

## Tourism Advisory Committee October 6, 2015 – 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: Chair Gary Gingras, Vice Chair Philip Allanson, Councillor Barb Clumpus, Councillor Gail Ardiel, Peter Majewsky, and Jim Halliday

Regrets: Paul Pinchbeck

### Staff

Present: Kim Wingrove, CAO; Bryan Plumstead, Manager of Economic Development and Tourism; Amanda Pausner, Tourism Specialist; Heather Aljoe, Tourism Specialist; and Mary Jane Hills, Recording Secretary

## Call to Order

Chair Gingras called the meeting to order.

## Agenda

There were no additional agenda items.

Moved by: Philip Allanson

Seconded by: Peter Majewski

**THAT the Agenda for October 6, 2015 Tourism Advisory Committee be adopted.**

Carried

## Declaration of Pecuniary Interest

There was none.

## Minutes of Meetings

The minutes from the July 22, 2015 Tourism Advisory Committee are for information only as they were adopted by the Planning and Community Development Committee on August 13, 2015 and by Grey County Council on September 1, 2015.

## Business Arising from the Minutes

### *Tourism Advisory Committee Minutes dated July 22, 2015*

Since the last meeting Grey County Tourism has applied to Regional Tourism Organization 7 (RTO7) for signage partnership funding for six kiosk style information signs to be installed at Waterfall and Trail Sites. Staff will work with the property owners (Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and the conservation authorities) regarding parking and signage location approvals.

Grey County Tourism plans to order a few trail counters in the near future to provide better visitation tracking at some important County promoted tourist locations. Installation will take place in late fall or early winter. Funding possibilities for this project will be researched.

Mr. Plumstead advised the Committee that Bruce County has recently released a report on changes to its tourism and economic development budget that involves partnership projects previously affiliated with Grey County.

Due to these changes a new map product is being considered for the Grey, Bruce and Simcoe area with assistance from RTO7. While such a change will result in less map detail than the existing Grey Bruce Map, it will introduce a large market segment to Grey County with the addition of its highly populated and visited neighbor Simcoe County.

It was discussed that there are still times where visitors confuse the Town of the Blue Mountains with the Town of Collingwood. One way that Grey County Tourism can help with this is to educate its operators who can then educate their customers.

### RTO7 Update and Partnership Funding

Bill Sullivan, Executive Director of RTO7, was in attendance and gave the Committee a brief overview of this organization that is funded by the province. He advised of current programs being run and funded that benefit the tourism industry in the areas of customer service, experience development, youth engagement for local careers, festivals and event staff training, and joint marketing opportunities. Grey County is currently applying for signage funding under its partnership funding program.

This year the Grey Bruce Fall Regional Tourism Conference has evolved to include Simcoe County with RTO7 providing management assistance for the event. It will be held in early December in Meaford.

Grey County Tourism has also applied for funding assistance to RTO7 for its five year Destination Development Action Plan. An agreement needs to be in place between Grey County and RTO7 for the project, and the Request for Proposal (RFP) for the project will be developed by Grey County Tourism and RTO7. The RFP will be released by RTO7. A steering committee will review and score all submissions to the RFP, interview those short listed, and arrive at a winning submission.

The review and award of the proposals must be done in a very timely manner in order to have the work completed by March 31, 2016. This group requires a cohesive and solid working relationship. Deadline management is crucial to the success of the project. It is important to keep the steering committee small and the approval process as tight as possible.

The RFP will be awarded by RTO7, and subsequent payments will be approved by Grey County Tourism and paid by RTO7. If the project is incomplete by March 31<sup>st</sup>, the province can pull back unspent funding provided by RTO7. Total budget is \$42,000.

The final report from the winning consultant is to be reviewed and approved by the steering committee and then forwarded to the Planning and Community Development Committee for review.

Mr. Sullivan's presentation concluded.

### Grey County Destination Development Action Plan Update.

Mr. Plumstead recommended that the RFP be prepared in a way that allows for various types of assessment tools to be utilized, including the DestinationNEXT process. While it is believed that DestinationNEXT provides a very thorough assessment tool, it would be too restrictive to request that only this tool be used for this portion of the project.

The RFP must clearly outline that this plan is to align with current County strategies such as the County's Strategic Plan. Engagement with businesses, local municipalities and stakeholder groups is very important. Outcomes need to clearly communicate in jointly undertaken projects the order of work to be completed, and who is responsible for the completion of each outlined task.

The need to engage operators in order to elevate local tourism products (waterfalls, trails, fish ladders, shipwrecks, etc.) is important. Businesses must understand their importance, and feel involved. Tourists come for an experience, and that is what keeps them coming back.

Also educating the non-traditional businesses (gas stations, health spas, corner, department, grocery and liquor stores) will result in much improved tourism experiences. These businesses see gains and losses when tourism business is up and

down. Customer service and area ambassadors need to be identified as areas for improvement. From a taxation standpoint one motel room pays the same tax as a two bedroom bungalow and all taxpayers need to be aware of this.

Grey County needs to be in contact with municipalities who are undertaking similar destination exercises, such as Grey Highlands, in order that each understands how their level of participation fits into the overall picture and then work together to benefit each other. With low tourism staffing levels this means that it is even more important to work together so that duplication is not taking place.

The learnings from recent meetings held with on-road cycling groups, the County and municipalities show the importance of working together to find the best routes for cyclists while making the least impact to road budgets. Grey County has challenges due to land topography and road width. This may not be the case in other areas or countries where road cycling is a huge tourism segment.

Market research and reporting is another important segment to be considered in the RFP.

As part of the study, it is expected that County tourism staff resources will be reviewed with an understanding that some job functions may need to be realigned due to changing destination marketing needs.

Ideally two or three committee members would participate on the steering committee dedicating a good deal of time over the next two or three months for this project. The time involved to evaluate the submissions will be dependent on the number of submissions received.

Moved by: Councillor Clumpus

Seconded by: Councillor Ardiel

**THAT Philip Allanson, Jim Halliday and Gary Gingras sit on the Steering Committee for the 2015/2016 Grey County Tourism Destination Development Action Plan with Bryan Plumstead of Grey County Tourism along with RTO7 representatives Bill Sullivan and Alex Hogan.**

Carried

## 2015 Fall Campaign Update

Grey County's Tourism Specialists Amanda Pausner and Heather Aljoe reviewed the 2015 social media fall campaign that began on August 25, and wraps up on October 11<sup>th</sup>. Fall product is very important in Grey County and this year's promotion was dedicated solely to Grey County products. In previous years this program was run

together as Grey Bruce. Due to changes at Bruce County, Grey County ran its own promotion in 2015.

Working with BC Hughes, a contest was developed and run through Facebook in conjunction with targeted media buys promoting fall touring in Grey County. The culmination of the campaign is the awarding of one prize consisting of fourteen (14) epic Grey County experiences.

To date 3,700 contest entries have been made and over 3,200 fall touring packages requested and mailed out. Grey County Tourism's Facebook "likes" have increased to 7,441 from 2,430 at the beginning of the fall promotion. There have been an additional 1,632 email addresses added to the consumer newsletter list and a newsletter sent out last week received an outstanding 46% open rate. The industry average is a 23% open rate, and this Grey County Tourism produced newsletter doubled that average. Similar increases to the Twitter and Instagram accounts during this time period were also noted.

To highlight the fall experiences in Grey County two online bloggers were invited separately to visit, experience and write about the area. Both of these bloggers have their own huge food related social media following. Amanda toured them throughout the County and these experiences were written about and promoted from the bloggers own accounts. One of the greatest outcomes of this promotion was a very well received Huffington Post story.

Committee members requested that staff look into the impact of these stories on the bloggers personal accounts. Web analytics from [visitgrey.ca](http://visitgrey.ca) showed increases in web visits following the posting of the blogs.

Besides social media, the only print ads run during this period were in Grey Bruce Kids and Grey Bruce Boomers with one ad purchased in each publication.

Grey County's IT Department, was able to physically plot on a map the locations where mailings were sent. The area of highest concentration of requests was from London to Barrie/Orillia and from Kitchener-Waterloo to Tobermory. While Toronto was not a major point of requests for mail outs, further analysis revealed that 30% of web traffic was from the Toronto area and 40% of downloads to personal devices were also from Toronto.

Prior to the fall campaign individual Facebook social media campaigns were conducted starting in July for waterfalls, paddling and cycling. These were also very well received with another 1,600 separate mailings being sent.

Staff will follow up with operators during the next few weeks to determine if these campaigns resulted in additional visits to operators. Visits to Inglis Falls where visitation numbers are tracked were up substantially. Also traffic on major highways coming into and out of Grey County was visibly higher this summer than in any summer in recent memory.

Staff will investigate ideas to determine who actually did come to the area from those who received information. Committee members would like visitor numbers and home locations of web visits and downloads sent to them for further review.

Staff will review Grey County tourism produced brochures to ensure they are optimized for mobile viewing and downloading.

## Don Braden Tribute Discussion

Mr. Plumstead presented a document listing several short and long term options for tributes that could be undertaken in Don Braden's name.

Awards, bursaries and scholarships were suggested, along with findings about undertaking an award night similar to those run by the Saugeen Economic Development Corporation in past years. It was thought that an awards night could be considered as part of the economic development strategy in a few years' time, but something of that magnitude requires ongoing dedicated manpower, funding and planning for success. Alternatively an award could be presented at an existing regional conference.

It was discussed how it would be best to undertake something that would be near and dear to Don. Don loved cycling and he loved children. It was suggested that a cycling trail/route in the Blue Mountains area be named after Don as Don was well known in the Blue Mountains area. It was also suggested that a bursary be set up at Georgian Bay Secondary School in his name for the Hospitality Program that is run there.

Staff will look further into the long term items discussed and bring further information back to the next meeting.

## Other Business

There was none.

## Next Meeting Dates

The next Tourism Advisory Committee meeting will be held January 19, 2016 at 2p.m.

On motion by Councillor Clumpus, the meeting adjourned at 4:07 p.m.

Tourism Advisory Committee  
October 6, 2015

Gary Gingras, Chair