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“MEET N PLAY” & “STAY N PLAY” 2004 SARS MARKETING AND RECOVERY INITIATIVES

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, March 8, 2004, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. This report be received for information.
2. Staff be directed to report back the results upon completion of the project.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Regional Council an update of the “Meet n Play” and “Stay n Play” SARS marketing and recovery initiatives that have received Provincial funding.

3. BACKGROUND

In May 2003, Regional Council approved funding of \$250,000 from the 2003 supplementary tax revenues to implement a SARS Emergency Recovery Program to rebuild consumer confidence and assist in economic recovery. In June 2003, Council approved a number of marketing and promotional initiatives with a portion of the funding being allocated to support the local business community and a portion for the Accommodation sector to recapture leisure and business overnight stays. On January 7, 2004, Regional Council received a staff report that detailed the SARS recovery activities implemented in 2003 and identified \$40,000 of the SARS funding for a program to be implemented in 2004 that would assist in rebuilding overnight traffic into the Region. The Regions’ \$40,000 supported a proposal in partnership with the York Region Hotel Marketing Committee and the Town of Markham to leverage funding from the Province of Ontario. The proposal identified a two phase strategy focussed on recapturing corporate and meeting business through a “Meet n Play” program plus a “Stay n Play” program to increase leisure overnight stays.

At the Tourism Annual General Conference on February 25, 2004, MPP Tony Wong announced that the Province would be financially supporting the Region’s “Meet n Play” and “Stay n Play” SARS recovery program in the amount of \$100,000. The combined Provincial support and partnered dollars will yield a total marketing budget of approximately \$200,000 to continue recovery efforts in 2004.

This report provides an overview of the activities to be undertaken in 2004 as part of the “Meet n Play” and “Stay n Play” SARS recovery program.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The program elements were determined in consultation with the York Region Hotel Marketing Committee, the Town of Markham and various industry partners. Regional staff will facilitate the program on behalf of the partners and the project will conclude Fall of 2004.

4.1 Meet n Play & Stay n Play York Region Program

The “Meet n Play” and “Stay n Play” represents a two phase collaborative effort structured to drive new business, assist in recapturing lost business and re-establishing York Region as a top of mind destination for leisure and business travellers. The two phases incorporate a number of initiatives that support rebuilding consumer confidence and economic recovery into York Region.

4.1.1 Phase 1 - “Meet n Play” Program Elements

The majority of “Meet n Play” initiatives will be implemented during the period February through June 2004. Meet n Play’s focus is on increasing new overnight business traffic, meetings and conference business and supports building current market loyalty. Approximately \$72,000 of the total program funding has been allocated to provide marketing and distribution support to increase awareness of the Region’s meeting facilities and the KeyNote Conference and Meeting Planner.

The initiatives include:

- Distribution of 5000 copies of the KeyNote Conference and Meeting Planner to corporate, independent and government meeting planners in February through the Meeting and Travel Group M & IT magazine
- Editorial, features, promotions and advertising in targeted publications (i.e. Meeting and Travel Group magazine, Conventions Meeting Canada, Globe & Mail Inconference Magazine, Independent Meeting Planners Association of Canada)
- A familiarization tour for meeting planners and media proposed for later in 2004
- Staff participation in “meetCanada Affordable Meeting Solutions” trade shows on May 19 in Vaughan and May 21 in Ottawa
- Other tradeshow or promotional initiatives to be considered in partnership with Tourism Toronto, Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership and Industry partners
- A “Meet n Play” value added discount coupon promotion may also be developed if there is sufficient industry interest and support

As well, the participating Hotels will implement a corporate business reward program that provides their business clients with a room discount offer to return in the summertime and participate in the Stay n Play program.

4.1.2 Phase 2 - “Stay n Play” Elements

Stay n Play will be implemented as a complementary component to Meet n Play with a focus to drive leisure and overnight travel to the Region during the period July through September 2004. The program builds upon the Region’s 2003 SARS Recovery Stay n Play promotion and includes compelling Hotel packages, a value added discount coupon booklet and an enhanced consumer advertising plan.

Approximately \$128,000 of the total program funding has been allocated to a Summer and Fall consumer advertising and marketing program consisting of the following:

- CAA publication advertising – Leisureways, Going Places and Journey
- The Great York Region Getaway feature, Buffalo, Ottawa and Rochester
- York Region feature in Globe & Mail, Explore Ontario promotion
- AAA Michigan Living advertising
- AAA Going Places advertising
- Other advertising and promotions may be considered in partnership with Tourism Toronto, Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership or other appropriate media or industry partners.

As well, Hotel partners will be providing compelling Stay n Play packages to lure leisure overnight stays, and a value added Stay n Play coupon booklet will be developed to increase awareness and promote visitation to Regional tourism facilities (attractions, retail, recreation, restaurants, events and festivals).

4.2 Relationship to Vision 2026

Promoting the economic health and prosperity of the Region will be essential in achieving the Vibrant Economy Goal of Vision 2026.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Region in partnership with the Town of Markham and the York Region Hotels contributed a total of \$100,000 to support the Meet n Play and Stay n Play project. This collaborative approach was successful in leveraging an additional \$100,000 in Provincial funding to enhance the program. The total amount of funding for marketing, promotions and distribution Meet n Play and Stay n Play program is \$200,000.

The partners include:

The Town of Markham	\$ 30,000
York Region	\$ 40,000
York Region Hotel Partners	\$ 30,000
Province of Ontario	\$ 100,000

Hotel partners to date include the Briars Resort and Conference Centre, Sheraton and Best Western Parkway Hotels, Holiday Inn Hotel and Suites Toronto-Markham, Hilton Suites Conference Centre & Spa, Radisson Hotel Toronto-Markham. Best Western

Voyageur Place Hotel Newmarket, Comfort Inn Markham, Howard Johnson Hotel Toronto-Markham, Hilton Garden Inn and the Monte Carlo Inn. Discussions are still ongoing to increase Hotel participation.

The Hotels and other industry partners will also be providing approximately \$20,000 of in-kind services for public relations and familiarization tours to increase awareness of the programs to select media and meeting planners. Additional funds will be generated through the industry sector (attraction, retail, recreational partners) to develop the Stay n Play discount coupon booklet.

The Region's \$40,000 contribution was funds that were allocated from the 2003 SARS Recovery budget to support the Accommodation sector in their recovery efforts.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

This industry partnership approach was required to demonstrate to the Province the commitment to work together and market the Region in a collaborative approach to the consumer. The Meet n Play and Stay n Play program continues to build upon the recovery efforts and drive tourist and business revenues into all of the area Municipalities.

7. CONCLUSION

It is estimated that it will take a minimum of at least two years for Toronto to restore its image and get the tourism industry back on track. York Region still has some challenging times ahead given the fierce competition to attract and rebuild leisure and business marketshare. The Meet n Play and Stay n Play programs demonstrate a strategic, partnered approach for maximum impact, leverage and economic benefits while restoring consumer confidence in York Region as a viable tourist and business destination.

It is recommended that this report be received for information and that staff be directed to report back the results of the project upon completion.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.