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YORK REGION TOURISM PROGRAM UPDATE

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report January 22, 2006, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that this report be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Regional Council an overview of the Region's tourism initiatives from November 2005 to February 2006, as well as partnership status updates and a preliminary snapshot of York Region's and Ontario's tourism performance and travel trends.

3. BACKGROUND

The 2006 Tourism Marketing plan sets out goals of the tourism program: to attract tourist visits, generate overnight stays, increase revenues and strengthen urban and rural communities by supporting the development, growth and sustainability of the tourism industry.

The Marketing Program targets three consumer market segments including:

- Leisure
- Travel Trade
- Corporate/Convention/ Conference/SMERF(Social Military Educational Religious and Fraternal Organizations) / Sport Tourism

The tourism program also incorporates Research, Industry and Partnership components.

Staff was directed to provide periodic updates to Council on the Tourism program throughout the year. In May and November of 2005, staff provided reports outlining activities implemented.

This report provides Council with an overview of tourism initiatives implemented from November 2005 through February 2006.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 York Region Tourism Program Initiatives

4.1.1 Leisure Advertising

Several tourism advertising and marketing activities have been committed to date including:

- Festival and Events Ontario Guide - inside front cover placement of York Region full page ad, 250,000 circulation commencing March 2006.
- Attractions Ontario Passport – partner supported ad placement, 1.3 million circulation commencing Spring 2006.
- 2006 Ontario Road Map – York Region full panel advertisement, 800,000 circulation commencing Spring 2006
- Tourism Toronto Spring/Summer Visitors Guide – York Region banner ad, 400,000 circulation commencing Spring 2006
- Ontario Travel Centre – year-round poster York Region display advertising at the provincial tourist information centres in Barrie and Toronto Atrium on Bay.

4.1.2 Travel Trade Marketing

To increase awareness and encourage group tour business, the Region has renewed membership with the Ontario Motorcoach Association, the National Tour Association, the Student and Youth Travel Association and the American Bus Association. Staff will work with tourism industry partners, Tourism Toronto and the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation to follow up with contacts and leads generated from Fall 2005 tradeshow participation. Staff is working with the tourism industry to identify group and student experiences to enhance the effectiveness and distribution of the inaugural “Touring York Region” promotional brochure developed in 2005.

4.1.3 Corporate/Convention/Conference/SMERF/Sport Tourism

To build awareness and generate new business from this market segment, the Region has renewed membership with the Canadian Society of Association Executives, Meeting Planners International, the Independent Meeting Planners Association of Canada and the Canadian Sport Tourism Alliance.

Staff continues to build relationships with key organizations and follow up with leads generated from participation at industry tradeshows and events in 2005.

The region is partnering with The Canadian Meeting and Travel Group in the development, marketing and distribution of the 2nd edition of the “KeyNote Conference Planner”. This planner is for the purpose of increasing awareness, soliciting and generating new business from the meeting/conference markets and is expected to be in circulation in March.

Sport tourism is simply, the visits generated by participants or spectators of sport, recreation and physical activity- everything from a day trip for hiking or horseback riding to watching a hockey game to hosting a major international Championship or multi-sport

Games. Under staff direction, the Humber and Seneca College students will work with area municipalities, private, government and sports organizations to collect data on the current status of the region's sport activities and facilities. Paul Jurbala of *communityactive* consulting and management will assist staff develop a foundation report which will be the basis to determine the feasibility for a larger sport tourism development initiative and strategy. Mr. Jurbala, a leader in Canadian sport for over 25 years, including affiliations with the Sport Alliance of Ontario, the National Sport Federation and the Markham Sports Council brings experience in areas of sport tourism, event hosting and community led development through sport to the project. An understanding of how to best support these activities will pay dividends far beyond the economic impact of sport event hosting.

4.1.4 Partnerships

Working in partnership forms the foundation of the Region's tourism program. An appealing tourist destination is comprised of many products and services, which can be more tangible through selling the experience as a whole. Partnered initiatives leverage limited marketing dollars and channel collective resources to maximize extended market reach in today's competitive marketplace.

- **Tourism Toronto**

This partnership was established in 2005 whereby \$250,000 was received by the Region and staff have been successful in securing this funding for 2006. Staff is in discussion with Tourism Toronto to establish a Memorandum of Understanding that will provide incremental dollars above this base funding to support additional tourism marketing programs in 2006 and to continue the \$250,000 funding for the 2007 tourism program. Staff will report back regarding this joint marketing initiative that augments and enhances the region's promotional reach in all market segments once details have been confirmed.

- **Humber College and Seneca College Student Placement**

The region supports the opportunity to encourage career choices in the leisure service industry by working with the Humber College School of Hospitality, Recreation & Tourism and the Seneca College of Applied Arts & Technology – Centre for Tourism and Leisure Services to provide internships for students. These learning experiences provide students the opportunity to apply knowledge and skills gained from classes to a professional environment. Seneca College student Serena Chin will complete 150 hours of internship during January – March and Humber College student Joey Mancini will complete 200 internship hours during the period February 6 to March 10. Under staff direction, the students will facilitate the first phase of the sport tourism initiative by doing a facility inventory to assess the region's current sport tourism capacity.

- **Tourism Federation of Ontario Conference**

Founded in January, 1996, the Tourism Federation of Ontario is the federally-incorporated not-for-profit "umbrella" organization for the 29 not-for-profit associations serving Ontario's diverse tourism industry. The Federation organizes and hosts an annual

Tourism Forum, a major event featuring speakers and workshops, to which all Ontario tourism operators are invited. York Region as well as, the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation are some of the sponsors for the eighth annual tourism forum being held on March 28 and 29 at the Sheraton Parkway Hotel and Conference Centre, Richmond Hill. Staff are working with various cultural organizations to provide the entertainment on March 28 that follows the annual banquet and awards presentation by the Honorable Jim Bradley, Ontario Minister of Tourism.

4.1.5 Research – Premier Ranked Tourist Destination Project (PRTD)

With the financial support of the Government of Canada (Service Canada) and the provincial Ministry of Tourism, the Region commenced work in October 2005 on this extensive research project. The Planning & Economic Development Committee received a staff presentation in November 2005 that was circulated to area Municipalities. Since November, the PRTD project team has collected data bases of accommodations, festivals and events, food and beverage, retail, wineries, breweries, recreation, attractions, museums and galleries and transportation companies. Sector surveys were sent out in January and the completed survey data will be inputted into the project database software for analysis, projections and recommendations.

A Steering Committee was struck consisting of representatives from Chambers of Commerce, Downtown Business Improvement Associations, Municipalities and the tourism business community. This Committee will assist the facilitation of the project with the York Region Tourism Advisory Group of which Regional Councillors Mayor Sherban and Deputy Mayor Scarpitti are the appointed Planning and Development Committee representatives. The committee building process included an initial information session held November 25th to engage interest and a project orientation session held on January 12th to give members a project overview and engage consultation with the PRTD Team's research activities currently in progress. These Committee champions will provide guidance and direction throughout the entire analysis process and will ultimately provide recommendations for future sustainability and growth within the tourism and related sectors. Staff will provide periodic milestone updates as the project progresses.

Upon completion in September, the Premier Ranked Tourism Destination project will provide an objective appraisal of the Region's current competitive position in the tourism marketplace, make recommendations for future growth and sustainability and identifies benchmarks to measure tourism performance over time.

4.1.6 Industry Development

Staff has on-going involvement and consultation with community organizations, area Municipalities and all levels of government with a role to build the economic impact of tourism in York Region. Such involvement includes but not restricted to Vaughan Tourism Advisory Committee, Arts Society of King, Artslink, York Durham Museum Association, York Region Farm Fresh Association, Getaway Country, Tourism Toronto, York Region Chambers of Commerce and downtown Business Improvement

Associations, Ministries of Tourism and Culture, Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and many others.

Another objective of the tourism program is to provide educational and networking opportunities such as the following to leverage a competitive edge for York Region's tourism sector:

- **Making Ontario's Heritage Accessible for People with Disabilities**

York Region Tourism in partnership with The Ontario Historical Society, York Durham Association of Museums and Archives and the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee will be presenting this workshop March 6, at the York Region administrative Centre. This workshop will discuss the barriers and challenges to improving accessibility and provide practical and innovation solutions for improving accessibility in the heritage community.

4.1.7 Promotional Brochure Development

As the region's tourism program evolves, staff regularly consults with tourism industry stakeholders and operators to ensure appropriate regional promotional publications are being developed to meet the needs of the end user and increase revenues to area municipalities and industry partners. The following are the only regional brochures engaging the tourism industry in a partnership to build consumer, travel trade and meeting/conference market segment awareness and demand. Strategic advertising, distribution channels and marketing activities are identified in the 2006 tourism program that support the promotion and marketing of these publications.

- **2006 York Region Visitors' Guide**

At time of writing this report, staff had completed the advertising sales programme to solicit industry participation and were working on the production and creative layout of the 2006 York Region Visitors' Guide. Design and production changes have been made to enhance the Guide to double the print quantity to 150,000 copies without increasing the cost for industry partners to participate. It is proposed that the Visitors' Guide will be produced and ready for circulation March/April.

- **Touring York Region**

Staff is working with the tourism industry to identify group and student experiences to enhance and support the development the 2nd edition of "Touring York Region" promotional brochure. This is the only regional publication that engages industry partners in a cooperative initiative to build awareness and generate revenues from the motor coach group and packaged tour market segments.

- **KeyNote Conference Planner**

The Region is partnering with the Canadian Meeting and Travel Group in the development, marketing and distribution of the 2nd edition of the "KeyNote Conference Planner." This is the only regional publication that engages industry partners in a

cooperative initiative to build awareness and generate revenues from the various meeting and conference market segments.

- **Sport Tourism Asset Guide**

Under staff direction, the Humber and Seneca College students will work with area municipalities, private, government and sports organizations to collect data on the current status of the region's sport activities and facilities. This is the first phase of the development of a sport tourism strategy.

4.1.8 Tourism Web Site - www.yorktourism.com

To enhance and position the tourism site as a lead community information portal for the region's tourism industry and provide consumers a one-stop shop for information, planning and buying purposes was identified in the 2006 tourism program. One immediate solution staff is pursuing is to build upon the area Municipalities and region's business directory partnership with the Breken Group, YLM™ - Your Local Marketplace. This would be a unique regional community opportunity that would evolve and enhance the current content of the regional and area municipal business directories to include tourism establishments. Integration of the data base to provide more functionality to support e-commerce, tourism promotion and marketing initiatives is under review.

4.2 Research

Staff regularly review and meet with tourism industry owners and operators as well as officials from The Canadian Tourism Commission, Tourism Toronto, Ontario Ministry of Tourism and the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation to better understand the trends and issues facing the travel and tourism industry. The following is a synopsis of some of this research.

- **An Overview of Tourism Activity in York Region**

The services of Research Resolutions and Consulting Ltd., is contracted on a yearly basis to provide the most recent overview of current markets, value, and characteristics of visits to the region. The findings are from the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation's economic impact model with information provided from Statistics Canada's Canadian Travel Survey and International Travel Survey. At time of writing this report only preliminary information was available that states York Region attracted almost 3 million person visitors in 2004 spending \$209.3 million on touristic activities. This was a recovery and growth year from the 2.5 million visitors spending \$184 million in 2003. Staff will arrange for Judy Rogers of Research Resolutions and Consulting Ltd., to do a presentation detailing the results of the findings at the April Planning Committee meeting.

- **Ontario Tourism Performance Update**

In 2004, tourism was Ontario's 7th largest generator of foreign exchange, following transportation equipment, machinery, chemical products, computer and electronic products, primary metals, and plastics and rubber products manufacturing, bringing into

the province \$6.7 billion. The total contribution of tourism to the provincial GDP amounted to \$20.4 billion, which is greater than that of the agriculture, forestry/logging, commercial fishing/hunting and mining industries combined. Tourism was the 14th largest industry in the province in terms of employment, reaching 213,000 jobs, accounting for 3.3% of Ontario's total employment. This is just a brief snapshot of the economic impact of tourism in Ontario and more information is available on www.tourism.gov.on.

- **Cross Border Passport Update**

On January 25, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and Department of State announced that they are developing a new travel document, the PASS (People Access Security Service) card. This is an alternative to an earlier proposal which under the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) stated that in 2008, all Canadians and Americans returning from visiting Canada would require a passport to enter the United States. Ontario is the largest Canadian port of entry into the U.S. and during 2004 Ontario received 21.4 million U.S. visitors, whose expenditures amounted to nearly US\$3.3 billion. Ontario Minister of Tourism, Jim Bradley continues to express his concern that the requirement of a passport- like document will not only affect the economy and business but also impact friends, families, historic and vital personal relationships. Ontario is proposing to identify and develop alternative forms of "secure documentation", such as a new, more secure drivers licence or other forms of documentation that would comply with the requirements of the U.S. Real ID Act, 2005.

4.3 Relationship to Vision 2026

The tourism program supports the Vibrant Economy and Enhanced Environment Heritage and Culture goals of Vision 2026 and is a core component of the York Region economic development strategy.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The tourism program initiatives are funded in the 2006 Economic Development budget allocation and are augmented by \$250,000 in funding from the Tourism Toronto destination marketing fee and industry advertising co-operative buys.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The region's tourism industry is extremely diverse and consists of predominantly small to medium sized family owned and operated businesses. Visitor expenditures contribute to profitable tourism businesses, create new employment opportunities, encourage economic growth and support the regeneration and sustainability within all of the area municipalities.

The Region's tourism marketing program is based on developing and promoting a range of tourism experiences in all of the local municipalities in the Region.

7. CONCLUSION

The Region's tourism program identifies the most critical tourism markets and works to maximize potential while developing new business opportunities and identifying partnerships to diversify the market base. Staff work collaboratively with members of local councils and staff of the local municipalities to ensure that the Region's marketing program is "in sync" with local tourism objectives, to eliminate overlapping efforts and channel collective resources in today's competitive.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.