



Committee Report

<i>To:</i>	<i>Chair Siegwart and Committee Members</i>
<i>Committee Date:</i>	<i>March 10, 2021</i>
<i>Subject / Report No:</i>	<i>EDTC-TAC-08-21</i>
<i>Title:</i>	<i>Q1 Tourism Workplan Priorities Update</i>
<i>Prepared by:</i>	<i>Bryan Plumstead, Manager of Tourism</i>
<i>Reviewed by:</i>	<i>Savanna Myers, Director of Economic Development, Tourism & Culture</i>
<i>Lower Tier(s) Affected:</i>	<i>All</i>
<i>Status:</i>	<i>Endorsed by the Tourism Advisory Committee through resolution TAC01-21; Adopted as presented by Committee of the Whole through resolution CW62-21; Endorsed by Grey County Council CC34-21</i>

Recommendation

- 1. That Report EDTC-TAC-08-21 regarding Q1 Tourism Workplan Priorities Update be received for information.*

Executive Summary

Implementation of the 2021 tourism workplan is underway. The Economic Development and Tourism Working Group continue to meet monthly. Several key items are progressing across all three priority areas of tourism infrastructure, investment, and marketing.

Background and Discussion

With the reorganization of tourism staff to further align portfolios with economic development and communications, the tourism workplan comprises the combined activities of the Manager of Tourism, Economic Development Officer – Tourism and Marketing and Communications Specialist, each focused on a pillar and described below.

Infrastructure

[Grey County's Cycling & Trails Master Plan](#) has been accepted by Council and the Manager of Tourism will be working with Transportation Services staff on implementation. This includes circulating the plan to member municipalities for endorsement, which is underway. At the same time staff will proceed with key recommendations from the plan; the formation of two Working Groups, one for on-road cycling and one for off-road trails, devising a cycling wayfinding signage plan, and applying for funding as it becomes available to install cycling signage on County Roads.

Under Tourism Infrastructure, a major focus for 2021 is to work with public land managers across Grey County to respond to the unprecedented demand for access to outdoor areas, with a top priority being to provide additional parking capacity where possible, working collaboratively on key communication messages including how to be a responsible visitor, and finally as health protocols permit, to tie natural area visitation to economic benefit to our communities and businesses. Grey County has posted two summer student positions for an Ambassador program this summer and is in discussions with other ambassador teams across Grey County to work collaboratively.

Grey County also just passed a [Wayfinding Policy](#) which pulls together the many disparate forms of signage into one policy document, including Grey County Tourism Oriented Destination Signage (GC TODS) which replaces the previous Rural Tourism Signage Policy. Council also accepted staff's recommendation to reimburse/write off payment of 2020 signage fees for Grey County's participating tourism businesses. The next step is to prioritize tourism signage for installation in 2021.

Using mobile data from 2019 and 2020, staff are looking at volume and segmentation changes from the 2019 baseline to 2020 visitation and using these insights to help plan for 2021, and specifically inform summer preparations and cycling implementation.

Investment

Grey County continues to assist tourism businesses with coaching and mentoring programs. To date five Grey County businesses have received ongoing coaching through the T3 program and eight tourism businesses have received coaching through the Catapult program. Staff also continues to support on-going requests for assistance from local tourism businesses and stakeholders via the Business Support Line.

In Fall of 2020, Grey County collaborated with Regional Tourism Marketing Organization 7 (RT07) to attract \$1.2 million dollars to help small and medium sized tourism businesses in Grey and Simcoe Counties and the cities of Barrie and Orillia. The COVID Tourism Response Fund opened on January 4, 2021 and received an incredible volume of applications for the highly competitive program. The program closed on January 31 and following an adjudication process with representation from Grey County, successful applicants have been awarded non-repayable financial support ranging from \$2,500 to \$20,000 dollars. At present, successful applicants are being contacted, agreements are being drawn up and final funding results on the projects and organizations that received funding will be released once all agreements are signed.

Staff are also beginning the business mix analysis project, beginning with West Grey. Meaford and Owen Sound have also indicated interest in the process. The goal is to understand the business mix in downtowns to develop a focus and marketing plan that builds on recently approved Community Improvement Plans (CIP).

Marketing

Grey County's newly redesigned and restructured tourism website, [visitgrey.ca](https://www.visitgrey.ca) officially launched on November 27th, 2020. Since launch, 35,000 visitors have browsed the visually-pleasing site. Website visits are down overall since March 2020, as staff have not advertised the website, or engaged in any marketing outside the local area.

The Communications department has been focused on safety messaging, with various tips on exploring outdoor spaces safely, promoting the Outdoor Activity Maps (both summer and winter) as well as supporting local businesses where possible, with the Business Resiliency Map. Most recently in conjunction with the Outdoor Areas Management Group, staff developed a Grey County Trail Etiquette graphic which has been very well received by landowners, trail groups and business partners.

In addition to consumer communications, staff have been communicating regularly with industry partners through e-newsletters and social media. In Q1, nine communications to various industry groups were sent to ensure all are up to date with the business supports being offered, funding opportunities, provincial and local regulations, as well as upcoming events like the virtual job fair and webinars. The goal is to inform without overwhelming.

In late November of 2020, Tourism, Economic Development and Communications teams worked together to launch the Home for the Holidays campaign. The campaign featured nine stories written by local writers, showcasing local shopping, dining & outdoor activity opportunities in each municipality. The stories were featured on visitgrey.ca and promoted through social media to a hyper local audience. An average reach of 17,000 people per story on social media with high engagement from both residents and local businesses was noted, with complementary ads on local radio.

Following the provincial stay-at-home order, staff launched a series of hyper local social media ads in mid-January to encourage residents to continue supporting those local businesses that were still open, by purchasing take out, delivery and curbside pick-up where possible. These were linked to the Business Resiliency Map, while the Economic Development team worked with local business to ensure data was up to date.

Legal and Legislated Requirements

There are no legal or legislated requirements relating to this report.

Financial and Resource Implications

There are no financial or resource implications relating to this report. All items have been included in the 2021 Budget.

Relevant Consultation

- Internal - Tourism Staff*
- External - Economic Development and Tourism Working Group*

Appendices and Attachments

[*Q1 Tourism Workplan Priorities Update*](#)