



Staff Report

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Report To:	General Government Committee	
Date of Meeting:	April 11, 2022	Report Number: CSD-007-22
Submitted By:	George Acorn, Director of Community Services	
Reviewed By:	Mary-Anne Dempster, CAO	By-law Number:
File Number:		Resolution#: GG-194-22
Report Subject:	Tourism Update 2021	

Recommendation:

1. That Report CSD-007-22 be received for information.

Report Overview

Tourism has experienced several changes through the years. Most recently, Tourism became a function of the Community Services Department, Client Services Division in the Fall of 2020. While the Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC) was formed in 2019, the past year saw the committee hit its stride in contributions to the Tourism portfolio.

The collaboration between staff and TAC saw improvements in meetings, goal setting, and focus. These improvements materialized into improvements in executing and evaluating annual Tourism marketing campaigns, development of key metrics which have positioned staff to evaluate the economic impact of Tourism in Clarington and positioned the team well to support the new initiatives with Economic Development and the Clarington Board of Trade (CBOT).

This report aims to summarize the work that has been accomplished within Tourism since becoming a part of the Community Services Department and outlines some of the focus and initiatives planned for the upcoming year.

1. Background

- 1.1 Following the confirmation of Tourism as a municipal service in 2015 and the hiring of a full-time staff position, Council voted to establish the Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC) in December 2018 through report [CAO-015-18](#). TAC is comprised of tourism stakeholders and residents, who work with staff to provide advice, and recommendations on how to improve and promote tourism in the Municipality. While the pandemic has provided challenges with meeting in person, TAC continued to meet virtually to enhance the Tourism portfolio.
- 1.2 In 2019, TAC worked with staff to develop strategic initiatives and goals to assist in providing some direction to the work of staff. This report outlines the collaborative work between TAC and staff on meeting the intent of the initiatives developed in 2019. Further, staff and TAC have worked together closely to evaluate new initiatives that should be included because of the ever-changing landscape of Clarington.
- 1.3 In Fall 2020, as recommended in the Grant Thornton Report, Tourism was transitioned out of the CAO's office, Communications Division, into the Community Services Department, Client Services Division. This provided staff an opportunity to review current work plans, the role of TAC, and metrics surrounding how success was measured for the various campaigns that occurred annually.
- 1.4 In Spring 2021, through report [CSD-004-21](#), the closure of the Tourism Information Centre was approved. This created an opportunity for Tourism staff to focus on how we could expand access to information, and how we could provide information to visitors through a different method, including the development of a Tourism

Ambassador program. Also, with the elimination of the part-time tourism position during the 2021 operating budget deliberations, staff saw an opportunity to utilize existing resources in our community centres to support the Tourism team.

2. Update of Strategic Initiatives

Marketing and Education Plan

- 2.1 In 2021, Clarington Tourism adopted the tourism ambassador toolkit made available by Central Counties Tourism. This toolkit is a self-paced online course that aims to give a better understanding of the relationship between tourism, and the local economy. By the end of the course, participants learn to treat each visitor in a way that creates a memorable guest experience. Tourism staff completed training in December 2021 to evaluate the program. Two actions came out of the evolution. First, staff has identified that all TAC members should complete the training. Moving forward, this will become a part of onboarding new committee members. Secondly, staff are developing an abbreviated version of the training targeted at Customer Service Representatives (CSRs). This training will position CSRs to act as Tourism Ambassadors.
- 2.2 As Tourism Ambassadors, CSRs will be able to support visitors and promote Tourism services and opportunities within our recreation facilities. This has become increasingly important. With the elimination of the Tourism Information Centre, Tourism Displays were created within the recreation facilities. The location of these displays was chosen to increase access to Tourism information because of the expanded hours at recreation facilities, provide customers access to accessible washrooms and water stations, lobbies that can be used to take a break, and access to our CSRs to answer Tourism related questions. These displays were launched in January to align with the reopening of the Municipality's recreation facilities. Coupled with the Tourism Ambassador training for staff, this will position our recreation facilities as the perfect opportunity for visitors to see all that Clarington has to offer.
- 2.3 Outside of offering local Tourism information, an important part of the Tourism portfolio is the Marketing and Advertising of opportunities for visitors. One initiative saw staff work with The Weekend Route to create a fall campaign that highlighted local businesses. 'Apples, Corn Mazes, and Sweet Treats,' route was created and advertised on The Weekend Route website (theweekendroute.com), and through a blog, vlog, and social media advertising. Clarington Tourism included this route as part of the overall fall campaign, which included promotion on the Municipal website and Municipal social media sites.
- 2.4 Social media remains the most effective way to promote Tourism opportunities in Clarington. The staff has seen increases in followers on social media. Since 2020, Tourism's Facebook audience has grown 12%, and the Instagram audience has grown

31%. Partnering with other social media users (accounts, influencers, and content creators) is a common practice. These social media partnerships expand Clarington's exposure, bring more diverse postings, and increase new content for our followers. An example of this is the partnership with Toronto food and travel influencer @to_finest to create a video. This provided exposure to @to_finest's 167,000 followers throughout the GTA. The summer video had over 70,000 views and over 4,000 likes, shares, saves, and comments. The fall video had 54,000 views and 3,800 likes, shares, saves, and comments, which added to the success of both the summer and fall campaigns.

- 2.5 Staff have been pursuing advertising opportunities in new areas outside of Clarington to broaden the reach of information. Advertisements were taken out in Horizon Magazine (100,000 copies distributed), on billboards at Yonge and Dundas Square (168 video spots), Gardiner Expressway (330 video spots), Adamo Magazine (100,000 copies distributes), condo elevators (700 elevator screens 700,000 plays over four months), and the Globe and Mail. These advertising initiatives have increased our advertising base and encouraged more people to take advantage of visitor opportunities within Clarington.
- 2.6 With the impact of the pandemic, a key goal in 2021 was to re-engage with residents and visitors. To gain feedback, staff, with the support of TAC, held eight pop-ups between July and October. Booths were set up to share local information, conduct surveys through QR codes (paper copies were available), and hand out swag to promote Tourism in Clarington. The information collected during these events has helped staff introduce new communication methods, and plan for more successful campaigns moving forward.
- 2.7 A specific outcome from the survey data has been the creation of an electronic newsletter. Customers identified through the survey, that the top two ways they prefer to receive information are through social media and email. Staff has already been working to increase social media followers as identified in section 2.4 of this report, so to meet the need of customers preferring email as a communication method, the newsletter was developed. The newsletter now has 387 subscribers and has an email open rate of 25%, 20% higher than the standard 5% open rate of most electronic newsletters.
- 2.8 Staff identified gaps in services resulting from Public Health restrictions throughout the pandemic. To highlight available opportunities for visitors to Clarington, staff worked with Darlington Provincial Park, which sees over 140,000 visitors per year. The Park could no longer provide canteen or store services to visitors. As a result, staff created and provided Darlington Provincial Park with watercolour postcards showcasing the park, and highlighted local businesses where visitors could buy food, camping gear, and local goods. This benefited both the park by providing visitors access to

necessities and helped to promote and support local businesses by encouraging park visitors to purchase items locally.

- 2.9 Based on the success and positive feedback received on the initiative with Darlington Provincial Park, staff created various postcards highlighting some of Clarington's well-known locations. The postcards were made available to hand out in local businesses and advertised as part of the holiday campaign in December.

Economic Impact of Tourism

- 2.10 Digital advertising and Geofencing are advertising tactics staff use that enables them to track the estimated economic impact of campaigns. This tactic was used in three campaigns in 2021. Digital advertising is measured by impressions and conversions. Impressions are the number of times an advertisement or content is displayed, regardless of customer interaction. Conversions occur when a visitor to a website completes a desired goal (i.e., enters an advertised business). These metrics enable staff to estimate the economic impact of a campaign. The calculation is done using the number of conversions multiplied by the per day spend provided by the Regional Tourism Office.
- 2.11 The summer and fall campaigns used information from the uptake of information from Clarington's website, through digital and social media advertisements, by clicking through to a stakeholder website, downloading the summer brochure, and by clicking on 'contact us' buttons. In addition to the above, the holiday campaign used tracking of cellphone pings as an additional way to measure the uptake of the campaign. Cell phone pings are when someone who received a Clarington Tourism advertisement on their phone then walks into a Clarington business or the predetermined area (Geofencing).
- 2.12 The summer campaign included four local pop-up events where over 1,600 pieces of Clarington swag were handed out and surveys were conducted with 241 people. Close to 90% of those surveyed were Clarington residents. Respondents indicated their favourite tourism activities include the waterfront, farmers' markets, beaches, trails, patios, and farms. Digital advertising tied to the summer campaign showed the campaign resulted in approximately \$239,282 being spent in Clarington. This economic impact was calculated using metrics from the summer campaign with the methodology explained in section 2.10.
- 2.13 The fall campaign included four local pop-up events targeted at key tourism locations that saw over 300 pieces of Clarington swag distributed and 131 surveys being completed. Visitors were from Toronto, Ajax, Oshawa, Pickering, and Scarborough. 23% of people heard about the location(s) from friends, followed by 12% hearing about the location from Instagram. Almost 60% of visitors surveyed intended to spend between \$25-\$100 in Clarington that day. Digital advertising had an estimated economic

impact of \$40,014. While lower than the summer campaign impact, staff spent less money on digital advertising in the fall, focussing more on other methods including billboards and magazine advertisements. Staff continue to evaluate the success of different advertising methods to inform what continues to be used in future campaigns.

- 2.14 The holiday campaign included a direct mail postcard encouraging visitors to shop our historic downtowns, rural markets, and tree farms. 2,683 postcards were delivered to Ajax, Oshawa, Peterborough, Pickering, Scarborough, Uxbridge, and Whitby. Digital advertising efforts targeted the same postal codes used for the maildrop. Efforts were made to geofence Clarington's downtown cores in addition to the businesses promoted through the holiday campaign. Digital advertising had an estimated economic impact of \$572,208. The geofencing showed 7,336 people received our advertisements and then walked into a Clarington downtown or business.

3. 2022 Workplan and Opportunities

- 3.1 Staff is looking forward to re-engaging in person with our stakeholders, residents, and visitors. With the loosening of Public Health measures, the staff and TAC are looking forward to participation in community events as they return. These events will provide staff additional opportunities to gather survey data that will drive improvements in Tourism advertising and visitor attraction. To increase our visibility at these community events, staff working with Corporate Communications, designed a new vehicle wrap for the Department's van. The vehicle will attend these events creating a higher profile that will support staff in getting out tourism messaging out to the community.
- 3.2 Staff recognize the importance of reporting on the economic impact Tourism has on the Clarington community. Tourism is an ideal vehicle to drive net new dollars into the local economy and can assist in keeping and stabilizing the tax base for years to come. Because of this importance, the staff is working with Central Counties Tourism (our Regional Tourism Office) on a new initiative to geofence the Municipality's historic downtowns and other tourism areas of interest. This will showcase the number of residents, visitors, and unique visits to the area over the year and compare the data to previous years, back to 2019. This information can be input into the "Tourism Regional Economic Impact Model" to provide the economic impact of tourism in these areas.
- 3.3 Staff will build on the success and learnings from 2021 to plan and implement plans for 2022. TAC continues to be engaged and involved in contributing to the focus and outcomes of tourism campaigns. The goals for this year's campaigns are to increase brand awareness, develop metrics that allow comparisons of results year over year, and increase the number of visitors to Clarington at key times of the year. Staff will utilize the data gathered through surveys to inform advertising and marketing decisions.

- 3.4 The Municipality recently signed an agreement with the Clarington Board of Trade to deliver business retention and expansion services for a two-year term. This would see the attraction portion of economic development activities become a responsibility of the Planning and Development Department. As part of CBOT's contract, they will be providing a quarterly update to the Planning and Development Committee that will also be inclusive of a staff update on the attraction portfolio. It is recommended that due to the linkages between Tourism and Economic Development that we also provide an update at that time on our activities. Moving forward, we will use this opportunity to update on Tourism initiatives rather than in the format of an annual report.
- 3.5 Filming is the responsibility of the Tourism office; while this has not been a large component of the work plan during the pandemic, staff has seen the number of requests increasing in the first quarter of 2022. Filming can be an important part of a community, providing community awareness of local assets and downtown cores, a positive economic impact both to the Municipality and businesses, and increases to foot traffic throughout the Municipality. As filming outside of Toronto increases year over year, staff look to create and digitize the filming process. This will ensure Clarington provides a film-friendly experience for production companies while considering the local impacts. Staff continues to work with the Durham Region Film Office on capturing the economic impact of filming in Clarington.

4. Concurrence

- 4.1 Not Applicable.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 Since moving to Community Services, Tourism staff have made a concerted effort to increase the metrics and measurements of success in the already great work on campaigns and marketing campaigns. The shift in focus to incorporating measurable metrics came from the awareness and importance of demonstrating the economic impact that Tourism can have on the local economy.
- 5.2 Staff, along with TAC, look forward to continuing their work with local stakeholders to increase their profile through campaigns and leveraging the opportunities to gather information on how the Tourism team can continue to support Tourism stakeholders. Staff have begun to plan their usual campaigns surrounding Summer, Fall and the Holidays. In addition, Staff and TAC are looking forward the return of Special Events and Festivals in 2022 to further support and encourage Tourism in our community.

Attachments:

Not Applicable

Interested Parties:

List of Interested Parties available from Department.