Report CCR-PCD-03-14

To: Chair and Members of the Planning and Community Development Committee  
From: Bryan Plumstead, Manager of Economic Development & Tourism  
Meeting Date: December 17, 2013  
Subject: Tourism 2013 Update and 2014 Priorities  
Status: Recommendation adopted by Committee as presented per Resolution PCD12-14 December 17, 2013; Endorsed by County Council January 9, 2014 per Resolution CC14-14;

Recommendation(s)

THAT Report CCR-PCD-03-14 regarding a Tourism 2013 Update and 2014 Priorities be received for information.

Background

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of activities undertaken by the Tourism Department in 2013 and look ahead to priorities for 2014. Staff and members of the Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC) will bring a more comprehensive visual presentation to the Committee meeting on December 17, 2013 focusing on the Website update and Cycling development project.

Destination Development Action Plan

For the past three years, Grey County Tourism’s Destination Development Action Plan (DDAP) has guided the department’s activities. Four areas of responsibility were identified: Leadership, Market Research, Marketing and Demand Generators. Each year priorities are set and then reported back under each of these areas. Monitoring the DDAP is part of the scope of the Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC), in addition to monitoring emerging trends, utilization of research to build market insight, track performance and guide product development, and growing Grey County Tourism’s role as a collaborative tourism leader.
Leadership

Tourism is a team sport and Grey County relies on many strategic partnerships to support and leverage its own resources. One exciting new initiative is a project involving the Georgian Bay Destination Development Partnership (GBDDP), three Regional Tourism Associations (RTO7, RTO12 and RTO13a) and the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership (OTMPC) in looking at how to expand the product offering and marketing to international markets. As the “banker” for GBDDP, Grey County initiated this project, was successful in attracting RTO7 funding, and with the help of GBDDP partners and some bigger tourism businesses around Georgian Bay has been able to bring in multiple RTOs, a first in Ontario.

Grey County continues to work with Bruce County, Owen Sound and other partners in the Regional Tourism Marketing Partnership (RTMP) and completed a very successful fall campaign, with some provincial funding.

One area of challenge has been the Functional Assessment study undertaken by RTO7, which was a roles and responsibilities exercise. Grey County and most other Destinations Marketing Organizations (DMOs) across Bruce, Grey and Simcoe have registered issues with the study, its process and its conclusions. The recent announcement of the retirement of RTO7’s Executive Director signals an opportunity for a change in direction in DMO relations, and some consultation by the search firm has already occurred.

Market Research

Analysis of Ministry of Tourism community profiles as well as pulling together some of RTO7’s research, and attendance figures at Grey County events and attractions was undertaken. Unfortunately the provincial data suffers from a small sample size and variable results, and a running five year average has been employed (2006-2010). Grey County welcomes an average of 1.6 million visitors each year who spend $230 million.

The top four markets include Toronto, Bruce County, Waterloo County and Wellington County. Half of Grey’s visitors spend at least one night, and half are day-only visitors. Top activities include Visiting Friends and Relatives, Skiing/snowboarding, Golfing, Fishing and Boating. Gated events showed a 7% increase in 2012 over 2011, while attractions showed a 14% increase. Non gated events provide less reliable estimates, and were up 32%.

Marketing

Grey County Tourism started to implement the County’s new brand into the special events’ tent, tourism vehicle, website and all forms of advertising. Seasonal “bucket
lists” provide ideas for visitors and residents to “Colour It Your Way.” Redevelopment of tourism’s website has been a major ongoing project for the tourism department, and early in 2013, a user-experience and design company, Akendi was hired to create the architecture and design for the new website. While the decision to hire Akendi slowed down the overall process, the company’s innovative approach and the learnings that resulted from its user-centered process have led to a much better understanding of the County’s users, their demands and how the County can better serve them. The result is an exciting new look and web-experience, and a more visual presentation will be provided at the December 17 meeting to fully describe the development process and final design.

**Demand Generators**

Cycling has been an area of focus for Grey County over the past few years in product development. With assistance from RTO7’s Partnership Funding program, a research program was undertaken and six new routes have been created to serve the family/leisure and recreational markets, share the road education was promoted through radio ads and vehicle magnets, and on-line advertising has been expanded. More recently the new routes have been added to the overall offering of active transportation options as part of the Transportation Master Plan, and the need to connect different parts of Grey County through a network has been acknowledged.

**2014 Priorities**

The following priorities have been identified for 2014:

**Leadership**

Improve DMO relationships with RTO7.
Provide leadership with Georgian Bay Destination Development Partners and Regions 7, 12 and 13a on Market Development Plan for International Travel Trade.

**Market Research**

Fully utilize RTO7 Consumer Insight Research with stakeholders and industry partners.
Expand Grey County’s events and attractions’ “dashboard.”

**Demand Generators**

Further development of Grey County cycling product and coordination with Bruce and Simcoe.
Further development of Grey County’s Ontario Signature Experiences.
Support tourism’s involvement with Transportation Master Plan and Grey County signage.
Marketing

Finish re-build of visitgrey.ca
Implement new marketing campaign with new brand.

Financial / Staffing / Legal / Information Technology

Considerations

The completion of 2013 activities is within budget and staffing resources. Completion of the coding of the new tourism site in 2014 is one of the Information Technology (IT) Department’s major projects, and there is a likelihood that bringing in some outside consulting would be a most efficient use of resources. The total remaining cost of the tourism website rebuild is estimated at approximately $30,000 to $35,000 and includes coding along with content management software (CMS) and customer relations management software (CRM).

Tourism has budgeted $10,000 from Reserves in the 2014 budget for this purpose. An additional $10,000 has been included as a year-end transfer to reserve from the IT budget for this purpose through a recommendation to the Corporate Services Committee in Report FR-CS-08-14 Corporate Services Financial Report and Treatment of Year-End Surplus/(Deficit) Positions. The remaining $15,000 required to complete the tourism website is recommended to be through a transfer to reserve from the 2013 Economic Development surplus and is subject to the Committee’s endorsement through Report CCR-PCD-01-14 Year End Budget Report and Treatment of Year End Budget Surplus or Deficit.

There are no legal implications associated with this report. The $35,000 estimated cost of finalizing the website includes both software and implementation costs. By outsourcing some of the implementation work, the Information Technology staff will be freed up to work on other developmental work within the County.

Link to Strategic Goals / Priorities

The Tourism Department’s activities support Goal 3 of Grey County’s Corporate Strategic Plan – Securing our place as Ontario’s recreation jewel. Redevelopment of the visitgrey website supports Goal 4 – Making connections.

Respectfully submitted by,

Bryan Plumstead
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Director Sign Off: Sharon Vokes