

# HEART'S CONTENT MIZZEN HERITAGE SOCIETY



## Visitor Experience Plan

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In January 2023, Heart's Content Mizzen Heritage Society initiated planning efforts to update museum exhibits and enhance the experience of their visitors. This Visitor Experience Plan is the result of a collaborative effort by a number of individuals.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To further the objectives of the Heart's Content Mizzen Heritage Society (HCMHS), Octopus Consulting (OC) was contracted to create a comprehensive plan for improvement of the visitor experience and interpretive assets of the society.

In preparation for UNESCO World Heritage Site designation, the Heart's Content Community Development Organization was established to create a vision for the future development of the community and its heritage assets. They engaged the services of Mills and Wright Landscape Architecture and Jane Severs Interpretive Planning, and worked alongside other community stakeholders, including the Mizzen Heritage Society, the Town of Heart's Content, Provincial Historic Sites and HeritageNL, to produce the *Heart's Content Interpretive Framework and Landscape Development Plan* (June 2021).

This document is intended to further the Mills, Wright and Severs Plan specifically as it relates to the heritage assets of HCMHS, with focus on the rebranded Heart's Content Heritage Centre (HCHC)<sup>1</sup>, formerly the Mizzen Heritage Museum. The purpose of this document is to guide the next phase of this project as HCMHS moves towards implementing new visitor experiences. It is divided into four sections:

## Section I

The first section details the mission, mandate and management goals of HCMHS, the resources available to move the project forward and the parameters that may need to be overcome to achieve success. This includes:

- Create world class experiences reflective of visitor expectations of a UNESCO Heritage Site
- Modernize visitor experience offerings and develop programs, events and activities for both tourists and the local community
- Work towards increased visitation and revenue generation
- Address pedestrian safety concerns

## Section II

This section includes an overview of the characteristics of target audiences and the implications of these characteristics for developing suitable tourism products, and identifies the interpretive goal and themes to be explored:

### Audience

- Product offerings will be aimed at both resident and non-resident visitors
- Non-resident visitors are primarily from other parts of Canada, with nearly half from Ontario
- The majority of non-resident visitors are age 55 or older, well-educated and travel as a couple without children.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a working name and should be finalized by HCMHS in consultation with a professional marketing team and in conjunction with the development of a brand identity.

- Families travelling with children represent a significant segment of the resident traveller market

## Interpretive Goal

After exploring Heart's Content interpretive offerings, visitors will feel connected to the character of the community and understand how its unique history shaped the lived experiences of people past and present.

## Themes

- Themes and supporting stories will be arranged to tie together tourist assets throughout the town to encourage visitors to freely explore and discover a more complete picture of Heart's Content.
- Topics represented should relate to typical daily experiences and supporting stories should give insight into the complexities of everyday life.
- Stories selected need to be relatable and emotionally engaging and they should focus on specific people placed within the broader historical context.
- It is important that the interpretation presented does not overlap or compete with exhibits at the Cable Station, but instead complements existing assets to present a more holistic story of the community.

## Section III

Section III describes the visitor journey:

### Trip Planning

- Create a recognizable brand identity
- Develop and implement a comprehensive marketing strategy
- Maintain an attractive and up-to-date digital presence
- Distribute well-designed print material through Visitor Information Centres and tourism partners

### Arrival

- Ensure that wayfinding signage is attractive and well-maintained and that digital wayfinding tools are kept up-to-date
- Complete renovations to the Heart's Content Heritage Centre to improve the arrival experience for visitors
- Employ trained and knowledgeable staff to provide personalized service to visitors

### Core Experience

- Tell stories using a mix of static interpretive panels, interactive digital content, audio and vid-

eo elements and select artifacts that support the interpretive theme

- Focus content on people and places and allow stories to be voiced by community members as much as possible through the use of audio, video and printed quotes
- Be conscious of limited space within the Heart's Content Heritage Centre and strive for a less is more approach to interpretation
- Utilize the centre to peak visitor interest and encourage them to explore more of the community through add-on experiences that dive deeper into the stories of Heart's Content

## **Exit**

- Ensure knowledgeable staff are available to encourage further exploration of Heart's Content and to address visitor questions or concerns
- Offer visitors the opportunity to purchase unique, high-quality products that align with brand identity and compliment the interpretive experience
- Encourage visitors to give feedback and review their experience online

## **Add-on Experience: Walking Tours**

- Encourage visitors to stay longer and experience more
- Allow visitors to become better acquainted with the sense of place and unique cultural heritage of the community
- Tours can be offered in a variety of formats:
  - Digital Story App downloaded onto visitor's phone that delivers content based on GPS location
  - Self-guided tour directed with a printed map and interpretive signage placed at key locations in the community
  - Guided tours offered in partnership with local guide

## **Add-on Experience: Programs and Activities**

- Develop a schedule of programs and activities that compliment the interpretive experience
- Offer activities marketed to resident visitors and local families seeking experiences that multiple generations can enjoy together
- Develop programs that appeal to the local community to keep them engaged and give them reasons to return

## **Section IV**

The final section recommends a phased approach to implementation:

- Phase 1: Planning
- Phase 2: Development

- Phase 3: Fabrication
- Phase 4: Installation
- Phase 5: Marketing and Promotion

# SECTION I

## 1.1 Mission, Motto & Mandate

### Mission

The mission of the Heart's Content Mizzen Heritage Society is to preserve, protect, collect and present the history and culture of Heart's Content for all present and future generations.

### Motto

Looking back to our future.

### Mandate

- To be the primary agent for the assembly and preservation of the history and culture of Heart's Content. To collect and preserve historical artifacts and information for display and storage in the museum and archives room.
- To maintain the Mizzen Heritage Museum and property, the Heart's Content Regional Centre for the Arts and property, the Rendell Forge property and the Archives Room at the Town Hall in a clean, safe and inviting condition.
- To raise funds to help enable the achievement of our mandate.
- To promote interest in, and knowledge of, the history and culture of Heart's Content through annual Heritage Days, displays at our museum, programming at our Centre for the Arts and the Rendell Forge, and through other activities that contribute towards achieving our mission.
- To work cooperatively with all other groups in the community with similar objectives to ours.
- To interact with and seek input and guidance from the community.
- To partner and cooperate with professional and amateur arts and heritage organizations and other groups with similar interests.
- To create, produce and/or present works in dance, theatre, music, visual arts or media arts.

## 1.2 Management Goals

- Modernize visitor experience offerings
- Increase visitation of resident and non-resident tourists
- Develop programs, events and activities for both tourists and the local community
- Promote tourism and hospitality destinations on the Baccalieu Coastal Drive
- Integrate the Heart's Content Heritage Centre experience with heritage sites and activities available in the community to create a complementary product that will encourage visitors to



stay longer

- Work towards travel trade readiness in preparation for opportunities that will result from receiving UNESCO World Heritage status
- Become a self-sustainable operation through revenue streams identified in the *Mizzen Centre Estimated Visitor Volumes, Revenues and Cash Flow* report by Jane Severs (October 2022)

### 1.3 Parameters

- Highway safety concerns for pedestrians
- Available financial resources
- Significant rehabilitation and upgrading to the Mizzen building required
- Limited interior space available
- Reliance on volunteers

### 1.4 Resources

- Volunteers and notable characters of the community
- Strong membership with active engagement
- Town of Heart's Content Mizzen Heritage Society Archives (photos, books, video and audio) and artifact collections
- *Interpretive Framework and Landscape Development Plan* completed by Mills and Wright Landscape Architects and Jane Severs Interpretive Planning (2021)
- *Mizzen Centre Estimated Visitor Volumes, Revenues and Cash Flow* report by Jane Severs (October 2022)

## SECTION II

### 2.1 Audience

The target audience for Heart's Content Heritage Centre and associated attractions includes resident and non-resident tourists. The local community, while part of the resident market segment, should also be given special consideration to ensure there are opportunities for continued engagement.

*The data included below is sourced from the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation.*

#### Non-Resident

According to the Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation, Newfoundland and Labrador's non-resident market is composed primarily of travelers from other parts of Canada, with 85% of travellers coming from Canada in 2022 and almost half of those visitors (43%) coming from Ontario. The majority of travellers coming from other parts of Canada and abroad are age 55 or older, well-educated and travel as a couple without children.

**Characteristic:** In 2022, just over half (58%) of non-resident travellers were age 55 or older, and 52% of those visitors were 65 plus

**Implication:** Tourism products should cater to an aging demographic

**Characteristic:** One-third (30% in 2022) of non-resident travellers are seniors (age 65+)

**Implication:** Appropriate considerations should be made, including implementing accommodations for mobility challenges and following best practices for accessible design (font sizes, colours, etc.)

**Characteristic:** Aging demographics may be less comfortable using technology

**Implication:** The visitor experience should not be diminished if technological components are not embraced

**Characteristic:** The majority (53% in 2016) of domestic visitors travel as a couple without children

**Implication:** Children are not a significant part of the target market for non-resident visitors and products should focus on offering experiences for adults

- Characteristic:** Tourists are increasingly conscious of their impact on the environment
- Implication:** Environmental sustainability and longevity of material selected for fabrication of displays should be considered. Retail products must be ethically sourced and focus on offering locally produced, unique and high quality items
- Characteristic:** Non-resident tourists are seeking cultural experiences, with history and heritage. Lighthouses, historic sites, world heritage sites, museum and galleries are among the most sought-after places to visit
- Implication:** With all of these assets, Heart's Content is well-positioned to offer these experiences to tourists
- Characteristic:** The primary non-resident target audience is more likely to choose quality over quantity
- Implication:** Emphasis should be placed on ensuring high quality products and experiences are being offered and that branding and promotional efforts are of equal caliber
- Characteristic:** Visitors to Newfoundland and Labrador are increasingly interested in the well-being of the locals and communities they travel to
- Implication:** It is important that the community supports the development of tourism products and are provided with opportunities for engagement

## Resident Market

Similar to the non-resident market, Newfoundland and Labrador's resident tourism market includes couples travelling without children (36% in 2022), Residents travelling with children have also been identified as a significant travel segment with one in five residents travelling with children under 17 in 2022. The remainder of residents are travelling alone, with friends or with other family members (adult children, parents, grandparents and other relations).

- Characteristic:** Parents of young children have specific needs
- Implication:** Must consider accommodating strollers, changing stations, and seating areas where appropriate
- Characteristic:** Families traveling with children will seek experiences that can be enjoyed by the whole family
- Implication:** Ensure there are opportunities to engage families through programs, activities and events that provide a venue for families to create memorable experiences

**Characteristic:** Almost half of all resident tourists (48% in 2022) visited a hiking or walking trail during their trip

**Implication:** Ensure that hiking and walking opportunities are available and well-promoted to attract visitors to the area

**Characteristic:** Financial concerns are a primary barrier to travel as residents are increasingly conscious of rising costs

**Implication:** Travellers will be attracted to special packages and deals that enhance the perceived value. Daytrip itineraries targeted to the surrounding area should also be offered to reduce costs associated with overnight travel

**Characteristic:** Resident have a wide array of attractive destination choices in the province

**Implication:** Complete packages that include meals, accommodations and activities will reduce friction of travel planning and enhance perceived value of the destination

**Characteristic:** Local communities will tire of static product offerings

**Implication:** A variety of changing programs, events and activities targeted to locals should be offered throughout the season/year

## 2.2 Interpretive Goal and Themes

### Interpretive Goal

After exploring Heart's Content interpretive offerings, visitors will feel connected to the character of the community and understand how its unique history shaped the lived experiences of people past and present.

### Themes

The interpretive experiences offered by Heart's Content Mizzen Heritage Society will tell the stories of the people of Heart's Content prior to the establishment of the Cable Station in 1866 and explore how the presence of the Cable Station influenced the lives of residents for generations thereafter. The unique history of Heart's Content distinguishes it from other outport communities in the 19th and 20th centuries, and now presents opportunity to differentiate its common stories from others presented throughout the province. Topics explored will relate to typical daily experiences and supporting stories will give insight into the complexities of everyday life. Stories selected need to be relatable and emotionally engaging and should be focused on specific people placed within the broader historical context.

It is important that the interpretation presented does not overlap or compete with exhibits at the Cable Station, but should instead complement it to present a more holistic story of the community. Themes and supporting stories will be arranged to tie together tourist assets throughout the town to encourage visitors to freely explore and discover a more complete picture of Heart's Content.

## SECTION III

### 3.1 The Visitor Journey

Developing new tourism experiences requires consideration of all aspects of the travellers' journey, from the time they begin to plan their trip until they return home and talk about their vacation experiences.

#### Trip Planning

Newfoundland and Labrador's award-winning marketing campaigns have positioned the province high on travellers' lists of places to visit. During the trip-planning phase, tourists make decisions about which communities they will visit and what experiences they want to take part in. To stand out amongst the numerous options, it is recommended that HCMHS develop a distinct tourism-focused brand identity, as well as a comprehensive marketing strategy to promote new opportunities as they are implemented. An essential component of marketing tourism products and experiences to travellers is quality branding: to showcase good value for money spent, and to meet the understanding that travellers are seeking quality over quantity. A recognizable brand identity will create a cohesive experience for visitors and tie together heritage assets throughout the community.

Trip planning primarily happens online, this means that digital presence needs to be attractive and provide visitors with relevant up-to-date information including location, hours of operation, product offerings and associated costs. A new website marketed to visitors, distinct from the Mizzen Heritage Society website, should include a path to purchase to allow tourists to make the commitment to visit by booking online or purchasing tickets in advance.

The provincial tourism website ([newfoundlandandlabrador.com](http://newfoundlandandlabrador.com)) is a key planning tool for travellers and it is important to ensure all products and experiences available in Heart's Content are represented on the province's website and that the information is current. Social media, primarily Facebook, Instagram and Trip Advisor, can be utilized to promote Heart's Content as a destination. Representation on these platforms should be consistent with the brand identity and in line with best practices to ensure that a quality impression of the community and its offerings are being presented.

Well-designed print materials should be made available at Visitor Information Centres across the province and provided to the local Destination Marketing Organization (Legendary Coasts of Eastern Newfoundland) for distribution at trade shows. Brochures can also be traded with local accommodators and tourism operators on the Baccalieu Coastal Drive to encourage cross promotion.

## Media:

- Website
- Social media
- Online listings (ie. newfoundlandandlabrador.com)
- Targeted online advertising
- Printed tourism literature (ie. pamphlet/brochure)

## Arrival

Presently, visitors to Heart's Content are arriving via personal transportation or bus tours. Attractive, clearly marked signage is important to provide a frictionless travel experience. Signage should be strategically located, well-designed and properly maintained. Digital wayfinding tools must be kept up-to-date on the website, social media pages, TripAdvisor and Google business listings.

Once visitors arrive in Heart's Content, signage will direct them to the Heart's Content Heritage Centre. Following planned renovations outlined in the *Heart's Content Interpretive Framework & Landscape Development Plan (2021)*, the exterior of the building will include a formalized parking lot and patio space with planter beds and vegetation for relaxation and programming. Walkways will guide visitors to the accessible entrance at the back of the building.

Inside, visitors will be greeted by professionally trained and knowledgeable staff. Clear signage will indicate admission fees, WIFI information, unique social media tags (ex. #MyHeartsContentNL), and the location of clean, well-maintained and fully accessible washrooms. Staff will give personalized service to visitors, providing information about additional experience offerings in the community and other nearby attractions. There is opportunity to partner with nearby tourism operators to offer joint ticket options or create package offers that encourage longer stays in Heart's Content and/or further exploration of the Baccalieu Coastal Drive.

As a community heritage centre, it is important to consider community access and engagement. Providing Heart's Content residents with free admission would encourage repeat visitation and allow barrier-free access to local heritage assets, making it easier for the community to feel welcomed and comfortable in the space.

## Media

- Wayfinder signage
- Mobile site
- Brochures/maps
- Face-to-Face with trained staff

## Core Experience

The Heart's Content Heritage Centre experience will be designed to tell stories of Heart's Content that provide visitors with insight into the character of the community and its unique history. Stories will be presented through a mix of static interpretive panels, interactive digital content, audio and video elements and select artifacts that support the interpretive theme(s). Design of all elements should be in line with best practices to ensure accessibility for visitors with visual impairment, hearing impairment, reduced mobility or neurodivergent needs.

Content should focus on people and places, with stories voiced by the community as much as possible through the use of video, audio and printed quotes. Visitors are interested in community knowledge and lived experience. They are most engaged when they are emotionally stimulated and able to connect with the content presented. Community histories should be revealed through the experiences of the people that lived it. While topics selected and supporting stories will be directed at outsiders, it is important for residents to feel accurately represented and feel ownership of the results of the project. This will require delicate negotiation when planning the presentation of any stories of the community that may be considered controversial.

With limited space available inside the building, the incorporation of digital content can provide opportunities to enhance the quality of content offered to visitors. Interactive elements will allow those with greater interest to dig deeper into the topic(s) that specifically intrigue them. Content can be presented via user-friendly screens on site and/or QR codes that link to online content. For both digital and printed displays, it is important to be mindful of the risk of information overload and avoid presenting excess of content that will deter visitors from engaging at all.

A "less is more" approach is key to success for the Heritage Centre. It will be impossible to tell all the stories of Heart's Content, however the centre offers an opportunity to peak interest in topics that can be explored deeper through add-on experiences discussed below. HCHC can be presented as the introductory chapter to the greater story of Heart's Content that is told throughout the town. This will encourage visitation of other sites promoted by the HCMHS and give visitors further reason to extend their stay in the area.

### Media:

- Storyboards
- Interactive digital content
- Audio/Video
- Artifacts

## Exit

As visitors complete their experience inside the Heritage Centre, professionally trained and knowledgeable staff will be available to provide recommendations that encourage visitors to stay longer in the area, direct visitors to other attractions on the Baccalieu Coastal Drive, and offer other relevant personalized information. This is also an appropriate time to encourage visitors to



leave a review (on sites such as TripAdvisor, Google and Facebook) and share their experience on social media using a unique hashtag. This information should also be included on any orientation or promotional materials handed out to visitors.

A small gift shop will give both travellers and locals the opportunity to purchase unique products and locally made crafts. Products selected for sale should be seen as an extension of the visitor experience and curated in consultation with an experienced retail professional. It should be ensured that products align with brand identity and compliment the interpretive experience. Focus should be placed on high-quality, locally produced items with unique stories attached and be mindful that tourists are increasingly conscious of their impact on the environment when making purchasing decisions.

**Media:**

- Face-to-face with trained staff
- Printed materials/tourism pamphlets
- Retail products

## Add-on Experiences

### Walking Tours

Walking tours give visitors the opportunity to explore a small community and take part in the outdoor experiences they are seeking. As visitors move around the community, they increase their chance of making authentic connections with locals and are more likely to visit and support local businesses. Walking tours would allow visitors to become better acquainted with the sense of place and unique cultural heritage of the community, and would also give them a reason to stay longer in the community.

Wayfinding signage, digital resources and printed literature should allow visitors to easily navigate the community and effortlessly locate attractions, amenities and services. Safety concerns for pedestrians must be taken into account and improvements should be considered a priority for enhancing the quality of these outdoor experiences while simultaneously enhancing the quality of life for local residents.

### Digital Story App Walking Tour

Digital story tour apps have been growing in popularity and allow users to engage with content while they actively explore the community. These apps are uniquely branded and GPS triggered to deliver subject matter based on the user's location. Content can be presented in the form of photos, video, audio and text and will complement and expand on stories found within the Heritage Centre. A wifi or cellular data connection is required to download the app, but once downloaded cellular service is not required to run the app.

Self-guided tours provide visitors with an opportunity for an outdoor experience and may be

particularly appealing for those seeking more independent activities in a post-pandemic world. The digital story app allows for visitor independence while still giving users a sense of place and personalized insight into the character of the community.

The app can be made available for purchase directly from the Google Play Store and Apple App Store or at the point-of-sale at the Heritage Centre.

### **Self-Guided Walking Tour**

Interpretive storyboards placed at significant locations throughout the community will also complement stories found at HCHC. These storyboards will provide an alternative independent outdoor experience for those who may not feel comfortable with digital tour technology.

Storyboards will be designed to match the recognizable brand identity to create a cohesive experience for visitors. A printed map indicating key locations should be made available for those interested in further exploration after their visit. For visitors who encounter storyboards without entering the Heritage Centre, a QR code could be added to direct them to the digital story app which they could purchase on their phones and/or direct them to visit the HCHC.

### **Guided Walking Tour**

Guided tours give visitors a chance for a more personal encounter as they engage in a face-to-face dialogic interpretive experience. It is recommended that Heart's Content Mizzen Heritage Society explore opportunities to partner with a local guide to offer tours of the community leaving from HCHC.

## **Programs and Activities**

A schedule of programs, activities and events offer the opportunity for a dynamic visit that complements the interpretive experience at the Heritage Centre and around the community. Hands-on activities can connect people to place and attract audiences seeking a more interactive experience.

Resident travellers with children, as well as local families, are seeking activities that multiple generations can enjoy together. Heart's Content Mizzen Heritage Society should target this market and develop programs aimed at children and families. It is recommended that HCMHS engage the local community to develop programs that interest them and rotate programs to give them a reason to come back. Opportunities to partner with other organizations to create special offers should be explored.

## 3.2 Implementation Plan

It is recommended that the Visitor Experience Plan be implemented as follows:

### Phase One

- Complete renovations to Heart's Content Heritage Centre
- Create brand identity
- Produce concept drawings

### Phase Two

- Conduct research and create digital content
- Develop content and complete design of interior interpretive displays
- Develop content and complete design of outdoor interpretive storyboards
- Complete wayfinding signage
- Source retail products that will be available for purchase in gift shop

### Phase Three

- Fabricate outdoor interpretive displays
- Fabricate indoor interpretive displays
- Fabricate wayfinding signage
- Create digital storytelling experience(s) delivered via mobile app
- Develop programming and schedule of activities

### Phase Four

- Install outdoor interpretive displays and wayfinding signage
- Install indoor interpretive displays
- Set up point-of-sale system, retail shop and interior wayfinding signage
- Undergo professional staff training

### Phase Five

- Implement marketing strategy

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