

## Tourism Advisory Committee

May 8, 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, Warden Brian Milne, Delton Becker, Councillor Francis Richardson, Philip Allanson, Gary Gingras, and Suzanne Ainley

### Staff

Present: Sharon Vokes, Clerk/Director of Council Services; Bryan Plumstead, Manager of Economic Development and Tourism, and Mary Jane Hills, Recording Secretary

## Call to Order

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

## Declaration of Pecuniary Interest

There was none.

## Business Arising from the Minutes

*Tourism Advisory Committee Minutes dated December 2, 2013*

These minutes are for information only as they were adopted by the Planning and Community Development Committee on December 17, 2013 and by Grey County Council on January 9, 2014.

### *Business Arising from the Minutes*

Mr. Plumstead brought the group up to date on actions related to the Transportation Master Plan (TMP) since the December 2, 2013 meeting. Bryan has met twice during this period with the Directors of Planning and Transportation Services. An implementation report is being drafted that will address a number of items brought forward including those from this Committee, and it is thought that it will include an active transportation component. The next meeting for the TMP steering committee is planned for June.

In February, 2014 Bill Sullivan was appointed as the new Executive Director of Regional Tourism Organization 7 (RTO7). Bill was very involved with the Region in a marketing

role prior to this promotion and will be able to draw on this knowledge in the new position.

## Report CCR-TAC-18-14 Tourism Priorities Update

Mr. Plumstead updated the group on recent meetings held with the RTO7 staff, RTO7 Board of Directors and the Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO) within this region. With the new Executive Director in place at RTO7 there is a greater desire for this group to work collaboratively with its DMO's and there are already improvements in the working relationships.

There is a new initiative underway with the Georgian Bay Destination Development Partners and Regions 7, 12 and 13a that created a Market Development Plan for International Travel Trade in the Georgian Bay area. The outcomes will result in a four year plan that will target the existing mature German market in the short term and look at additional markets, such as the Asian market in the longer term as local capacities intended for international tourism increase.

An Executive Summary of the Plan submitted by Ferrell + Partners Marketing Inc. was provided to the group. The full report will be provided to Committee members for their review.

There is a need to increase market awareness of the Georgian Bay region both nationally and internationally. It was discussed how the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation (OTMPC) has recently identified Blue Mountains, in the Georgian Bay region, as one of the new emerging destinations in Ontario. OTMPC will be promoting Blue Mountains to international markets in addition to established tourism areas such as the Muskokas and Ottawa.

Grey County has introduced six new cycling routes in early 2014 to help promote more family oriented cycling experiences in Grey County. Local business operators are seeing the advantages in marketing to this tourism segment by offering new cycling experiential product marketing involving overnight bed and breakfast stays near the cycling routes.

With all the additional cyclists on area roads, Grey County Tourism needs to ensure that motorists can safely coexist with cyclists on our roads. To assist with this there is a new provincial government cycling strategy called CycleOn, which was recently released and new provincial legislation is expected that will affect the legality of cycling on paved shoulders and will specify safe overtaking distance requirements between vehicles and cyclists. Also the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) has introduced a new Ontario Traffic Manual (OTM) Book 18 that deals with cycling facilities on roadways.

The Grey County Tourism vehicle has a new sponsor, Red Prince Apples. This is a great relation to local food and the apple industry in Grey County.

Mr. Braden discussed an undertaking by the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO) to assess the outcomes following a 2009 Ontario Government study and report titled "Discovering Ontario: A Report on the Future of Tourism" meant to increase tourism and economic activity and make Ontario a top tourism destination.

To do this, TIAO is taking on a large consultation process in the spring and summer of 2014 that will culminate in a presentation of findings at the Ontario Tourism Summit on November 12 and 13 at Blue Mountain Resort.

## Talisman Advisory Task Force Report

Mr. Allanson spoke to the group about the Talisman property in Grey Highlands that has been taken over by the Municipality of Grey Highlands. Mr. Gingras and Mr. Allanson were part of a group of seven community volunteers who were asked by the Municipality to make recommendations for the preparation of a Request for Proposal related to the sale or use of the property.

Talisman has been a real gem in the Beaver Valley for many years being run as a family style ski resort and employing up to 200 local residents. It ran into financial difficulties during the recession following its sale to a developer and was closed a few years ago. The Municipality took over the property when taxes and utilities were unpaid and a buyer could not be found.

Community consultations, meetings with Niagara Escarpment Commission, the Conservation Authority, municipal planners, and former Talisman employees were held in conjunction with web based questionnaires to gain feedback and ideas from people in the immediate area and beyond resulting in many ideas being brought forward.

It was felt that development of the property should be a benefit to the Grey Highlands community, and something that would appeal to residents and tourists and be financially sustainable. The development should work with the existing village of Kimberley, and be related to outdoor activities, but not necessarily downhill skiing as lifts, and snow making equipment would require a major investment. It could be a place for people to stay, with a great restaurant, spa, and the trails on the property (Bruce Trail) would be maintained.

The outcome of this volunteer group's work was a recommendation to Municipal Council to engage a small group of local people with development experience to find a qualified consultant who would prepare a Request for Proposal for the development of the property using the parameters established by the volunteer group.

It was discussed that it is still possible for the property to be sold for taxes without thought to future business development. The task force has completed its mandate.

## Economic Development Activities Update

Meredith Bowers joined the meeting to discuss recent activities by the Economic Development staff.

Items discussed were:

- A new edition of Grey County's Economic Development Newsletter was issued last week
- Recent release of the Four County Labour Board's Skills Gap Study for Grey County
- Growing surge of municipal interest around the Southwestern Ontario High Speed Intelligent Community initiative that is heavily supported by Grey County's Warden, CAO, Information Technology and Economic Development staff
- Local food project funding grants and partnerships with Georgian College for food entrepreneurs and food safety regulation courses
- Identification of new process to track Grey County real estate purchaser locations in order to market economic benefits of this area to specific areas of the province
- Upcoming business tours to enhance corporate aftercare and cooperation between business and local government
- On-line winter advertising success to boost awareness of economic development opportunities in Grey County

A Request for Proposal (RFP) for a new Economic Development Strategy for Grey County closes on May 22. The Strategy has been approved for funding by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food and Rural Affairs through the RED (Rural Economic Development) Fund. The RFP calls for an overall ten year plan with a three year action plan to set the direction of Grey County's efforts. The County wants a plan that will provide performance measurements and tangible outcomes that can be tracked to show achievement.

The plan will look at all of Grey County's sectors including business, industry, health, and education. Tourism will be included as part of overall economic development in the County, with a dedicated Tourism Plan to follow in 2015, using findings from the Economic Development Strategic Plan and building specifically on tourism development.

Grey County will engage five local business people and three elected officials to form a steering committee to guide the strategic planning process. A report will go to the Planning and Community Development Committee in May with the hope for approval of the members of this team. June 18 is the scheduled interview date for the RFP where the winning consultant will be selected by the team.

Grey County's Economic Development Working Group had a difficult year in 2013 losing three of its members to other employment and illness. Three new staff members have been recently hired at these municipalities and are being welcomed into the County's working group. It was noted that the participating lower tier municipalities are finding great value in their employee's participation in the County's Economic Development working group.

## Next Meeting Date

This group will meet again on September 18<sup>th</sup> at 2 p.m. at Grey Roots, and on December 18<sup>th</sup> at 2 p.m. at the same location.

On motion by Warden Milne the meeting adjourned at 4:10 p.m.

Don Braden, Chair