

## Tourism Advisory Committee September 18, 2014 – 2:00 p.m.

The Tourism Advisory Committee met on the above date at the Grey Roots Museum and Archives building with the following members in attendance:

Present: Don Braden, Chair, Delton Becker, Philip Allanson, Gary Gingras, and Suzanne Ainley

Regrets: Councillor Francis Richardson, Warden Brian Milne

### Staff

Present: Bryan Plumstead, Manager of Economic Development and Tourism; Allison Davies, Tourism Specialist; and Mary Jane Hills, Recording Secretary

## Call to Order

Mr. Braden called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

Allison Davies was introduced to the Committee members. Allison is taking over the position of Tourism Specialist for Heather Aljoe who is on maternity leave for the upcoming year. Allison is well known in the area for her photographic and writing skills.

## Declaration of Pecuniary Interest

There was none.

## Business Arising from the Minutes

*Tourism Advisory Committee Minutes dated May 8, 2014*

These minutes are for information only as they were adopted by the Planning and Community Development Committee on May 20, 2014 and by Grey County Council on June 3, 2014.

*Business Arising from the Minutes*

Mr. Plumstead updated the Committee on recent developments with the Transportation Master Plan as it pertains to tourism on Grey County roads.

Mr. Allanson provided an update on the Talisman property that has been purchased by a business group. Building remediation is underway, and the new owners have met with community members to discuss their plans for the property which is expected to open to the public in 2015.

## Report CCR-PCD-30-14 Information and Tourism Signage Plan

Mr. Plumstead spoke about the Signage Report that has recently been presented and accepted at two committees of Council. It will be presented to County Council at its next meeting for their consideration.

One of the final pieces of the signage plan is a plan for Grey County information and tourism signage. This signage would be based on the Regional Tourism Organization 7 signage manual. The purpose of the report is to contract services of a consultant to recommend a plan for implementation of information and tourism signage throughout the County.

One consideration may be to use Canadian Tourism-Oriented Directional Signing (TODS) signs on County roads, these signs are used on Provincial Highways and some municipalities where allowed. It was discussed how there would be some benefits and drawbacks to using this service. If the County looks after the signage, it will have control over the parameters of what is signed and where, with TODS, it will be at their discretion. It was noted how some tourism industry members have had excellent experiences with TODS and others have not.

It was suggested that roads under municipal jurisdiction should be encouraged to use the same design parameters as the County selects in order to keep continuity throughout the County and making it easier for drivers to find their way around.

## Tourism Update

### *Grey County Tourism*

Mrs. Davies reported on the latest tourism website analysis showing increases over the past year of users and visits by over 30%. Most users are from Ontario but there has been a notable increase in web visits from Quebec and British Columbia.

Staff has made a concerted effort to use more Social Media Paths (SMP) this year (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) and the summer students were very social media savvy which increased participation and viewer levels. This focus translated into large social media gains over the past year for the County's tourism events and attractions. It was suggested that Pinterest be investigated as a way to reach women with families as

they are usually the ones to make the decision related to where the family will travel. It was noted how youth is now trending away from Facebook, and moving to Instagram.

The new tourism website is getting closer to reality. Grey County IT staff is building the website pages and it is a huge job. Data clean-up is being undertaken as part of the project. Staff is looking at ways to set criteria for operators.

Mr. Plumstead spoke about overall summer visit results, and while there are no heavy statistics yet indications are that it has been inconsistent. It has been reported that numbers were soft in July, reasonably strong in August and quite good so far for September. Overall indications are that numbers are down slightly; maybe 10% and much of this can be attributed to a cool and wet summer.

The department sees the benefit of undertaking a dashboard type analysis within Grey County. It is hoped that some funding could be received from RTO7 to help with this expense. In the last three years, provincial statistics have been difficult to rely on locally since the sampling size is so small. Only 265 surveys were conducted on the last available year from the millions of visitors to Ontario.

It was suggested that more industry surveying be undertaken to get actual visit results. To be effective, it would need to be done by sector. While web analytics show trends, it is important to understand who is coming and what they are doing.

### *Regional Tourism Organization 7 (RTO7)*

RTO7 is currently undertaking strategic planning sessions. Overall there is a feeling of a better rapport between Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO) and RTO7 at this time.

### *Georgian Bay Destination Development Partnership (GBDDP)*

GBDDP is applying for a FedNor grant in hopes of being able to hire an intern to work and focus on programs to help this group move forward.

### *Changing Role of the Destination Marketing Organization (DMO):*

Mr. Plumstead shared recently released information from the Destination Marketing Association International on the changing role of the DMO. Over 100 partner and business members of this organization provided their input on what they feel are the most important trends for 2015 and beyond.

Of the topics covered, the ones that were identified as most important were social media prominence and mobile platforms and apps, followed closely by personalized travel experiences, brand impact, smart technology opportunities and geographic targeting and localization.

DMO marketing appears to be moving from push to pull marketing. It is important to get people to recognize that Grey County is a great place to vacation. Grey County needs to use and publicize the uniqueness of the area and the special offerings that are here, such as the escarpment.

It was discussed how small businesses can adapt quickly to these changing times, and the role the DMO can be to educate them on the trends taking place and how they can best adapt and use the trends to their advantage.

It was discussed how branding is not just the logo and tagline, it is the experience you associate with the brand. It's what you think about a place. A unique experience needs to be offered. It is important to connect a visitor's experience with a resident's quality of life.

It should be reiterated that tourism in this area has unlimited growth potential. When operators are successful they can pay their taxes. This can also lead to increased assessment from development. Agriculture taxes alone will not cover municipal expenses.

Tourism brings people and awareness to the area, and from this awareness a tourist may decide to relocate here. It was discussed how some young people are calling this area home now because of the lifestyle it offers. While jobs for young people are not plentiful, some have decided to make their own jobs in niche areas such as fine carpentry and craft brew houses.

Ideally DMOs want to be positioned as destination trailblazers where there is strong community engagement in an established destination. This is where the benefits of tourism are realized; and community and marketplace engagement is ongoing.

The full report will be shared with the Tourism Advisory Committee for their review.

### *Tourism Readiness*

A list of criteria for market readiness from Visit Niagara Canada was shared with the group. They have visitor ready, market ready and experience ready levels that would work well for Grey County. With the upcoming transfer of data to the new Grey County tourism website, there is a need to define tourism operations in the County. It was

discussed how a minimum criteria will need to be met to be listed on the new website, and then businesses that offer additional experiences would receive a higher level of recognition.

This type of criteria was used to identify operators for the Georgian Bay Destination Development Partnership website.

Our desire is to help operators reach the next level of criteria. One way to do this is to have them participate in educational opportunities such as the Grey Bruce Fall Tourism Conference. Another way could be for operators and their staff to take the online customer service training being created by RTO7. Better access to annual tourism statistics within Grey County at the grass root level could be obtained by implementing statistical reporting as part of the criteria levels.

For success, there should be consultation with local industry operators as they are engaged in the use of the new website.

The Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO) 2014 Tourism Summit is being held at Blue Mountain Resorts November 12 to 13. It would be great for members of this Committee to attend especially when it is being held in Grey County.

## Economic Development Update:

The Strategic Planning Sessions are underway with several focus groups being involved including tourism, small business, local food, creative economy, and municipal economic development officers. The consultants are putting together a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis. There will be themes and action items identified at the Summit being held in November that will be held with a group of business people and economic development community partners.

There has been very good participation in the surveys and focus groups, so expectations are that an accurate picture of what is happening will be delivered along with current needs of business, and action items Grey County can undertake.

## Next Meeting:

Today's meeting marks the end of the term of the current Tourism Advisory Committee. Volunteer members will be sought to work with Grey County Tourism for the upcoming 2015 to 2018 term. Please advise Bryan if you are interested in taking on a role with this Committee in the New Year. There will be two members from County Council sit on the Committee as has been the practice for this term.

Tourism Advisory Committee

September 18, 2014

The top priority for 2015 will be to set a new destination development plan for the Tourism Department and to implement that plan in the coming years.

On motion by Philp Allanson the meeting adjourned at 3:40 p.m.

Don Braden, Chair