and overall décor of Covenhoven and other historic buildings are authentic to the time periods involved.

## vii. Tourism and Recreation

VHEMI recognizes Ministers Island offers visitors a unique blend of opportunities. Visitors have the opportunity to learn about human use of the island, including the eras of Indigenous, Loyalist and Sir William Van Horne occupations. Others may decide to pursue the various recreational opportunities the island offers, such as walking, running or biking the trails, exploring the island's abundant and diverse flora and fauna, or boating and kayaking around the island. Others may visit to simply enjoy the natural scenic beauty of the island. VHEMI is committed to ensuring this unique blend of opportunities is protected and promoted for both current and future generations. VHEMI will work with local, provincial, and federal leaders with expertise in these areas in the pursuit of a **Tourism and Recreation Growth Plan** that builds on this unique blend of public offerings.

One of the primary goals of the **Tourism and Recreation Growth Plan** will be to recover from the recent and pre-Covid decline in visitation rates. The plan calls for setting specific visitation targets, improvements in programming, and enhancing visitor satisfaction levels. Following are the key elements of the **Tourism and Recreation Growth Plan**.

The following visitation targets for Ministers Island will be pursued and measured.

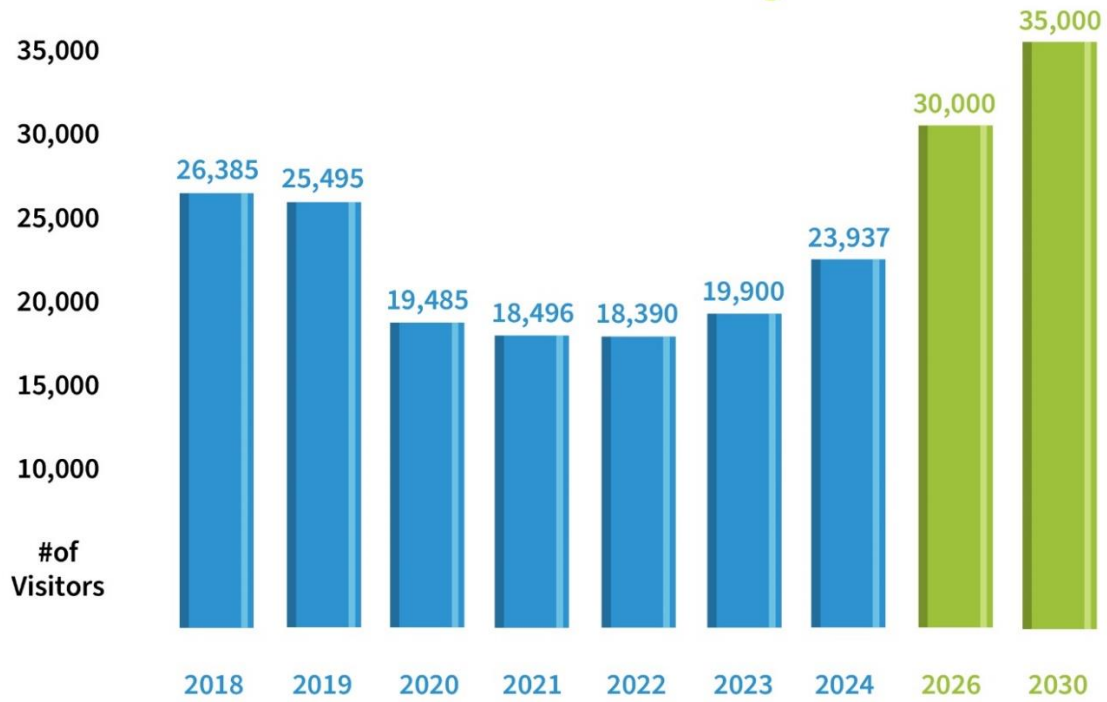
- 30,000 visitations by the end of the 2026/27 season (2-year target)
- 35,000 visitations by the end of the 2029/30 season (5-year target).

The chart on the next page illustrates the past visitation trends along with the Tourism Growth Plan's two-year and five-year visitation targets.





### Visitations: Actual and Targeted







In order to achieve the identified visitation targets, VHEMI will pursue the following specific initiatives:

Refreshing the island’s historical and cultural displays on an ongoing basis.	Targeted promotions for cruise and travel trade (bus) tours.
New programming offering experiential and regeneration visitation opportunities.	A robust special events program, including music, exhibitions and festivals.
New programming aimed at families and children.	High tide access with off-island staging area.
New eco-tourism opportunities showcasing the island’s natural environment.	An improved showcasing of the Indigenous history of the island in collaboration with the local Indigenous leaders and the community.
A higher emphasis on maintaining, improving and promoting the use of the island’s trail system, including special trail-related events.	A new Welcome and Exhibition Centre with space for exhibits, ticketing, offices and washrooms and to facilitate the on-island movement of people.
Use of digital technologies to improve visitor experience.	Improved landscaping.
Repurposing of some of the historic buildings for tourism purposes, as appropriate.	Improved alignment and coordination of VHEMI’s marketing and promotion activities with local, regional and provincial partners and authorities.
An improved system to monitor visitor satisfaction <b>levels</b> .	Aligning all business plan pillars to the achievement of the visitation targets, including the curation and showcasing of historical artifacts, restoration of the historic buildings, and the education and agriculture programs.
Improved signage and enhanced island access during busy times.	Protecting and promoting the island’s green spaces.



### **viii. Agriculture**

Sir William Van Horne's Van Horne's innovative agricultural accomplishments of the past will play a more prominent role in interpretive talks and promotional efforts. VHEMI will also seek to partner with local indigenous community to showcase indigenous husbandry practices of the past. VHEMI will also seek to reestablish a number of Van Horne's agriculture pursuits, such as an orchard and vegetable garden. In keeping with Van Horne's legacy of innovative agricultural greenhouse practices, VHEMI will pursue funding to build a modern greenhouse facility and conduct innovative agriculture research and development activities with and in support of the local agriculture community. Other agriculture pursuits will also be explored, such as the growing of hops to support New Brunswick's growing craft beer industry.

### **ix. Education and Training**

VHEMI will identify and implement a series of education and learning programs and opportunities on the island consistent with the themes of innovation, history and environmental stewardship. VHEMI will also explore with provincial school authorities the opportunity to showcase the history and culture of Ministers Island through

videos designed for classroom use. This initiative will include the Indigenous heritage of the island as well as the role of Sir William Van Horne in building the CPR transcontinental railway.

### **x. Leadership, Management and Administration**

VHEMI will ensure the organization has the right blend of leadership and organizational capacity to meet the requirements of the Business Plan. This includes ensuring the Board of Directors is diverse and experienced in the areas of VHEMI's responsibilities, as well as ensuring that VHEMI's staffing complement is able to deliver on the key pillars of the plan.

VHEMI is committed to Improving the level and quality of digital connectivity and communications on the island. Such improvements are a prerequisite to diversifying programming opportunities, as well as improving on island communications and efficient allocation of resources.

In addition, in recognition of the fact that leadership also comes by way of volunteerism, VHEMI will ensure it has the capacity to coordinate the significant number of community volunteers who consistently support the variety of activities on Ministers



Island, whether they be helping with island tours, trails maintenance and management, environmental stewardship or special events.

A prerequisite to the success of this Business Plan is ensuring the provincial government provides VHEMI with a fair annual operating grant and annual capital budget to ensure the long-term sustainability of both the island operations and the preservation of island's historic assets. At the same time, VHEMI will commit to more active fundraising efforts and campaigns to support its efforts to offer meaningful and sustainable programming on the island.

### C. INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT PLAN

VHEMI will work with its provincial and federal partners to pursue a multi-year **Historic Buildings Restoration Program** with a view to ensuring the buildings currently on the island remain available to future generations to enjoy.

With respect to *new* infrastructure, VHEMI will continue to promote the need for a strategic parking area on the mainland to facilitate the provision of high tide access using a shuttle watercraft to and from the island. The provision of high tide access is becoming of increasing importance, both in terms of pursuing improved

financial stability, but also in relation to rising sea levels and related storm damages potentially rendering the Bar Road unavailable for use in the future. We will also continue to advocate for a new Welcome and Exhibit Centre, similar to those available to other tourism venues such as Kings Landing and Hopewell Rocks, to facilitate visitation growth, improve visitor experiences, and facilitate on-island movement of people and vehicles.

The historic building assets, along with those new infrastructure assets required to facilitate tourism growth on the island, are identified in the chart below, entitled: **Six Year Asset Management Plan for Ministers Island.**

As noted earlier, in addition to the infrastructure assets outlined in the six-year asset management chart below, in the months ahead VHEMI will be exploring the potential of re-establishing a viable role for agriculture on the island. This process will include the identification of any new infrastructure that may be required, such as climate-controlled greenhouses, laboratory space, and other such requirements. These potential investment requirements are not currently reflected in the chart below and will be pursued through alternative funding sources.



## MINISTERS ISLAND SIX-YEAR ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN

INFRASTRUCTURE ASSET	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	RATIONALE / RETURN ON INVESTMENT
<b>Covenhoven Roof and Interior Walls</b>	600,000 Underway	TBD	TBD	TBD	-	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protect historical furnishings, artifacts &amp; interior walls and floors</li> <li>Improve tourism experience and revenue flows</li> </ul>
<b>Heat in Covenhoven</b>	80,000 Underway		-	-	-	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protect historical furnishings, artifacts, interior</li> <li>Extend tourism into spring and fall</li> <li>Improve tourism experience and revenue flows</li> </ul>
<b>Ministers House</b>	150,000 Underway	150,000	-	-	-	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete restoration</li> <li>Improve tourism experience and revenue flows</li> </ul>
<b>High Tide Access Staging Area</b>	TBD (Option to Purchase Land)	TBD Purchase Land	500,000 Develop Parking Area	500,000 Develop Parking Area		-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accommodate future high tide access - Secure land <b>currently</b> available for sale - Protect bar road from increasing traffic - Rising sea levels may prevent future use of bar road</li> </ul>
<b>Creamery</b>	-	400,000	-	-	-	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restoration required.</li> <li>Repurpose to food outlet to enhance tourism experience and revenue flows</li> </ul>
<b>Gardeners Cottage</b>	-	-	550,000	-	-	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restoration required.</li> <li>Repurpose for overnight accommodation for staff &amp; security and safety reasons</li> </ul>



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<b>Gardeners Greenhouses</b>	-	-	-	400,000	-	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restoration required.</li> <li>Potential to grow products to provide tourists with agriculture experience.</li> </ul>
<b>Carriage House</b>	-		300,000	300,000	-	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restoration required.</li> <li>Improve tourism experience</li> </ul>
<b>Bathhouse</b>				75,000	-	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> </ul>
<b>Windmill</b>	-	-	-	250,000	-	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restoration required.</li> <li>Improve tourism experience</li> </ul>
<b>Gas House</b>	-	-	-	-	150,000	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restoration required.</li> <li>Improve tourism experience</li> </ul>
<b>Welcome and Exhibit Centre</b>	-	-	-	-	1,500,000	1,500,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve tourism experience and people flow</li> <li>Venue to showcase indigenous heritage and artifacts</li> </ul>
<b>New Maintenance Building and Vault</b>	-	-	400,000		-	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Storage of grounds equipment/materials</li> </ul>
<b>Garage</b>	-	-	-	25,000			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Storage of vehicles</li> </ul>
<b>Tidal Pool</b>	-	-	-	-	-	50,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restoration required</li> <li>Revenue source as tourism bathing experience</li> </ul>
<b>TOTAL INVESTMENT / FISCAL YEAR</b>	830,000	550,000	1,750,000	1,550,000	1,550,000	1,550,000	<b>All costs are estimates only and subject to more detailed pricing and tendering results.</b>



## D. PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

The Six-Year Business Plan for Ministers Island requires strong relationships with a number of the island's key partners, including provincial and federal governments, the Town of Saint Andrews, local First Nation leaders, other local tourism operators, and local community and business leaders. VHEMI commits to collaborating with all these partners to ensure Ministers Island reaches its full potential. Just as importantly, VHEMI will count on its many volunteers to help achieve the goals and objectives of the Business Plan. Specifically, VHEMI will count on the support of the following organizations:

***Town of Saint Andrews and other local civic leaders in the area***

***Local First Nation leaders***

***Local community and private sector leaders and organizations, including local tourism entities***

***Southwest NB Service Commission***

***Explore Saint Andrews***

***Saint Andrews Chamber of Commerce***

***Provincial Agencies – NB Departments of: Tourism, Heritage, and Culture; Agriculture, Fisheries and Aquaculture; Post Secondary Education and Labour; Education and Early Childhood Education; Environment and Local Government; Natural Resources and Energy Development***

***Federal Agencies (ACOA / Agriculture Canada / Parks Canada / Heritage Canada)***

## E. SUMMARY OF KEY IDEAS

It is important to underline that all six pillars are important and mutually inclusive. For example, current and future generations will benefit from and enjoy witnessing the inter-relationship between all the pillars. If all involved continue to embrace innovation as an underlying principle, the future of Ministers Island will indeed be bright and secure.

**Chart 1** below summarizes, at a high level, some of the key go forward ideas related to the above noted pillars. In all cases, more details will be forthcoming as the Business Plan is implemented in the ensuing years. However, the chart is provided for easy reference and for tracking and accountability purposes:



**Chart 1: Key Ideas Related to the Six Pillars**

**ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

**KEY GOAL**

**RELATED OBJECTIVE**

**RELATED BUSINESS**

Develop environmental sustainability and resource management plans for the island.	To protect the island’s land and marine ecosystems.	Engage the island’s key partners and stakeholders in designing and implementing the subject plans.
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**HERITAGE AND CULTURE**

**KEY GOAL**

**RELATED OBJECTIVES**

**RELATED BUSINESS**

Preserve the culture and heritage of the island for future generations.	To identify and protect the island’s heritage and culture.	Engage the island’s key partners and stakeholders in designing and implementing the subject plans.  Collaborate closely with the First Nation leadership in the design and implementation of Indigenous related plans and activities.
	To identify and protect the island’s archeological sites.	
	To preserve and protect the island’s historical artifacts and assets.	
	To restore and maintain the historical buildings.	

**TOURISM**

**KEY GOAL**

**RELATED OBJECTIVE**

**RELATED BUSINESS**

Promote and showcase the island to the public.	To attract new visitors and increase the level of revisitations.	Complete the restoration of the island’s historic buildings, including the provision of a new roof for and heat in Covenhoven.
		Carry out an authentic refurbishment program for Covenhoven consistent with the Van Horne era.
		Repurpose historic buildings, where appropriate (Creamery / Gardeners Cottage).



**EDUCATION & TRAINING**

		Collaborate with First Nation leaders on how best to showcase the Indigenous heritage of the island to the public.
	<b>KEY GOAL</b>	<b>RELATED OBJECTIVE</b>
	Offer education and training experiences on the island.	To develop and offer an education outreach program to the public school system and public at large with a focus on innovation, history and environmental stewardship.
		<b>RELATED BUSINESS</b>
		Engage local people in the design and implementation of the program.

**AGRICULTURE**

	<b>KEY GOALS</b>	<b>RELATED OBJECTIVE</b>	<b>RELATED BUSINESS</b>
	Explore the potential to establish an experimental agriculture research and demonstration activity.	To build on Sir William van Horne’s agriculture legacy.	Continue to explore the feasibility of meaningful agriculture activities on the island.
	Explore other agriculture related activities such as an annual corn maze, apple orchard, hops cultivation, community garden, animal husbandry.		

**LEADERSHIP, MANAGEMENT ADMINISTRATION**

	Provide the leadership and organization required to deliver the Business Plan	To build the required organizational capacity.	Provide cost effective management and oversight of island operations.
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## F. MISSION CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

VHEMI considers the following outcomes to be critical for the Business Plan to succeed:

- 1) Ongoing community engagement and partnership development.
- 2) Achieving the targeted visitation numbers and tracking visitor satisfaction levels.
- 3) Action plans for each of the six pillars.
- 4) Delineation of areas requiring protection for cultural, heritage and/or archeological reasons.
- 5) Identification of historical buildings eligible for repurposing.
- 6) A Historical Buildings Restoration Plan.
- 7) A plan for high tide access.
- 8) Appropriate operating and capital investment support from the provincial government.

## G. BUDGET REQUIREMENTS, VALUE PROPOSITION AND RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Ministers Island is a significant asset to the local community, province and country as a whole. It has been designated a ***national and provincial historic site*** and boasts a rich heritage worthy of protecting and showcasing

to the public. Like the rest of Saint Andrews, it is set in a jewel of an environment and offers visitors an opportunity to learn and be refreshed.

VHEMI's operations are funded through a blend of an annual grant from the province, membership and visitation revenues, and various one-time grants or loans. VHEMI is counting on an enhanced level of annual grant support from the province to ensure it has the organizational capacity to deliver this strategic plan. In return, VHEMI offers a cost-effective management model for the province.

Restoration and maintenance of the island's historic buildings are funded through a blend of province's capital budget program, federal infrastructure investments, and community fund raising activities. The proposed *Historic Buildings Restoration Program* is counting on an enhanced level of financial support from its provincial and federal partners as well as a multi-year commitment consistent with the island's national and provincial historic site status. These investments and commitments are imperative to ensuring no further deterioration of the island's historic assets occur.

With respect to return on investment, all parties noted above recognize that any investment in Ministers Island is an investment in both current and future generations.



## H. FINAL REMARKS

VHEMI is a not-for-profit, community-based organization mandated through its 25-year lease with the province of New Brunswick to oversee the management, restoration and operation of Ministers Island. VHEMI's current Board of Directors is committed to providing the leadership and building the required organizational capacity and delivering on this strategic plan in the interests of the existing community and future generations. As the local custodian of the island, VHEMI will continue to rely on its primary partner, the NB Department of Tourism, Heritage and Culture for strategic advice, technical support and base funding. As most people in the local and regional community will attest, the potential of Ministers Island is high. In this context, having an multi year Business Plan for Ministers Island founded on community and environmental values that the local people and indigenous leaders will actively support is a recipe for success.

