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2009 TOURISM INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated September 17, 2008, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The 2009 Tourism Industry Partnership Development Program be adopted as outlined, subject to the approval of the 2009 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 2009 Tourism Industry Partnership Development Program and seeks approval to the components of the work plan, subject to approval of the 2009 Economic Development operating budget.

3. BACKGROUND

Tourism industry partnership development is a core component of the regional tourism program. It is the leadership role that regional staff undertakes to create an environment for the development, growth and sustainability of the tourism industry. This is accomplished by providing strategic direction, holding 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 Communications

- Stakeholder Product Development
- Research and Performance Metrics
- Consumer Inquiries, Web Site and Database Administration

4.1 Strengthen Partnerships and Communications

Initiatives to build partnerships and enhance communication initiatives are as follows:

- Quarterly meetings will be coordinated with the York Region Tourism Advisory Group to provide the leadership and advisement to regional staff on matters that affect the sustainability of the tourism sector and act in the role of advocates for the tourism industry partnership development program.
- Training and educational forums will be held to assist operators obtain the business skills to plan for change, develop new products and manage their operations effectively. The training will be based on industry needs from the following four themes: Marketing, Customer Service, Sales and Product Development. Four to six sessions are proposed for 2009 on a partnership basis with the local Municipalities, Chambers of Commerce and Board of Trade.
- Increase business participation in the Tourism Customer Service Training Program in partnership with the York Region Character Foundation.
- Outreach to local Municipalities, industry stakeholders and tourism partners are an integral component of regional efforts to support, inform and engage partner participation. Consultations to be better informed, to share best practices and trends and to provide grant funding direction will be held throughout the year with tourism partners to improve existing products to meet visitor expectations.
- The Tourism Newsletter blog has been created on www.yorktourism.com under the Tourism Partners menu as the primary communication vehicle to the tourism industry and partners. Updates on regional tourism activities, partner opportunities and marketing initiatives are posted and communicated electronically on a monthly basis; as well this tool provides tracking and direct partner feedback. The blog also includes a feature that recognizes individual tourism business innovation and best practices.

4.2 Stakeholder and Product Development

The following strategic initiative support industry development and provides tourism partners with opportunities to increase visitation and revenues from the Region's target audiences:

- **Leisure Consumer**

Two York Region promotional days will be held, (in June and September) where partners have opportunities to distribute literature to GO Train passengers at Union Station.

Staff will work with industry partners to collaborate and create innovative all inclusive packages that support the 2009 tourism marketing campaigns and develop experiential offerings that are aligned with regional and provincial product clusters including Golf, Culinary, Arts and Culture, Outdoors, Distinctive Getaways and Great Fall Drives.

- **Meetings and Group**

Trade show participation, sales missions and client events will be hosted in collaboration with Tourism Toronto to increase the number of meetings, conferences and conventions held in York Region.

Regional sponsorship and participation at the Ontario Motorcoach Association Conference will provide partner opportunities to generate new student and adult group tour business.

Work will continue in support of local Sports Councils and organizations coordinating sports tournaments in York Region through the provision of a personalized promotional “tournament brochure” and regional information services.

Membership will be retained with key trade and industry organization to build the profile and services available through the regional tourism office.

4.3 Research and Performance Metrics

Regional staff will assist in the development of tools to collect reliable customer information and enhance the research capacity at the local level. Research captured from the tourism web site (www.yorktourism.com) and collected at trade shows and events will provide market analysis to enhance and tailor product development strategies and support marketing collateral.

Research Resolutions and Consulting Ltd., will be retained to analyze the most recent provincial data provided by Statistics Canada to report on the economic value and impact of tourism into York Region. Provincial and other tourism research resources will be examined to identify new research requirements to be implemented to support industry development in 2009.

A greater emphasis will be placed on communicating the results of this research and in training operators how to use it for making informed business decisions.

4.4 Consumer Inquiries, Web site and Database Administration

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

- Additional web features will be incorporated in 2009 that support ease of consumer planning and buying and assist in maximizing the on-line capacity of tourism industry partners.
- Management of the consumer, web site and industry contact databases and updates to the data base technology will be incorporated in 2009 to enhance current capabilities.

4.5 Relationship to Vision 2026

The 2009 Tourism Industry Partnership Development Program supports the Vibrant Economy and Enhanced Environment, Heritage and Culture and Engaged Communities and A Responsive Region goals of Vision 2026 and is a core component of the York Region Economic Development Strategy.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Tourism Industry Partnership Development program funding is a component of the Economic Development and Tourism program which is subject to approval of the 2009 Economic Development operating budget. Industry participation fees and sponsorships will partially offset the costs. The total York Region Tourism budget for 2009 is \$896,200 with a net tax levy impact of \$474,600. This compares to the 2008 budget of \$873,200 and \$451,600 respectively.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Regional staff will work with local municipalities to raise awareness of tourism and provide assistance with destination planning and development to maximize tourism's opportunities and increase local economic impact.

7. CONCLUSION

The 2009 tourism industry partnership development program includes a multitude of components including research, assessment of current assets, product and experience

market readiness development, training requirements and visitor services. To be fully effective, it will require collaborative efforts 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 (905) 830 4444 Ext. 1553 or Patrick Draper, Program Director Economic Strategy and Tourism at Ext. 1503.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.