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2010 YORK REGION TOURISM INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated August 31, 2009, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The 2010 Tourism Industry Partnership Development Program be adopted as outlined, subject to the approval of the 2010 Economic Development operating budget.
2. The Regional Chair and Regional Clerk be authorized to sign the necessary agreement(s) with industry partners and other organizations, subject to review by Legal Services to support the program.
3. 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

This report provides Regional Council with the 2010 Tourism Industry Partnership Development Program and seeks approval to the activities identified in the work plan, subject to approval of the 2010 Economic Development and Tourism operating budget.

3. BACKGROUND

Tourism industry partnership development is a core component of the Region's tourism program and plays an active role in achieving the goals identified in the Long Term Tourism Destination Development Strategy, known as LTTDDS in future references.

Creating an environment for the development, growth and sustainability of the tourism industry

Support to the tourism industry is accomplished through the provision of strategic direction, educational forums, effective communications, business planning assistance, product and partnership development and research initiatives that assist the tourism industry to make informed decisions.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The Industry Partnership Development Program consists of the following initiatives:

- Strengthening Partnerships and Communication
- Product Development and Packaging
- Research
- Consumer inquiries, Database Administration and Tracking Management

STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIP AND COMMUNICATIONS

Outreach to industry partners to be better informed will be increased

Information sharing with local Municipalities, industry stakeholders and tourism partners are an integral component of Regional efforts to support, inform and engage partner participation. Initiatives to build partnerships, to share best practices and enhance communications will be held throughout the year with tourism partners as follows:

- Monthly communications via email directing stakeholders to the Tourism Newsletter on www.yorktourism.com. where updates on Regional tourism activities, partner opportunities, business innovation, research, marketing and advertising initiatives will be posted
- Database management and building of new tourism partners contacts
- Quarterly meetings will be coordinated with the York Region Tourism Advisory Group for advisement on matters that affect the sustainability of the tourism sector.
- Hosting of an annual tourism conference in November plus consultations/meetings throughout the year with industry stakeholders and local municipalities to engage partners in marketing, product development and marketing campaigns and to advocate for the tourism program.
- Continue to monitor and communicate the opportunities and implications of the Ministry of Tourism's Ontario's Competitive Study recommendation to develop new Provincial tourism zones and destination marketing/management organizations.

Facilitate professional development to support business sustainability and growth

Training and educational forums will be held to enhance business skills, develop new products and manage operations effectively. On a partnership basis with the local Municipalities, Chambers of Commerce and Board of Trade five workshops which are aligned with the recommendations from the LTTDDS are proposed as follows:

- Host a York Region Sports Symposium to facilitate development of a sports tournament program with support from the Canadian Sport Tourism Alliance

- Conduct an Investment Readiness workshop to educate and empower municipalities for investment attraction from a tourism perspective. As part of the LTTDS process, PKF Consulting will be providing an individual municipal accommodation needs assessment and undertaking feasibility studies for potential tourism attraction investment opportunities for York Region
- Enhance grant and funding proposal skills by offering a *How to Grow Successful and Sustainable Community Events* seminar
- Promote region-wide service excellence through engaging the tourism industry in the new online York Region Customer Service Training Toolkit

Additional educational opportunities that support business development of smaller to medium size hospitality and tourism enterprises will be coordinated in partnership with the York Region Small Business Enterprise Center.

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND PACKAGING

Tourism product development is an essential element to further growth of York Region's tourism sector

Tourism product development enhancements can lengthen the time visitors stay, increase visitor expenditures and encourage repeat visitation. Strengthening existing product offerings and facilitating new product experiences will be coordinated to support Regional tourism expansion and include the following:

- Establish a working group of York Region golf industry partners to plan enhancements to the existing golf program
- Collaborate with industry partners to build the agri-culinary experiences in the Region and further the development of the York Region Farm Fresh Guide
- Build upon the *Doors Open* partnership established in 2009 with the participating local municipalities
- Develop new programs and promotions that support the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership's themed Distinctive Getaways promotions (Cultural, Great Drives, Festivals/Events)
- Work with the York Region Forest in the development and promotion of the Region's recreation and outdoor experiences
- Work with accommodation partners to develop innovative getaway packages to increase leisure overnight stays
- Work with industry stakeholders to develop promotional offers to increase overnight business traffic, meetings and conferences
- Efforts will be enhanced to increase awareness and engage tourism businesses in free business listing and event promotional opportunities on the tourism website

RESEARCH

Conduct and monitor research to anticipate and effectively address current economic conditions and tourism trends

Tourism research is conducted by various entities but not often coordinated or shared. Having a sound research base is critical to ensure that proper planning is done to guide the development of marketing programs and product offerings. Increased emphasis will be placed on communicating the results of this research and in training tourism operators how to use research for making informed business decisions.

As a means of understanding the leisure consumer that is accessing York Region tourism experiences, a minimum of nine intercept surveys in collaboration with local municipal partners and industry stakeholders will be completed at a variety of attractions, museums, golf courses, festivals and events across the Region.

The surveys will provide valuable research to the participating tourism business to understand who their leisure consumers is, where did they originate, how did they hear about the tourism experience, the value of their economic spend and what their future travel intentions are. This information will assist the tourism business to secure external funding resources to enhance and market their business and validates Regional tourism marketing strategies and future product development.

The available Provincial Statistics Canada York Region census data on the tourism visitation and economic impacts and the intercept data will be analysed and used to tailor product development and refine marketing strategies.

CONSUMER INQUIRIES, WEB SITE AND DATABASE MANAGEMENT

Tracking inquiries and managing results maximizes tourism program delivery

Table 1
Jan-July Tracking Results

2009 Year to Date Tracking		2008 Year to Date Tracking	
Information request via phone*	2,320	Information request via phone*	450
Information request via website *	3,899	Information request via website *	360
Contest entries	6,093	Contest entries	1, 240
Website: Total number of visits	76,541	Website: Total number of visits	104,940
Website: Total number of page views	417,426	Website: Total number of page views	463,246
Website: Avg. page views per visit	5.94	Website: Avg. page views per visit	5.22

** The resident postcard mail drop was done in April 2009 versus September in 2008.*

Tracking and managing the results captured from the tourism website, from the consumer inquiries, and industry trends including hotel occupancy levels assists in the delivery of programs that provide economic benefits the tourism industry.

All advertising campaigns direct consumers to the tourism website (www.yorktourism.com) or to call the toll-free line (1-888-448-0000) for assistance and to obtain promotional brochures. This direct communication with consumers provides an opportunity to obtain valuable market research and build repeat visitation.

Additional web features will be incorporated in 2010 that support ease of consumer planning and assist in maximizing the online capacity for the tourism industry partners.

Relationship to Vision 2026

The 2010 Tourism Industry Partnership Development Program supports the Vibrant Economy and Enhanced Environment, Heritage and Culture goals of Vision 2026, is a core component of the York Region Economic Development Strategy and the Long Term Tourism Destination Development Strategy.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

York Region's tourism program budget is subject to approval of the 2010 Economic Development operating budget. The total tourism program budget for 2010 is \$605,760 with a net tax levy impact of \$484,160.

Partnerships with public and private organizations will be utilized to secure additional funding resources to leverage regional tourism activities.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Regional staff will continue to work with local municipalities to build tourism potential and provide assistance with destination planning and product development to maximize tourism's opportunities and increase local economic impact.

7. CONCLUSION

The 2010 Tourism Industry Partnership Development work plan supports the recommendations identified in the Long Term Tourism Destination Development Strategy for York Region. The program includes a multitude of initiatives including research, product development, education and training opportunities and visitor services. To be fully effective, it will require a coordinated approach and open communication between tourism partners, industry stakeholders and local municipalities.

For more information on this report, please contact Brenda McGowan, Program Manager, Tourism Development at (905) 830 4444 Ext. 1553 or Patrick Draper, Program Director, Economic Development and Tourism.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.