Committee Minutes

Tourism Advisory Committee
April 5, 2013 – 1:00 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 Duncan McKinlay, Councillor Francis Richardson, Philip Allanson, and Suzanne Ainley-by telephone

Regrets: Delton Becker, Gary Gingras

Staff Present: Bryan Plumstead, Tourism Manager/Economic Development Coordinator and Mary Jane Hills, Recording Secretary

Call to Order

Mr. Braden called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

Additional Agenda Items

There was none.

Declaration of Pecuniary Interest

There was none.

Business Arising from the Minutes

Tourism Advisory Committee Minutes dated December 20, 2012

These minutes are for information only as they were adopted by the Planning and Community Development Committee on January 22, 2013 and by Grey County Council on February 5, 2013.

Presentation of Research Findings by Resource Management Consulting Group (RMCG)

Mr. Braden welcomed Rob and Peggy Wong of RMCG to the meeting. RMCG was tasked to analyze the 2011 RTO7 Visitor Image Study as it relates specifically to Grey County. The original study focused on the region of Bruce, Grey and Simcoe counties. It was noted that this regional information is good to have but there is a need to find out how Grey County is perceived by its visitors.
This study was undertaken with an invited online consumer panel meeting specific criteria from various regions in Ontario, Quebec and neighbouring U.S. states. The study size for Grey County results was large enough to allow analysis of visitors to Grey County as a whole, and to The Blue Mountains area. This analysis now provides specific information on visitor regional origin, gender, age, household size, level of education and familiarity with local communities and attractions. Certain travel motivators such as worry free, affordable, unique, entertaining, etc. were highlighted. These findings allow a focus on areas needing improvement in order to enhance visitor experiences. These finding will help focus the marketing efforts, plan for new website photography, utilize search engine recognition, etc.

2012 results were compared for 19 Grey County gated and non-gated attractions and events to previous years. These numbers showed a draw of over half a million attendees with an overall increase of 17% in visitation over the past year.

Information was also provided on tourism statistics and related gross domestic product (GDP) for Canada, Ontario and the Bruce Grey Simcoe Region. The information results from the Travel Survey of Residents of Canada and International Travel Survey provided only 400 surveys specifically for Grey County visits which proved to be too small to effectively show GDP for Grey County in the last period provided of 2009/2010.

The group also learned about 2010 and 2012 research conducted at the Blue Mountain Village (BMV). This is of major interest because it involves people who were currently in Grey County when the survey was taken. One of the more interesting findings was that 26% of the Canadian visitors to BMV were born outside of Canada and 25% of that group have lived in Canada for less than 10 years. This is an emerging tourism group that needs to be enticed to visit other areas of Grey County. Results showed that most people visiting are from postal code areas beginning with L, M and N.

Overall results show that the special events held at BMV are bringing people to The Blue Mountains and attracting them to stay overnight and longer.

Surveying was also taken at the 2013 Toronto Cycling Show where there was very good interest in Grey County. 30% of attendees at this show were looking for cycling destinations so it is important for Grey County to participate.

Updates:

Staff

Philly Markowitz joined the meeting. Bryan advised of the recent hiring of the Economic Development Local Food position. Philly Markowitz has been hired for this position effective Monday, April 8th. Philly has been working with the Tourism Department during a recent maternity leave, and then under contract on the special website project.

Vistgrey.ca Refresh:
Philly provided an update on the website project advising of the background work including the development of a white paper, the development and issue of a Request for Purchase (RFP) and award of the RFP to Akendi. Akendi who specializes in intuitive navigation, will train Grey County Information Technology (IT) staff to help build future websites using this methodology. Better functionality will be available in calendaring events, and mapping trails.

The work with Akendi will be completed shortly and will then move into the build portion of the work where the County is currently sourcing software.

Local Food:

The work in local food and food inspection is moving forward. Freeman Boyd has been hired as a consultant to develop courses in conjunction with the Grey Bruce Health Unit to help business owners understand and comply with regulations and food inspection.

Grey County is stepping up its culinary profile by partnering with Bruce County and participating in the Ontario Culinary Guide, sent out as part of an edition of the Globe & Mail, and participating at the upcoming Green Living Show in Toronto for the first time. This show involves local chefs, wineries and sale of local foods.

Grey County was recently recognized as an emerging wine region called South Georgian Bay. It includes Coffin Ridge, Georgian Hills and Carrick Estates.

Grey Bruce Escape Marketing

A special event strategy was established and has led to a decision to promote the top 10 events in Grey County in this year’s edition of the Grey Bruce Escape. Criteria were used to bring the number down to 10, including revenue generation ability. Bruce County has done the same with its events page this year.

Grey County Cycling Experience Development

Bryan was a speaker at the Ontario Cycling Forum held in Toronto in March. The presentation was well received, especially the section about Grey County’s paved road shoulders.

Going forward a partnership was developed with The Blue Mountains and in order to apply to Region 7 for funding to increase cycling awareness and visits to this area. A new event called Peddlefest is being promoted to create new smaller touring routes of 20 to 40 kilometres in size that include stops at wineries, museums, restaurants and attractions. These routes will be in key accommodation clusters including The Blue Mountains, South Grey, Owen Sound, and Meaford/Beaver Valley. Funds will be used to help develop bicycle friendly stops, and increase marketing and safety awareness.

Bryan has been involved with the creation of Grey County’s Transportation Master Plan which is currently out for public input. Grey County is now undertaking a Road Rationalization study which could impact the number of roads under the County’s jurisdiction. It was discussed how
such a change could impact tourism when it comes to such things as signage and paved shoulders. Are regional tourism routes being considered, and should they be?

It was decided that this Committee will meet again in May to discuss this matter further in order to provide input to the Road Rationalization review. Prior to this meeting a summary on the work to date including the proposed point system will be sent out to Tourism Advisory Committee members for their review and comments.

Economic Development:

Meredith Bowers gave an update on all the undertakings related to Economic Development since the last meeting including:

- Starting a countywide newsletter to go out to business and municipalities
- Starting countywide business tours with the first being held in Hanover
- Participation in two tradeshows this year; considering the Real Estate Show, Cottage Life, Zoomer, and various industry shows
- Community Profiles for the website are being completed
- Purchase of a statistical data package from Manifold for Community Profiles and other work
- Attendance at various upcoming training opportunities
- Grey Bruce Website improvements planned including new videos
- Economic development advertisements in EDCO magazine and the Grey Bruce Escape.
- Hosted South Western Ontario Development Fund (SWODF) information session. 74 people registered resulting in three businesses applying for funding and one of those being able to leverage significant funding
- Western Union attended SWODF advising of assistance they can give on overseas financing, moving funds from Canada to Europe and worldwide. Five businesses are now using their services. They have become part of the Blue Water Wood Alliance (BWWA) group and are also attending Four County Labour Board Committee meetings
- Involved in the new Grey County branding and participated on “Politically Speaking”.
- Worked on proposed brief for dredging of Owen Sound harbor and now have a solid good base of information on the impact of low water levels on shipping in Grey County.

Tourism Organizations

Don provided an update on the Destination Management Fee (DMF) situation in Ontario. The DMF is a voluntary industry lead fee that is charged to hotel guests and remitted to a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) to undertake marketing or product development. The Federal Bureau of Competition had started a price fixing investigation on this fee but there has
been a resolution. The Ministry has issued a “Tip Sheet” to assist the industry and has referenced TIAO as a resource.

Plans are in the works to attend and participate in Rendezvous Canada being held this year in Ottawa in May. Funding is being requested from the Regions for this. A group from South Georgian Bay area is going together to develop long term relationships that will increase market readiness.

Next Meeting Dates

A meeting will be set up in May to discuss the possible changes to the Grey County Road System and how this could impact tourism in Grey County.

On motion by Philip Allanson the meeting adjourned at 3:15 p.m.