

<b>To:</b>	Chair and Members of Tourism Advisory Committee
<b>Committee Date:</b>	May 11, 2022
<b>Subject / Report No:</b>	EDTC-TAC-09-22
<b>Title:</b>	Tourism Infrastructure & Investment
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<b>Reviewed by:</b>	Randy Scherzer, Deputy CAO
<b>Lower Tier(s) Affected:</b>	All
<b>Status:</b>	Recommendation adopted by Committee as presented; Endorsed by Committee of the Whole May 26, 2022 per Resolution CW79-22;

## Recommendation

1. **That Report EDTC-TAC-09-22 regarding the Tourism Infrastructure & Investment be received for information.**

## Executive Summary

Through the 2022 budget process, staff proposed a shift in tourism focus upon review of stakeholder comments collected over the past two years. In preparation for the 2023 Economic Development, Tourism & Culture Master Plan development, staff reallocated resources to begin addressing some reigning challenges. As a result, tourism infrastructure and investment became priority, alongside multi-sectoral attraction and retention work targeting the labour shortage.

## Background and Discussion

Tourism in Grey County changed significantly through the pandemic. Outdoor spaces were at capacity and a major cause of concern for nearly all stakeholders from a stewardship and safety lens. At the same time, tourism operators and local businesses suffered loss from pandemic restrictions and reduced spending.

As a result of these shifts, combined with stakeholder feedback, staff have shifted their approach to tourism in 2022, which are highlighted below. These projects and shifts are

made possible through multi-departmental collaborations between Economic Development, Tourism & Culture, Planning, Transportation and Communications. The collective resources and staff expertise enable this important work to move forward.

## **OMG Group**

Grey County Outdoor Management Group (GC OMG) is a group of regional partner organizations dedicated to sharing information and collaborating on projects with the goal of developing and maintaining trails and outdoor areas through sustainable management practices. This will contribute to overall benefit of outdoor recreation and tourism across Grey County and support individual mandates of member organizations.

The group was established in 2021 and expanded in 2022 under the [terms of reference](#).

## **Investment in Infrastructure**

Major investments in tourism infrastructure for 2022 includes:

- CP Rail Trail Stone Dust Completion
- Kolapore Parking Lot
- Cycling & Trails Signage
- Hoggs Falls Trail Redevelopment

These projects are funded by EDTC, Planning and Transportation budgets, which includes funding received by Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP).

Through the outdoor management group, consideration and planning for infrastructure investment is now also underway for:

- Beaver River Access
- Hoggs Falls
- Metcalfe Rock

While identifying issues and possible solutions are ongoing, improvements to natural assets are not easily achieved. Key to this challenge is land ownership, with multiple stakeholders and landowners involved, including Ministry of Natural Resources, Conservation Authorities, User Group Trail Associations and private landowners and operators. Approval processes also take significant time, in part because the land is regularly located in hazard lands such as flood plains.

That said, staff are committed to finding solutions to the over-use of natural assets, which continues to cause carrying capacity issues. For example, lack of washroom facilities, emergency vehicles unable to access through roads, increased liability related to risk taking, are all related to overcrowding at facilities designed for five vehicles yet now report 60 to 100 or more at times.

Marketing will also play a key role to counter misinformation generated by social media. For example, tubing down the Beaver River. It takes significantly longer to float down the unmarked river in an area of minimal current and little cell phone coverage, which results in calls to emergency services and difficulty locating people.

As a result, the high use areas are getting a multi-discipline approach which includes on-site signage, parking signs, an ambassador program and social media messages. Longer term parking lot improvements are being considered, including the possibility of paid parking which has helped to curb popularity elsewhere.

### **Tourism Investment**

- December 2021, Georgian Bluffs sold the Wiarton-Keppel International Airport to Clayton Smith for \$2.6 million.
- January 2022, Westway Capital purchased the municipally owned upper Talisman lands and former golf course at the resort for \$2.5 million.
- Staff assisted Grey Highlands with their investment strategies, helping link opportunities for Markdale's Downtown Redevelopment RFP.
- Grey County is investing in the inaugural Blue Mountain Film Festival through sponsorship of the industry forum to leverage attraction and retention opportunities.
- Staff partnered with West Grey to develop a Business Mix Analysis for downtown Durham and Neustadt to support business attraction and retention efforts in addition to marketing potential. Meaford and Owen Sound projects will begin in 2022.
- Staff are exploring hotel investment opportunities with Hanover based on their hotel feasibility study.

Through the upcoming Grey County Investment Strategy, staff will continue to take a steady and strategic approach to further advancing priority investment opportunities across the County. The strategy will be brought to Committee of the Whole for consideration in May.

It is also important to recognize the significant funding investments made by Federal and Provincial governments to support tourism businesses. Locally, RT07 is a fundamental partner and leader in supporting tourism businesses with funding, marketing and training. Economic Development staff, the Business Enterprise Centre and Catapult Grey Bruce have also been quick to provide support and mentorship to businesses and will continue to offer these services as part of regular operations.

### **Marketing the Business**

Given the awareness and popularity of Grey's outdoor assets, focused marketing of green space is not required at present time. Instead, marketing efforts will focus on the

business, delivering itineraries to take visitors to the doorstep of Grey's restaurants and shops. This cohort of business has been hardest hit through covid and is also a group visitors and residents are happy to learn about through digital platforms. Business profiles and shop local itineraries have been well received to date, so staff will take these lessons and apply them on a greater scale in 2022. This will also connect to staycation promotions, leveraging the provincial tax credit to encourage overnight visitation. The intent of all marketing is to drive longer stays and greater spending across the county.

With the return of signature events in 2022, renewed focus will be placed on events newsletters, social media promotions, and blog content.

## Legal and Legislated Requirements

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

## Financial and Resource Implications

There are no financial implications with this report. All items are included in the approved 2022 budget.

## Relevant Consultation

- Internal – Economic Development, Tourism & Culture, Planning, Communications
- External – Outdoor Management Group, Economic Development & Tourism Working Group

## Appendices and Attachments

None.