



Committee Report

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| To: | Warden Hicks and Members of Grey County Council |
| Committee Date: | September 23, 2021 |
| Subject / Report No: | EDTC-CW-16-21 |
| Title: | Tourism Oriented Destination Signage Fees 2021 |
| Prepared by: | Bryan Plumstead, Manager of Tourism |
| Reviewed by: | Pat Hoy, Director of Transportation Mary Lou Spicer, Director of Finance |
| Lower Tier(s) Affected: | All |
| Status: | Recommendation adopted by Committee as presented; Endorsed by Committee of the Whole September 23, 2021; |

Recommendation

1. **That Report EDTC-CW-16-21 be received; and**
2. **That the 2021 fees for Grey County Tourism Oriented Destination Signage (GC TODS) be written off, totaling approximately \$10,000 in lost revenue, to be offset by utilizing COVID-19 Recovery Funding.**

Executive Summary

County Council endorsed a recommendation to write-off Tourism Signage Fees in 2020 due to the adverse impacts of COVID-19. The almost \$9,000 revenue loss was offset through Federal Provincial Safe Restart Municipal Operating Funding.

Visitation and expenditures in Grey County's tourism businesses has been severely impacted by provincial stay at home orders for much of 2021 and partial re-opening beginning in May. Despite a busy summer, most businesses are still impacted by lower revenues for the year, staffing issues and increased costs related to infection prevention and following provincial guidelines. Tourism businesses also face an uncertain fall and winter.

Staff are again recommending a write off of Tourism Signage Fees for 2021 at an estimated loss of \$10,000 to be funded from COVID-19 Recovery Funding.

Background and Discussion

In February 2021 County Council endorsed [EDTC-CW-05-21 Wayfinding Signage Policy](#) which included a recommendation that 2020 Grey County Tourism Oriented Destination Signage (GC TODS) fees be written off . The revenue loss of \$8,944.92 was offset by utilizing Federal Provincial Safe Restart Municipal Operating funding.

Staff are recommending that 2021 Signage fees also be written off, with a projected revenue loss of \$10,000, and that this loss be funded from COVID-19 Recovery Funding. As Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism & Culture Industries Lisa McLeod repeatedly points out “Tourism is the hardest-hit industry, the first to be impacted and the last to re-open.”

Provincial Stay At Home orders in place for much of 2021 and then a Roadmap to ReOpen plan launched in May have greatly impacted Grey County’s tourism industry. Despite Ontario moving to Step 3 of its Roadmap to ReOpen in late July, and Grey Bruce Health Unit lifting its voluntary modifications in early August, and the re-opening of many tourism businesses and institutions, capacity restrictions mean this was only a partial re-opening. Coupled with industry labour shortages, businesses are further handicapped from operating even at capacities they could be, resulting in reduced operating hours and lost potential revenue.

The Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO) has been strongly advocating that “Reopening does not mean Recovery.” From their most recent survey in June 2021, half of all tourism businesses in Ontario expect to recoup only up to 25% of lost revenue over the next three months, and a quarter of businesses do not expect to recoup any of their revenue losses over this period. Just under two-thirds of Ontario tourism businesses had estimated that without continued government support and with no changes in sales or financing, they would not be able to continue paying their ongoing business expenses beyond the end of 2021. With the province now pausing its exit from Step 3, and a lot of uncertainty ahead this fall, tourism businesses are feeling burned out.

From conversations with many Grey County businesses, our municipal partners, and other organizations (Bruce Community Futures and Saugeen Economic Development Corporations, Four County Labour Market Partnership, YMCA, Regional Tourism Organization 7) Economic Development and Tourism staff confirm that these issues and statistics are very much at play in Grey County. Despite a busy summer, most businesses are very concerned about their staffing, debt load, bottom line and what lies ahead this fall and winter. Many businesses that have taken advantage of government funding also are facing deadlines that are fast approaching for repaying loans to access the forgivable portion, and further delay in returning to “normal” business levels is impacting their ability to do so.

While staff are looking at many options to assist our business community and within that our tourism industry, tourism signage fees are one area that Grey County can provide some direct assistance by again writing off fees for 2021. This would amount to a loss of revenue to Transportation Services of approximately \$10,000 and staff recommends funding this from COVID-19 Recovery Funding.

Legal and Legislated Requirements

Not applicable

Financial and Resource Implications

As a result of the pandemic, the tourism sector has been especially impacted. Many tourism businesses hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and regional and provincial health measures required them to close or greatly reduce their operations in 2021. Staff requests the 2021 fees for Grey County Tourism Oriented Destination Signage (GC TODS) be written off due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic impacts. This COVID-19 relief measure would impact Transportation Services as a loss of revenue of approximately \$10,000. The original plan was to recoup some of the County's upfront investment in creating and installing the signs through annual licensing fees; however, given the impact on tourism businesses as a result the pandemic the fees were written off in 2020 and staff are recommending the same approach in 2021. This loss of revenue is being recommended to be to be offset by utilizing COVID-19 Recovery Funding.

Relevant Consultation

- Internal - Tourism, Economic Development, Transportation, Planning, Finance
- External

Appendices and Attachments

None