 Committee Report

# Report CCR-PCD-18-16

**To**: Chair McQueen and Members of the Planning and Community Development Committee

**From**: Bryan Plumstead, Manager of Economic Development and Tourism

**Meeting Date:** June 21, 2016

**Subject: Tourism Destination Development Action Plan 2016**

**Status**: Recommendation adopted by Committee as presented per Resolution PCD73-16; Endorsed by County Council July 5, 2016 per Resolution CC87-16

## Recommendation(s)

**WHEREAS the Grey County Tourism Destination Development Action Plan 2016 (Action Plan) has been updated in order to provide guidance on Grey County’s commitment to tourism for the next three to five years;**

**BE IT RESOLVED THAT Report CCR-PCD-18-16 be received and the Grey County Tourism Destination Development Action Plan 2016 be approved;**

**AND THAT staff begin implementation of the Action Plan immediately, and that the Tourism Advisory Committee monitor progress of the plan through quarterly scorecards, and a summary of completed actions be presented to the Planning and Community Development Committee on an annual basis.**

## Background

In December 2015, Grey County Tourism along with BruceGreySimcoe (RTO7) hired Bannikin Travel and Tourism to update the Destination Development Action Plan (Action Plan) for the County. The 2016 Action Plan is a Regional Tourism Organization 7 (RTO7) Partnership Funding project and builds on the work completed over the past five years in Grey County’s first Action Plan.

Bannikin’s work was directed by a Steering Committee comprised of three members of Grey County’s Tourism Advisory Committee; Chair Gary Gingras, Vice-chair Philip Allanson, and member Jim Halliday, along with Manager of Economic Development and Tourism Bryan Plumstead, and BruceGreySimcoe staff Bill Sullivan and Alex Hogan. Bannikin’s task was “to develop a user-friendly action plan to guide the continued sustainable growth of tourism in Grey County.”

### Consultation

Bannikin has completed an extensive review of background information, gathered the input of 118 businesses and stakeholders who completed an online survey, interviewed another 38 stakeholders and county staff, and met with another 30 stakeholders who attended a workshop or information session. They spent many hours compiling their recommendations with input and direction from the Steering Committee as well as the workshop participants.  The plan analyzes the County’s strengths and weaknesses related to tourism, studied some competitive tourism destinations, and recommends continuing some existing activities as well as suggesting some new areas of focus.

### The Why

The 2016 Action Plan confirmed Grey County Tourism’s existing goal to “Increase sustainable tourism revenues through managing and marketing Grey County as a tourism destination”.

Based on what the consultants heard in their consultation and on their experience, a key differentiator or unique selling proposition was also identified: “Grey County is a true four-season rural destination with exceptional natural assets, a strong emerging food and beverage scene, two hours from the Greater Toronto area, and the only County in Ontario with a world-class ski resort within its boundaries.”

The plan is divided into four pillars, with strategic activities identified in each pillar. Broadly, the activities are designed so that the success of their implementation lies within the areas of responsibility of County staff. The four pillars are:

### Pillar 1: Stakeholder Engagement

Research indicated that stakeholders are keen to hear from Grey County often and seek greater opportunities for networking with industry peers. The County’s role is to facilitate collaboration between stakeholders and ensure stakeholders are well informed of County activities. For this to be effective, the County’s industry database must be current, the industry website must be easy to access and useful, and the County must organise networking events to bring the tourism industry together.

Recommendations;

Objective: To create a collaborative tourism community in Grey County.

|  | Key Activities | Results |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. | Clean up and maintain the Grey County Tourism Stakeholder Database | A clean database to communicate effectively and efficiently to stakeholders |
| 2. | Build a simple stakeholder communication plan | A plan for communicating on a consistent basis |
| 3. | Relaunch “Tourism Talks” | A great networking event that benefits everyone |
| 4. | Make the industry website a useful tool and resource | Easy to use website for industry |

### Pillar 2: Destination Development

At the core of the Action Plan is the product development and marketing of the County that differentiates the County from its competition. The Action Plan recommends creating a marketing strategy that brings the brand to life through innovative marketing and communications channels, such as a mobile app and outreach to domestic and international tour operators. Furthermore, it recommends coordinating product and experience development that is in line with the market needs through identification of key experiences, such as cycling and food tourism and coordinating a visiting friends and relatives (VFR) campaign.

Recommendations;

Objective: To increase the competitiveness of Grey County as a tourism destination.

|  | Key Activities | Results |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. | Create a robust marketing & communications plan | A plan that guides all marketing activity |
| 2. | Embrace the brand | Bringing the brand to life through good marketing and providing tools to stakeholders |
| 3. | Create a Visiting Friends & Relatives (VFR) marketing and communications campaign | Campaign to support VFR hosts and leverage the many relatives and family friends who visit Grey County |
| 4. | Create a Grey County Tourism mobile application | An innovative tool to showcase both well-known attractions and hidden gems |
| 5. | Facilitate creation of packages and itineraries | Facilitate collaboration between stakeholders to create easily bookable experiences that are in line with market demand. |
| 6. | Create a simple experiential outbound tour operator strategy | Build relationships with international outbound operators and work with them to create itineraries that include Grey |

## Pillar 3: Market Research and Tracking

The Action Plan is measurable. The scorecard identifies key performance indicators and data sources for Grey County Tourism to measure its success on an on-going basis and compare annually. Besides measuring the progress of the Action Plan, the report recommends surveying industry on an annual basis to develop a snapshot of the ‘State of Tourism in Grey’ and sharing that data with stakeholders.

Recommendations

Objective: To measure the Action Plan

|  | Key Activities | Results |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. | Track success of the Action Plan | Measure success through a scorecard that can be circulated to the Tourism Advisory Committee each quarter |
| 2. | Track key quantitative and qualitative metrics and economic impact of tourism | Dashboard on the state of tourism produced annually based on industry surveys |
| 3. | Create profiles of target market audience groups (demographics/psychographics) | Provide tools to stakeholders to help them target their marketing |

### Pillar 4: Resource Allocation

Bannikin reviewed the roles and responsibilities of Grey County Tourism staff, and recommended a reorganization of staff functions to increase efficiency of County staff, and to ensure that initiatives are clearly lead by one staff member, which will increase overall effectiveness and accountability. Grey County Tourism has a dedicated team, and investing in their professional development should be a priority.

Recommendations:

Objective: To create the most effective tourism team at Grey County.

|  | Key Activities | Results |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. | Reorganize tourism staff functions | Create the most effective structure able to support stakeholders |
| 2. | Invest in professional development | Ensure staff is always on top of the trends |

### Implementation

The Action Plan provides a detailed outline of recommended actions and timing for the next three to five years. Successful implementation of the proposed activities will result in tourism growth and value, and the development of a strong, collaborative tourism community in Grey, further solidifying its reputation as a destination of choice in Ontario. The chart below highlights the phasing of activities.

Staff have begun working on some of the internal Urgent items (April – September 2016), pending formal acceptance of the plan by County Council. This includes updating the industry database, creating a marketing and communications plan as well as embracing the brand, tracking success of the Action Plan and the reorganization of tourism staff functions.

Staff have engaged Bannikin for some follow-up assistance in facilitating the marketing and communications plan and embracing the brand, in order to complete these tasks before the summer and fall campaign and partly as a result of staff backfilling the vacant Economic Development Officer position. This will also enable staff to be better prepared to lead partner outreach in the fall. The draft Action Plan has been posted on Grey County Tourism’s industry website and circulated to all industry partners for comment, to engage stakeholders before the busy summer season. Links to the Draft Action Plan and to the consultant’s Detailed Recommendations are provided at the end of this report.

(Every effort has been made to ensure this document is accessible in accordance with the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA) and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA). To request this information in an alternate format, please contact Rob Hatten at Robert.Hatten@grey.ca or 519-372-0219 ext. 1235.)

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Grey County Tourism Priority Calendar for Action Plan** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Priority Levels: 1 = Accomplish in first and second quarters, Year 1 (Urgent) 2 = Accomplish in third and fourth quarters, Year 1 (Immediate)3 = Accomplish in Year 2 (Timely)4 = Accomplish in Year 3 (Extended)** | **Priority Level** | **Year 1: 2016-2017** | **Year 2: 2017-2018** | **Year 3: 2018-2019** |
| **Q1: April-June** | **Q2: July-Sept** | **Q3: Oct-Dec** | **Q4: Jan-March** | **Q1: April-June** | **Q2: July-Sept** | **Q3: Oct-Dec** | **Q4: Jan-March** | **Q1: April-June** | **Q2: July-Sept** | **Q3: Oct-Dec** | **Q4: Jan-March** |
| **Pillar 1: Community Engagement** |
| 1. Clean Up and Maintain the Grey County Tourism Stakeholder Database | 1 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 2. Build a Simple Stakeholder Communications Plan | 2 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 3. Relaunch "Tourism Talks" | 2 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 4. Make the Industry Website a Useful Tool and Resource  | 2 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| **Pillar 2: Destination Management** |
| 1. Create a Robust Marketing and Communications Plan | 1 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 2. Embrace the Brand | 1 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 3. Create a Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) Marketing and Communications Campaign | 2 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 4. Create a Grey County Tourism Mobile Application | 3 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 5. Facilitate Creation of Packages and Itineraries | 4 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 6. Create a Simple Experiential Outbound Tour Operator Strategy  | 4 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| **Pillar 3: Market Research and Tracking** |
| 1. Track the Success of the Action Plan | 1 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 2. Track Key Quantitative and Qualitative Metrics and Economic Impact of Tourism | 2 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 3. Create Profiles of Target Market Audience Groups Using Both Demographics and Psychographics | 3 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| **Pillar 4: Resource Allocation** |
| 1. Reorganize Tourism Staff Functions | 1 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 2. Invest in Professional Development | 3 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |

## Financial/Staffing/Legal/Information Technology Considerations

Total cost of this project was $41,855, with RTO7 contributing two thirds or almost $28,000 through their partnership funding program, and Grey County contributing one third or almost $14,000. This was paid in 2015 and has no impact on the 2016 budget.

The consultants have identified broad actions to be undertaken over the next three to five years within existing resources. Some realignment of staff responsibilities and functions has been identified and these are being addressed by staff and the Director and may result in some job reclassifications.

One recommendation that will have a small budgetary impact beginning in 2017 is for $1,000 investment per staff member for training, in order to be on top of trends and to be good resources for the tourism industry. The net budget impact is estimated at $3,000 annually.

There are also some recommendations that involve information technology (IT) and may involve a combination of use of County IT staff where possible and some outside resources. The largest impact is the development of a mobile app, scheduled to begin later in 2017. Further research will be undertaken to determine the best platform, costs and ability of the IT department to do any of the work. Funding for this project might be withdrawn as a one-time cost from the general tourism reserve.

Link to Strategic Goals/Priorities

Goal 3 of Grey County’s Corporate Strategic Plan is “Securing our place as Ontario’s recreation jewel and Action 3.2 “Utilize market research and senior government funding to build insight, track performance and economic impact, and guide development in the County’s tourism sector.

## Attachments

## [Tourism Destination Development Action Plan 2016](https://greydocs.ca/urm/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=GC_268808&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&Rendition=Web" \o "Tourism Destination Development Action Plan April 2 2016)

[Action Plan 2016 Detailed Recommendations](https://greydocs.ca/urm/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=GC_268806&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&Rendition=Web)

Respectfully submitted by,

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Title Manager of Economic Development and Tourism

Director Sign Off: Sharon Vokes