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YORK REGION TOURISM MARKETING MID-YEAR REVIEW

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated March 30, 2007, 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 marketing initiatives from November 2006 to May 2007.

3. BACKGROUND

The 2007 Tourism Marketing Program is based on research, results and consultations with industry and partners. It supports the 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 local tourism industry and York Region as a four season destination.

The Marketing Program is centred on promoting the Region by experience, by season, and by market. Programs are directed at high-yield travellers in three key source markets:

- Consumer Leisure
- Leisure Trade
- Corporate Meeting & Conference and Sport

The tourism marketing program also addresses Industry Relations, Interactive Marketing, and Destination Partner marketing.

Staff was directed to provide periodic updates to Council on the tourism marketing program throughout the year. In March and October of 2006, staff provided reports outlining activities implemented throughout 2006.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The 2007 Tourism Marketing Program has been developed based on key experiential product clusters, determined in part from the results of the Premier-Ranked Tourism

Destination audit. These leading regional tourism products are: Recreation/Outdoors, Arts & Culture, Canada's Wonderland, Shopping, Urban/Rural Experiences, and Heritage Districts. Tourism marketing messaging in advertising and promotions speaks to the key tourism experiences of Family Adventure, Shopping, Festivals & Events, Arts & Culture, Agri-Culinary, and Golf.

4.1 York Region Tourism Marketing Initiatives

4.1.1 Consumer Leisure Marketing

- Summer Advertising Campaign - Campaign flight April – August 2007 targeting Family (A30-55 with kids), Couples(25-65) in Michigan, Upstate New York, Ontario markets, including the GTA. Publications include CAA, AAA, Ontario Travel, and the Globe & Mail.
- Fall Advertising Campaign - Campaign flight September – November 2007 targeting Couples (25-65) in Michigan, Upstate New York, Ontario markets. Publications include CAA, AAA, Ontario Travel, and the Globe & Mail.
- Stay Local Campaign - Local marketing initiative to encourage attraction & dining visitation, targeting residents, trade & consumer show attendees, local corporations, inbound meeting delegates, and sporting event attendees. Commencing summer 2007.
- Festival and Events Ontario Guide - 250,000 circulation commencing March 2007.
- Harvest Ontario Guide – collaboration with York Region Farm Fresh Association to profile the Region's agri-culinary product and farmers' markets. Commencing May 2007.
- Ontario Travel Centres – annual advertising at the provincial tourist information centres in Barrie and downtown Toronto.
- Ontario Travel web site and micro sites - online web banners links to yorktourism.com.
- Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership programs – Great Drives, Distinctive Getaways, and Ontario Golf marketing programs. Year long programs in market April 2007.

4.1.2 Leisure Trade Marketing

To increase destination awareness and encourage group tour business, the Region has renewed partnerships with the Ontario Motor Coach Association, the National Tour Association, the Student and Youth Travel Association and the American Bus Association. Staff are working with the tourism industry to identify new group and student experiences to further develop the Region as a group tour destination. The "Touring York Region" promotional brochure developed in 2006 will be updated to highlight new product offerings. Other partnered initiatives include:

- Attractions Ontario "Are We There Yet?" Guide – Destination awareness through region and industry partner product profiles, 1.3 million circulation commencing September 2007.
- Destination Familiarization Tour – an invitational tour was conducted February 16-17, 2007 for Ontario tour operators seeking new product and touring experiences

coupled with an interest in increasing visitation to the Region. The program involved nine regional tourism industry partners and showcased regional product applicable to student and senior tours.

4.1.3 Corporate Meetings & Conferences and Sport Marketing

To build awareness and generate new business from the Meetings & Conference market, the Region has renewed partnership with the Canadian Society of Association Executives, Meeting Professionals International, and the Independent Meeting Planners Association of Canada.

Staff continues to build awareness with key trade organizations, participate in industry tradeshow, and support special marketing events, including National Meetings Industry Day (April 2007). Assistance is regularly provided to the meeting & conference planning profession to facilitate site selection, connection to local tourism businesses, and provision of destination services.

The 2007 tourism marketing program begins to address the Sport tourism audience which is defined as participants in group physical activity and spectators of sports and recreational events. A pilot of a tournament supplement publication was undertaken with the International Silver Sticks hockey tournaments between December 2006 and February 2007. Intended as a destination awareness publication, the booklets summarize visitor information specific to the tournament audiences of visiting teams and their families. The content builds the awareness of local businesses and entertainments while generating local economic impacts. This pilot project has garnered the interest of other local sports associations and councils, as well as the local municipalities.

Several activities intended to build awareness of the Region's sporting venues, services and facilities are planned throughout 2007 and include marketing communications to the national and provincial sports organizations (industry representatives of a variety of sport disciplines); co-ordination of a facilities familiarization tour in conjunction with the GTA tourism partnership; and participation in a Sport Alliance Ontario Event to showcase regional attributes.

4.2 External Partnerships

Working in partnership with industry is an integral part of the tourism marketing program. In developing consumer-focused programs that support the tourism strategy, marketing priorities and promotional campaigns, the Region's tourism marketing program seeks to build industry partnerships. Collaboration with various industry groups and associations enables the development and delivery of sustainable destination marketing programs. Partnered initiatives leverage limited marketing dollars and channel collective resources to maximize market reach in today's competitive marketplace.

4.2.1 Tourism Toronto

This partnership was established in 2005 with Tourism Toronto whereby the collection of a Destination Marketing Fee by the Greater Toronto Hotel Association provides the

Region with annual marketing funds. Staff successfully secured this funding through to 2009. A renewed Memorandum of Understanding has provided funding in the amount of \$300,000 to support an expanded tourism marketing program for 2007, augmenting and enhancing the Region's promotional reach in all markets.

4.2.2 Humber College Internship

In working in partnership with the Humber College School of Hospitality, Recreation & Tourism, the Region has provided a spring internship in the Tourism branch. A Humber College student completed a four-week internship during the period February 26 to March 23, 2007. Under staff direction, the student was responsible for the development of a directory of services and information as a prototype module for volunteer and hospitality industry customer service training.

4.2.3 New Partnership Initiatives

Support will be given to a number of new partner initiatives in 2007

- Great Drives touring routes program, initiated by the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation (OTMPC), targets family and adult travel within the Region and encourages the discovery of the Region's tourism treasures throughout the summer and fall seasons.
- Distinctive Getaways, an OTMPC program, defines product for the discerning Ontario traveller seeking unique theatre, spa, golf, and agri-culinary experiences year round.
- A tourism partnership with key golf course stakeholders will promote the Region's premier golf experiences and product.
- In partnership with the organizers of the Canadian Open golf championship, York Region Tourism will facilitate and promote the visitor experience surrounding the Canadian Open event. Partnership activities include the development of an event-specific golf web site, niche publications for the golf audience, and collaboration on events and communication channels to showcase the Region's tourism product.

4.3 Industry Development

Staff has continued to consult and interact with tourism industry partners, community organizations, area municipalities and related associations with the goal of building and enhancing the Region's tourism profile into an integrated, four season destination. In the area of Industry Development, staff provided the following industry education, assistance, and shared learning opportunities through workshops and regular communication to local industry partners:

4.3.1 Partners Working Together Workshop

Facilitated by the Tourism branch, with a guest speaker from the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation (OTMPC), the *Partners Working Together* Workshop was held on March 22, 2007. The workshop consisted of a half-day presentation that included a review of the 2006 tourism marketing and partnership successes, and industry development programs along with a presentation of the tourism initiatives for 2007. The workshop was well received with over 50 participants in attendance from a wide variety

of industry sectors including chambers of commerce, attractions, hotels, arts & cultural associations, and area municipalities.

4.3.2 Arts Workshop

York Region Tourism in partnership with the Ontario Trillium Foundation provided a workshop on March 27, 2007 to Region-based arts organizations to familiarize local stakeholders with the two organizations and their respective partnership and funding opportunities. A total of 22 arts organizations from across the Region participated in the workshop.

4.3.3 Celebrate Ontario Grant Application Assistance

In January 2007, the Ministry of Tourism announced new funding for Festival & Events under a one time grant program called Celebrate Ontario. Application assistance and direction was provided to nine Region-based festival & events including: Milliken Mills Children's Festival, Unionville Village Festival, Applefest at Markham Museum, Windfall Ecology Festival, Great Markham Stampede, Kingfest Music Celebration, and Kortright Centre Fall Colour Festival. On March 19, 2007 the Ministry of Tourism announced that 56 festivals, from the 350 applications received, were granted one-time funding. The Kingfest Music Celebration located in King Township was one of the successful applicants granted funding.

4.3.4 York Region Tourism E-Newsletter

This quarterly communication vehicle is used to update tourism industry partners on marketing opportunities, promotions, trends, and research.

4.4 Promotional Development

Regionally-focused publications and online content promote the Region as a tourism destination and are developed in conjunction with tourism industry partners to support tourism revenue generation and drive consumer demand in key markets.

4.4.1 2007 York Region Visitors' Guide

The 2007 edition of the annual Visitors' Guide has been printed and currently 150,000 copies are in distribution throughout Ontario with fulfillment to other locales channelled through consumer inquiries by phone and the Internet.

4.4.2 "Touring York Region" Brochure

Staff is working with the tourism industry to identify group tour experiences to enhance and support the development of the second edition of "Touring York Region" promotional brochure which targets the Region's business-to-business relationship with the tour operator. This Regional publication engages industry partners in a cooperative initiative to build awareness and generate revenues from the motor coach and packaged tour industry.

4.4.3 Student Experiences Guide

A supplemental publication to the “Touring York Region” brochure is in development. This targeted educational piece will outline Student experiences and profile Regional tourism experiences of interest to the niche market of student tour operators.

4.4.4 Tourism Web Site - www.yorktourism.com

The tourism web site is the information portal for the Region’s communities, tourism industry, and consumers in general. During 2007, the web site will be re-launched with a new appearance and functionality for both the consumer and the tourism industry. Advancements on the web site were reported to Committee April 4, 2007.

4.5 Research, Trends and Performance Measures

Staff regularly consults 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.

4.5.1 An Overview of Tourism Activity in York Region

Research Resolutions and Consulting Ltd. is contracted on a yearly basis to provide the most recent overview of tourism markets, value, and characteristics of visits to the Region. At this time, 2005 statistics are not yet available from the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation and Statistics Canada. Staff will arrange for a presentation by Research Resolutions and Consulting Ltd. as soon as data is available and compiled.

Travel indicators and trends, however, largely support a positive outlook for domestic tourism in Ontario. Travel demand continues to rise to more stable levels aided by Canada’s strong economic performance and higher consumer interest in domestic travel. Tourism marketers are placing stronger emphasis in 2007 on the domestic traveller in an effort to maintain demand for tourism product and domestic destinations by offering more compelling travel options in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

Awareness of York Region as a tourism destination is growing within Ontario. The conveniences of closeness to major centres and accessibility, combined with the Region’s diversity, urban /rural communities, and significant outdoor product, is making York Region an alternative getaway choice and a recognized day trip destination for visitors and residents alike.

4.5.2 Interactive Marketing Trends

With the Internet playing an increasingly significant role in consumer travel patterns, a fully integrated web and media strategy is emerging as a tourism marketing priority. Developing a dynamic web site with quick access to diverse travel information, consumer-focused communications, and targeted content and messaging will allow the Region to reach consumers earlier in their trip planning cycle and is essential if the Region is to remain a competitive destination.

4.5.3 Performance Measures

The tourism marketing initiatives include performance measures used to understand, evaluate, and measure the impact of marketing communications and partnered programs while providing accountability to our stakeholders and assisting development of new marketing campaigns.

In 2007, the following measures will support our marketing efforts:

- Work closely with Tourism Toronto and Ontario Ministry of Tourism to monitor visitation to York Region, emerging trends and assess the strength of new domestic markets.
- Provide detailed information on the results of the Region's tourism marketing program and progress pertaining to consumer awareness, interest in visiting York Region and perceptions of York Region as a tourist destination.
- Conduct seasonal advertising tracking research to measure awareness levels of campaigns and the corresponding impact of advertising on consumer intentions to travel to the Region.
- Collaborate with Tourism Toronto and the Ministry of Tourism to obtain survey statistics related to travel indicators, visitor characteristic and economic impacts.

4.6 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 2007 Economic Development budget allocation and are augmented by \$300,000 in funding from the Tourism Toronto destination marketing fee initiative and industry supported co-operative advertising.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The Region's tourism industry is extremely diverse and consists of predominantly small to medium sized businesses. Visitor expenditures support the economic vitality of local tourism businesses, enhance employment opportunities, encourage economic growth, and support sustainability of area municipalities.

The Region's tourism marketing program is based on developing and promoting a range of tourism experiences that will impact all municipalities throughout the Region.

7. CONCLUSION

The 2007 tourism marketing program provides a framework for the promotion and development of the Region as a four season destination. The Region's tourism industry is provided with tactical partnership opportunities to enhance and grow their businesses and market reach. The marketing priorities build upon the Region's key experiences and strongest audience markets to maximize visitation and economic impact, while furthering the development and sustainability of the Region's urban and rural communities.

Staff continues to work collaboratively with members of local councils and staff of local municipalities to ensure that the Region's tourism marketing program recognizes local tourism objectives and supports a collective approach to tourism and destination development.

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The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.