

2

YORK REGION TOURISM WEBSITE

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated May 14, 2007, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that this report be circulated by the Regional Clerk to the local municipalities, the local chambers of commerce and board of trade for information and engagement.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Regional Council with an overview of the new and enhanced York Region tourism website.

3. BACKGROUND

The development of a new and enhanced tourism website was identified as a component of the 2006 Tourism Marketing Program approved by Regional Council in September 2005. The Supplies and Services Branch released the Request for Proposals to secure consulting services for the development of York Region's tourism website on October 6, 2006. Fifteen (15) companies provided project submissions that were reviewed by an Evaluation Team resulting in the two (2) highest ranking firms being interviewed. Based on the scoring results from the interview evaluation process, the project was awarded to eSolutions Group Ltd., based out of Waterloo. eSolutions specializes in web based communications and has worked with a variety of governmental and private sector organizations to develop award winning tourism websites. The tourism website URL will remain as www.yorktourism.com.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The global trend in tourism marketing is that the internet plays an increasingly significant role in consumers researching, planning and purchasing of travel resources. The new and enhanced tourism web site responds to these marketplace demands and is a continuation of the ongoing marketing to promote tourism and generate economic benefits for York Region. The new site is a migration to a more dynamic, visually appealing and interactive design with enhanced infrastructure that provides ease of navigation for the

user. These upgrades and enhancements position the Regional tourism web site as the lead community marketing and information portal for the tourism industry and provides consumers a one-stop shop for information, planning and buying purposes. The web technology infrastructure is scalable so it can be built upon as stakeholders use the online channel to find information and access services.

4.1 The Website Framework

The site is developed into three specific categories to allow for strategic target marketing to York Region's key target audiences. The objective of this design is to engage each target audience by speaking directly to their needs when visiting the site. The *Plan Your Visit* focuses on the leisure consumer traveller. *Meetings & Groups* provides an opportunity to provide information on the services required by Meeting Planners, Tour Operators and Sports Organizations. *Experience Your Community* supports enhancing the awareness level of the resident community. An exclusive *Media and Tourism Partners* section has been incorporated into the new site.

4.1.1 Tourism Business and Event Promotion

The website is a free marketing opportunity for tourism businesses and for special event promotion. These listings can be submitted and managed automatically by the tourism businesses with posting approval being granted at the regional level. As well, banner advertising is available for a fee.

- **Free Business Listing**

All approved tourism businesses will be provided a free business listing. The business listing includes the business contact, address, email and web site link, plus a 100 word description, logo and maximum of three images.

- **Events / Activities Calendar**

Tourism events and activities are posted on the website for free. The calendar allows site visitors to search events by date, keyword, municipality or category. As events and tourism activities are key travel motivators, tourism businesses are encouraged to take advantage of this free marketing opportunity.

- **Advertising and Promotions**

The site empowers York Region's tourism industry to have access into an effective, integrated on-line marketing, advertising and promotional tool. The concept provides the ability for businesses to enhance business exposure and market to specific audience sectors through the purchase of banner advertisement.

4.1.2 Local Municipal Promotion

A page has been designed exclusively for each local municipality to market their tourism attributes and services. The page is designed to augment local municipal tourism promotional efforts and consists of a description, photos and community services and contacts. A link is also provided to the business directory for the consumer to research tourism businesses and event listings specific to one municipality. To further enhance

and cross promote the municipal profile and local specific attributes, the new site provides links to municipal web sites in several sections. Staff will work with the local municipalities to ensure reciprocal links are in place back to www.yorktourism.com. The municipalities are also encouraged to advise their tourism businesses to take advantage of the free promotion by submitting a business or event listing.

4.1.3 Website Enhancements

The new tourism website incorporates several new features that support building the profile of York Region as a tourist destination and provides insight for future tourism initiatives and activities.

- **Tourism Partners**

Industry relations have been improved through a partner log in section on the site. This section will include general information, demographics and research to assist the development of the tourism industry. Currently, the Tourism Partners section will host York Region industry communications including the newsletter, the tourism strategy and marketing partnership programs.

- **Media**

The media section has been designed through consultations with media partners to ensure effective delivery of news articles and story ideas which can be easily researched to build York Region's profile through unpaid media exposure.

- **Statistical Report System**

The web content management system has an integrated statistical report system supported by Urchin that provides hit/visit details for each individual business. This information is valuable to determine consumer trends for future strategic direction and marketing promotions.

- **e-Postcard System - Tell a Friend**

Site visitors will be able to send a picture from the digital gallery system via email to friends and family and within the postcard will be links back to the tourism website.

- **Travel Guides/Brochures/Publications**

To enhance partner exposure in print publications York Region tourism brochures will be posted on-line.

- **Ontarians with Disabilities Act 2001 (ODA 2001)**

The website has been designed to be accessible to persons with disabilities, in support of the ODA 2001.

4.2 Next Steps

The tourism website URL is posted on all tourism consumer marketing, advertising and promotional materials. Enhanced internet marketing activities are included in the tourism

program to support the launch of the new site and participating industry partners. Staff will continue to contact industry leaders and tourism businesses to engage their participation.

4.3 Relationship to Vision 2026

The new tourism website supports the Vibrant Economy and Enhanced Environment, Heritage and Culture goals as set out in Vision 2026.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The website design and infrastructure services provided by eSolutions in the amount of \$81,800 (including GST), was funded through the destination marketing partnership with Tourism Toronto. Funding to cover the cost of externally hosting the site, will be budgeted for in the tourism budget annually and will be offset through the sales of website banner advertising.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The site supports and leverages current local municipal marketing efforts and provides exclusive opportunities to market and profile municipal specific tourism activities. The new and improved website is an information source/directory and marketing tool that will attract new visitors and generate economic benefits to local municipalities and businesses. Local municipalities are encouraged to ensure that direct links from municipal web sites to www.yorktourism.com are in place to take advantage of the marketing and promotional initiatives identified in the tourism program to build awareness of the new site.

7. CONCLUSION

An enhanced internet presence is a key component of the tourism promotional efforts to capture York Region's share of tourism revenues. The objective is to provide a dynamic and integrated site that empowers York Region's tourism industry and related businesses to have access into an effective, integrated on-line marketing, advertising and promotional tool. The new web site provides diverse travel information, consumer-focused communications, and targeted content and messaging allowing York Region to be more effective marketing to consumers and key business sectors.

For further information about this report, please contact Brenda McGowan, Program Manager Tourism Development at (905) 830-4444 ext. 1553 or brenda.mcgowan@york.ca.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.