

## Report CCR-PCD-05-14

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

**From:** Sharon Vokes, County Clerk / Director of Council Services

**Meeting Date:** January 21, 2014

**Subject:** **Road Signage Update**

**Status:** Recommendation endorsed by Committee as amended per Resolution PCD19-14 January 21, 2014; Resolution PCD19-14 rescinded by County Council February 4, 2014 by Resolution CC22-14 and directed that staff develop a signage plan and recommended funding model of County owned road signage and entry way signage along County boundaries;

### Recommendation(s)

**WHEREAS Grey County Council at its September 3, 2013 session directed that further review of road signage and way finding be completed and a recommendation be made on how to proceed;**

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Report CCR-PCD-05-14 be received;**

**AND THAT Grey County pursue the development of a signage strategy that addresses the various aspects of road signage;**

**AND THAT an invitation be sent to the County's member municipalities seeking the interest of one or two municipalities to participate in the road signage study and its implementation;**

**AND FURTHER THAT once responses have been received that staff provide a further report to the Planning and Community Development Committee on a recommended funding model between the County and the participating municipalities, including potential grant opportunities.**

## Background

At the September 3, 2013 Session of County Council a presentation was made by staff on signage and way finding in Grey County. The presentation highlighted the opportunities, challenges and ways of moving forward. At that meeting Council directed that the Planning and Community Development Committee complete a further review and provide a path forward for future plans.

There is no question of the need for the County to address road signage at this time. The current signs are in need of replacement; many because they are worn out, and all because they reflect the old County logo. Additionally, Council, through its endorsement of the three year Corporate Operating Plan has requested that historical signage be reviewed and a policy put in place.

Against this backdrop, and adding yet another layer to consider, is the signage project completed by Regional Tourism 7 (RTO7). That particular study resulted in a recommended signage methodology for way finding of both places, such as urban areas/communities, and attractions that range from natural features to local libraries and parks. The RTO7 study envisions that the approved methodology will be rolled out across the counties of Bruce, Grey and Simcoe.

Since that time staff has contacted several other municipalities to gauge their experiences with new signage implementation. Specifically, the Town of Innisfil was contacted as it has implemented the RTO7 model. Bruce County was also contacted as it contracted a consultant to develop a signage strategy. The Bruce County work was done prior to the RTO7 study and provides insights and lessons learned.

### *Types of Signage*

On the surface erecting signage sounds easy, but it is anything but. There are many needs of signage that range from:

- Regulatory (including warning and information)
- Municipal identification
- Way finding/tourism destinations
- Pay to Play (tourism destinations)
- Heritage
- Private (advertising)

In addition to the many different types of signage, there are multiple jurisdictions that administer these signs, from the province (Ministry of Transportation) to the County to the local municipality. It's important that signage have a consistent look and feel for

ease of use. There needs to be a balance between the number of signs needed to provide information and the requirement to keep roads clean and clear of clutter. To keep roads safe and functional, strong and reliable criteria is required for determining where signs are placed, what information is displayed, what they look like and how they are managed.

### *Existing County Signage Policies*

Grey County's existing signage policies include a tourism advertising signage policy (pay to play) which governs county-installed signage for tourism purposes. The policy outlines eligible businesses, types of signs and criteria for different sign types. An Advertising Sign policy and permit procedure governs third-party installation of advertising signs along county right of ways. This is different from many other municipalities that utilize the provincial TODS' (Tourism – Oriented Directional Signing) program.

### *The Innisfil and Bruce County Experiences*

Bruce County embarked on a signage strategy in 2006. The primary reason for the signage strategy was to provide better signage for moving tourists around the County. Initially, Bruce County looked for interested municipalities to participate in a pilot project, and both Saugeen Shores and Kincardine agreed to participate. The cost of the study was \$220,000, with Bruce County shouldering the majority of the cost and the two lower tier municipalities funding a smaller portion.

The initial consulting work included developing a system for signage which included messaging in downtown cores. The consultants held a number of workshops and it was noted that community branding discussions took up a lot of time.

Since that time, the signage program has been rolled out in Saugeen Shores and Kincardine and other lower tier municipalities have either done so, or are in the process of changing over. The County has also implemented the signage program on some of its higher volume tourist related roads.

Innisfil's experience is more recent and the consulting work was completed in 2013. Innisfil used the same consultants that prepared the RTO7 signage strategy and the work required was the development of a plan to implement the RT07 model in Innisfil. A program that was to be implemented in three months, actually took closer to a year. The Innisfil study cost approximately \$30,000.

As can be seen from the above examples, the work can be costly and certainly has long timelines for implementation.

## *The RTO7 Model*

RTO7 embarked on creating a way finding signage model because it identified that there is a lack of consistent and coherent way finding signage throughout the three counties.

The RTO7 signage system specifically addresses tourism-based way finding needs throughout Grey, Bruce and Simcoe Counties. The system is designed to provide communities with a cohesive, cost-effective promotional platform. It is also designed to provide flexibility and the opportunity to incorporate community specific branding. It does not however provide direction on a municipal identification signage hierarchy (ie county, municipal/community).

## *The Recommended Strategy*

The RTO7 model for way finding signage is timely for Grey County as it continues to refresh its brand. There is an opportunity to create a signage program which is distinctive and recognizable, and that pairs municipal branding initiatives both locally and at the county level. Signage is often the first impression of visitors and residents. A signage program that is properly thought out and executed can help create a positive and welcoming first impression of Grey County and its member municipalities.

The presentation made to Council in September, 2013 set out the following options to move forward:

- Collaborative County approach (utilizing consultant) – full partnership in strategy development and implementation plan
- County led (utilizing consultant), with municipal input
- County led (no consultant), with municipal input
- County only

Staff's research of the options, including the experience of other municipalities, has determined that a signage strategy on a county wide level is a huge project and would be difficult to implement. Research also determined that the County does not have enough staff resources in-house to manage a county wide study, either with or without a consultant.

It is therefore recommended that a signage strategy be initiated similar to the Bruce County model where the County will manage the project and seek the interest of one or two lower tier municipalities to participate in a pilot project. In time it is hoped that the remaining municipalities would also implement the strategy, but at a minimum, there would be consistency on all county roads. The study would determine the following:

1. Implementation of community/municipal branding recognizing county and lower tier identities/brands
2. Directional signage for tourism and community features
3. Detailed directional signage requirements in urban centres of participating lower tier municipalities
4. Policy and signage design for recognition of historical communities
5. Determination of methodology for paid directional signage on County/municipal roads – TODS versus internal policy

Lower tier municipalities wishing to participate would need to be willing to fund a portion of the study and be committed to implementing the signage strategy over a number of years.

Within the County, it's of note that the Town of the Blue Mountains participated in the original RTO7 strategy and had a detailed signage plan done as a pilot community. To date, the Town has not implemented the plan. Work has also begun in the Municipality of Meaford to implement signage in keeping with the RTO7 model.

Improving signage is a priority of RTO7 and as such, applications can be submitted for funding of both the study and for funds to implement the program. Funding is based on 50% of the proponent's contribution, which translates into \$20,000 to match with \$40,000 county/municipal funding on a \$60,000 program for example.

## Financial / Staffing / Legal / Information Technology

### Considerations

There are no legal or information technology (IT) considerations related to this report. In the future, if it is determined that the County would benefit from acquiring software to manage the development of signage policies in the other municipalities there would be IT implications. While there are no specific legal implications, a poorly designed signage system could potentially lead to claims of liability in the case of accidents which in turn would impact both the County's legal and insurance costs.

There will be implications for staff in the Clerk's Office, Tourism and Economic Development and the Transportation Services' Department in both the development and implementation of the strategy.

No funding is currently within the 2014 budget for this purpose, so if it is Council's desire to proceed in 2014, funding will need to be allocated from the One Time Reserve for this purpose. Given the experience of Innisfil and Bruce County, and the intent to take advantage of the already established RTO7 standards, it is estimated that the cost of

the study could be \$ 60,000. Grant funding from RTO7 could reduce this amount by as much as one third and would also be offset by contributions from participating lower tier municipalities. It is somewhat difficult to accurately predict the total cost of the study without knowing which lower tier municipalities are interested in participating as the signage needs of some municipalities will be more complex than others.

There is no additional funding within the 2014 Transportation Services Department budget for implementation of a signage strategy beyond the usual replacement of worn out or broken signs. In the event the strategy was completed early enough in 2014 to implement, a further report would need to be submitted recommending a funding mechanism for the new signage. Alternatively, it could be a budget item for 2015, or phased in over a number of years.

## Link to Strategic Goals / Priorities

The creation and implementation of a road signage policy that incorporates the County's new brand meets Goal 6.6 of reviewing and updating the County's corporate branding. Additionally, Goal 3 of securing our place as Ontario's recreation jewel is supported by consistent, coherent and visually pleasing way finding signage.

Respectfully submitted by,

Sharon Vokes  
Clerk/Director of Council Services