



Committee Minutes

Tourism Advisory Committee November 17, 2021 – 9:30 AM

The Tourism Advisory Committee met on the above date through electronic participation with the following members in attendance:

Present: Andrew Siegwart, Joel Dawson, Andrea O'Reilly and Councillors Shirley Keaveney and Sue Carleton.

Regrets: Jim Diebel and Jim Halliday

Staff

Present: Savanna Myers, Director of Economic Development, Tourism and Culture; Bryan Plumstead, Manager of Tourism; Heather Morrison, Clerk; Heather Aljoe, Marketing and Communications Specialist; Alison Theodore, Economic Development Officer; Kimberly Trombley, Administrative Assistant; Linda Swanston, Manager, Climate Change Initiatives; and Tara Warder, Legislative Coordinator/Deputy Clerk

Call to Order

The Chair called the meeting to order at 9:32 AM.

Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Reports

EDTC-TAC-19-21 Quarter 2 and Quarter 3 Tourism Workplan Priorities Update

Bryan Plumstead addressed the Committee on the Quarter 2 and 3 workplan updates. He provided updates on the Grey County Cycling and Trails Master Plan and noted receipt of funding from the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program. He provided further updates on signage and work that the county wide ambassador team had done over the summer.

Alison Theodore then provided an update. She noted that staff have been offering support to tourism businesses and working with them to offer coaching resources and helping them research ways to move business forward during COVID. This has been the focus currently, through one on one and social media. Further, webinars have been held and a business mix analysis is being delivered for downtowns and will be rolled out to member municipalities.

Inquiries from the Committee included what support will look like going forward. Staff noted that there have been several funding and support opportunities that businesses were able to access, and a number of Grey County businesses were supported through these programs. Through the Business Enterprise Centre, Grey has the flexibility to offer similar programs and continue with the support that is being provided. The consultations, business line, and the general ability to reach out will always remain. Ms. Theodore noted that there are upcoming workshops in 2022.

It was noted that the staycation travel credit is being implemented by the province and staff are looking at how businesses can leverage that credit. It is a great opportunity to ensure the ability is there for tourists to add on activities.

Staff addressed questions from the committee on the business mix analysis and timelines related to this. Discussion occurred on what can be done to change the habit of online shopping that increased during the COVID pandemic.

The Committee and staff spoke to the methodology that was used for the business mix analysis. OMAFRA has a sound methodology that is used by many municipalities, including Grey. There have been a lot of changes in the last few years and staff would like to take the opportunity to review the analysis again.

It was noted that it would be beneficial to bring together the Chambers and the Business Improvement Areas to facilitate a growth-oriented brainstorming session. Businesses are overwhelmed with data points. Anyone who is sharing data should be rethinking how that data is presented and shared so that users can be engaged fully.

Heather Aljoe addressed the Committee on a marketing update. She noted that the Rediscover Responsibly campaign was launched on Visitgrey.ca early in Quarter 2 and she spoke to the positive participation and results of everyone getting the same message. The outdoor activity map continued and for the first time since March of 2020, the County was able to market outside of the Grey County audience with a "Find It Here" fall campaign.

TACxx-21 Moved by: Andrea O'Reilly

Seconded by: Joel Dawson

**That Report EDTC-TAC-19-21 regarding a Quarter 2 and Quarter 3
Tourism Workplan Priorities Update be received for information.**

Climate Change Action Plan Update

Linda Swanston noted that she has been working to take the draft Climate Change Action Plan that was prepared with ICLEI Canada and finalize it.

She outlined the vision statement of the Plan and the work that has been completed so far from identifying the need for a climate change action plan, to consultations and the development of a draft plan. She highlighted the communities that have been engaged, and 2018 baselines for community greenhouse gas emissions.

She outlined corporate and community targets in Grey County.

Ms. Swanston outlined the objectives of the Plan including understanding current and projected greenhouse gas emissions, developing a reduction target and set of goals, identifying strategies and actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, preparing the Climate Change Action Plan and partnering with municipalities and stakeholders to implement strategies and work together towards the targets.

Climate change action plan community strategies were outlined, including building, transportation, waste, agriculture, land use, energy, and protection of waterways and shorelines. She noted the areas that touch on the tourism sector and spoke to statistics on sustainable tourism.

Stakeholder conversations are continuing, and she invited members to provide targeted feedback on the Plan. The Plan will also speak to all the great work that is being done in Grey County.

Feedback was then provided. It was noted that stakeholders and businesses feel more engaged when the Plan moves to the stage of providing funding and incentives to enact change. Staff noted that what those incentives will look like will vary based on the program, however it could be low interest financing for retrofits for example.

It is important to position it in a way that looks at opportunities and prioritizing the sectors that have potential for higher impact.

Ms. Swanston noted that each member municipality has identified a climate point of contact and staff can communicate regularly to seek opportunities and to seek where alignments can be made. Further, ensuring that where things are unique to a certain municipality, that those are supported by the County as well.

Meet Your Visitor

Summary of Visitor Markets from Mobile Data

Bryan Plumstead provided an overview of the Meet Your Visitor summary.

He provided information on benchmarks, identified key segments, and who the visitors are that are visiting Grey County and their characteristics. He explored patterns of visitation for these segments and how they have changed over time.

It was noted that staff did a deep dive into Grey's mid-week visitors and how they can be reached. Staff have gained a better understanding of the local market for the first time. Other businesses have gone on to bring Environics Analytics into their marketing and product development as well. Grey County is getting more sophisticated in targeting its marketing.

It was noted that the demographic that was served ten years ago is not the same demographic that is being served today. The visitor has changed.

Roundtable Presentation

Sector Overview and 2022 Predictions & Priorities

Joel Dawson updated the Committee on their business activities. He noted that differences were noticed in terms of what people's expectations are from 2020 to 2021. People have shifted to going somewhere with a purpose rather than travelling in hopes of finding something to do. They expect that there will be a need to market to locals and from within the Province. International travel is on the horizon, but the focus will be local at this time.

Councillor Keaveney noted that the main challenges still exist with the lack of available workforce. Meaford is working towards housing for all. The comments from visitors who came to Meaford were positive. The harbour has been busy, and the municipality is ready to meet the needs of tourists next year. The Meaford Harbour Master Plan called for the addition of a hotel to the harbour area and Meaford staff are working to ensure that hotel plan moves forward.

Andrea O'Reilly noted that the workforce shortage was a significant trend in the hospitality industry. It was tough. Many operators have had to reduce hours but have adapted. She spoke to the difficulty in finding people who want to work in hospitality after the pandemic because of the way front line staff were treated. 2021 saw an increase in weddings, so there is opportunity there to be involved in more weddings and events. She also spoke to the difficulty in managing consumer expectations in terms of

shipping price, delivery times and convenience. The bar has been set high by online retailers.

Sue Carleton gave an update from the Township of Georgian Bluffs. A Recreational Trails Master Plan has been completed and is in the process of being implemented. There are opportunities moving forward to work on these items in the Township.

Andrew Siegart noted that the Blue Mountain Village Association has been working on a next level strategic plan, being a 3-year plan because of the volatility of the market. A big part of focus is the development of a few new iconic events and will help them grow in the shoulder season. Launching in 2022 is an international film festival, which will be a major cultural event. A destination management master plan is being developed. Diversity and inclusion are a priority as well as sustainability.

The focus going forward will be ensuring programming isn't just designed to stimulate day visits and free activities. There will be more bucketing programming, encouraging overnight stays and a higher level of spending. Booking online and preparing in advance are trends that will likely continue. Technology is a labour supply solution.

The Blue Mountain Attainable Housing Corporation is approaching an important milestone in that it is asking the Town to be a co-investor who can provide long term loans and funding and could potentially implement a new development charge to stimulate investment in attainable housing units. Staff are working on a report, but the results of the process will help the corporation advance to the next steps of zoning. The site will have a mix of commercial, market and attainable units. One of the areas of success has been the constant dialogue in the process and the open discussion forum so concerns can be addressed from the outset.

Savanna Myers noted that there are other supporting initiatives that are enabling this. There have been a lot of advancements and changing policies, and the implementation of Community Improvement Plan Programs. Tax increment financing and development charge exemptions are instrumental in getting action and results.

Staff have done a preliminary brainstorming session and are looking at sustainable tourism through a climate change lens. There is a need to continue with data sharing, investment attraction, business support and marketing. The strategic plan will be updated in the future. 2022 will be used as a wrap up year and in 2023 Economic Development, Tourism and Culture will create a Master Plan with the new term of council.

Other Business

Bryan Plumstead will be retiring at the end of the year. He has been such a crucial part of Grey County Tourism. This is his last Tourism Advisory Committee meeting and staff

would like to share a video sharing some messages with him on his importance in the sector.

Staff and the Committee expressed their sincere thanks to Bryan for his work with Grey County Tourism. Bryan then noted that he feels confident leaving Grey County Tourism in great hands. He noted that this Committee is 20 years old this year and thanked the Committee for their kind words.

Chair Siegwart noted that results are some of the most important things and Grey County and the tourism community are among the strongest. Bryan has been instrumental in this and this legacy will live on. He expressed gratitude for the advice and work that Bryan has given over the years.

Next Meeting Dates

January/ February 2022

On motion by Andrea O'Reilly and Councillor Keaveney, the meeting adjourned at 11:50 AM.

Andrew Siegwart, Chair