

REPORT

REPORT TO: Chair and Members of the Community and Corporate Affairs Committee

REPORT FROM: Damian Szybalski, Manager of Economic Development,
Innovation and Culture
Alex Fuller, Manager of Corporate Communications

DATE: February 26, 2018

REPORT NO.: ADMIN-2018-0007

RE: New Strategic Approach to the Management of the Tourism Portfolio

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report No. ADMIN-2018-0007, dated February 26, 2018, regarding the recommended new strategic approach to the management of the tourism portfolio be received;

AND FURTHER THAT the existing Tourism Agreement between the Town of Halton Hills and the Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce, which expired on December 31, 2017, for the delivery of tourism information services, not be renewed, including the “Amendment to Tourism Agreement Web Site” related to the Chamber’s responsibilities around the www.visithaltonhills.ca website;

AND FURTHER THAT, the \$30,000 in annual funding that had previously been allocated to the implementation of the Tourism Agreement be reallocated to supplement the already-budgeted-for part-time permanent position of “Economic Development Assistant” in order to convert this job to a part-time permanent “Economic Development and Tourism Coordinator” position within the Economic Development, Innovation and Culture division;

AND FURTHER THAT, as part of the development of a comprehensive tourism workplan, Town staff give consideration to any potential opportunities for utilizing a ‘fee-for-service’ approach with the Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce and other potential partners for the purposes of delivering specific activities, provided that such activities align within the Town’s workplan, add value and fit within the available Town budget;

AND FURTHER THAT, Town staff prepare and execute a mutually-beneficial Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which identifies potential tourism roles and responsibilities, to be signed by the Town of Halton Hills and the Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce;

AND FURTHER THAT the oversight and management of the “Tourism Advisory Committee”, currently with the Chamber of Commerce, be reassumed by the Town of Halton Hills;

AND FURTHER THAT the “Economic Development and Tourism Coordinator”, in collaboration with the Manager of Corporate Communications, utilize the community brand guidelines for tourism-related initiatives, as appropriate.

BACKGROUND:

1.1 Tourism Agreement

The Town of Halton Hills (the Town), annually provides funding of \$30,000 to the Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce (the “Chamber”) through the Economic Development, Innovation and Culture division for the purposes of carrying out tourism-related initiatives. This includes the development and execution of an annual plan; promotion, hosting and/or attendance at community events; production of a Festival and Events Guide; display and re-stocking of tourism material; tourism marketing and development; inquiry fulfillment and tourism research.

The most recent tourism Agreement had a 3-year term that started on January 1, 2015 and expired on December 31, 2017. The Agreement included a number of stipulations and deliverables for the Chamber, including:

- Hosting a tourism-focused website (originally developed by the Town);
- Developing/executing activities associated with tourism information services;
- Providing and staffing a Tourism Information Services site;
- Producing and distributing a tourism-related publication;
- Maintaining a tourism rack and supplying satellite sites;
- Preparing (in consultation with the Town) an annual plan and delivering it;
- Preparing a semi-annual progress report; and
- Providing \$30,000 in in-kind and/or cash contributions towards tourism services.

Over the years, the Chamber has fulfilled the Agreement and has had some significant successes, most notably with the ‘Most Patriotic Town Challenge’ initiative. The latter was supported by Town funding. The Chamber has also secured summer students through grant applications (i.e. “Summer Events Team”), promoted a variety of community events via social media and other channels, managed the Tourism Committee and grown the www.visithaltonhills.ca website.

1.2 Community Brand

Although the marketing of the community brand was not included in the tourism agreement, it has been used on various tourism materials. In June 2017, staff developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Chamber to fulfill Council's direction per report COMMSERV-2017-0001:

"... for staff to explore a partnership with the Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce to promote and encourage community-wide adoption of the community brand as per the established guidelines and that the Town provide an annual budget of \$5,000 from the existing Corporate Communications account to assist the Chamber with their marketing efforts."

This MOU was based on a three-phase project regarding 'Community Branding of Online and Public Display Bulletin Boards/Kiosks' which included:

- Phase 1 – Research: Developing a comprehensive inventory of all public display bulletin boards and information kiosks located in Halton Hills.
- Phase 2 – Design Suggestions for Application of Community Brand.
- Phase 3 – Execution of Approved Design Option(s).

The Chamber successfully completed phases one and two and received \$2500 for this work. Phase 3 was put on hold as staff wanted to have further discussions regarding the use of the community brand in municipal facilities. The community brand MOU expired in September 2017.

With the Town now recommended to lead tourism services, and given the connection between tourism and the community brand, it is no longer necessary to provide the Chamber with funding for the community brand, nor the renewal of the related MOU.

COMMENTS:

2.1 Current (Expired) Tourism Agreement

The current tourism Agreement allows both parties to terminate it with a six month written notice or wait until its natural expiration. The Agreement expired at the end of 2017.

Town staff has had several meetings with the Chamber to discuss the tourism Agreement and explore next steps. These discussions have been positive, comprehensive and productive, and resulted in the recommended roles and relationships outlined in this report, as well as an agreement of the need for the tourism portfolio to be managed in a more strategic manner that aligns with Council's Strategic Plan.

On January 11, 2018, the Town's CAO; Manager of Economic Development, Innovation and Culture; and Manager of Corporate Communications met with the Chamber's Chair of Board of Directors; General Manager; and the Membership Services, Communications and Tourism Coordinator. Building on previous meetings, the discussion focused on the Town's and Chamber's mutual interest in successfully delivering tourism services. All parties acknowledged numerous challenges posed by the past Tourism Agreement, the need to prepare a more focused and scoped MOU that aligns with Council's Strategic Plan, and the need to move to a more strategic approach to managing tourism services. As well, it was recognized that this direction would support the Chamber in their desire to better focus on their core business and related priorities.

2.2 New Strategic Approach to Managing the Tourism Portfolio

Over the past three years, the Town has spent considerable effort to put in place a comprehensive strategic planning framework. With Council's Strategic Plan as the starting point, this framework determines the Town's priorities, drives departmental business plans and workplans, and ensures that Town resources are allocated effectively and efficiently to deliver on Council's priorities. The result is that all work undertaken by staff aligns with the Strategic Plan and is accompanied by a transparent process that ensures accountability to the public.

The Town has applied this strategic approach to all subject areas across departments, including, for example, sustainability, transportation, economic development, corporate communications, arts and culture, youth needs, community planning and budgeting. The same strategic approach had not however, been applied to the tourism file. This has created some uncertainty about the Town's tourism priorities and the status of their implementation.

Tourism is referenced as one of Council's Strategic Plan priorities, and relates to rural economic development, planning for growth and communications, specifically:

- 7B – Rural Economic Development: Work with the Chamber of Commerce, BIA's, the Region, Halton Hills Cultural Round Table, and others to promote sports, heritage, countryside, agricultural and eco-tourism.
- 3E – Planning for Growth: Have regard to our “strong sense of community” in welcoming new residents and businesses to Halton Hills.
- 8C: Communications: Explore and implement opportunities for improved web/social media communications.

A more strategic approach to managing tourism will benefit the Town and the Chamber.

Under the new model, the Town would assume responsibility for leading the tourism strategy, while continuing to collaborate with the Chamber on specific initiatives on a fee-for-service basis, as needed. In this way, the Town will be able to leverage the skills and/or resources of the municipality, including the new Economic Development,

Innovation and Culture division, Recreation and Parks, Heritage (Planning and Sustainability), Corporate Communications division and other community partners.

This new model will align the tourism portfolio with the Town's Strategic Plan, Council's priorities and utilize the community brand guidelines, as appropriate. Among other things and subject to the development of a detailed tourism workplan, the Town would:

- Establish the strategy, priorities and develop a detailed workplan to capitalize on the Town's tourism assets, including culture (e.g. cultural assets captured in the Cultural Master Plan, Culture Days, Wenjiang partnership), eco-tourism (e.g. trails, cycling), agri-tourism, heritage (e.g. LMM), sports (e.g. tournaments, sports facilities), and culinary attractions;
- Develop Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure the economic benefits of tourism specific to Halton Hills;
- Continue to collaborate with the Chamber in the implementation of tourism priorities (fee-for-service, as appropriate);
- Leverage the new corporate structure which includes the recently established "Economic Development, Innovation and Culture" division, and the linkages between economic development, culture, recreation and tourism, as well as the Town's expertise within the Corporate Communications division;
- Report to Town Committee/Council on the KPIs and deliverables;
- Oversee and manage the Tourism Advisory Committee;
- Oversee and manage the www.visithaltonhills.ca website; and
- Identify and leverage funding and partnership opportunities at the regional, provincial, federal and international levels (e.g. Cultural Roundtable, LMM, Halton Region, Halton Tourism Partners, Conservation Authorities, sports groups/associations, RTO 3, etc).

The Chamber's role will be captured under the new MOU. It is recognized that some tasks may fall under the Chamber's regular day-to-day responsibilities while others would incur additional costs and be scoped under the MOU. Town staff have met with the Chamber to develop the document and both parties have agreed to the draft MOU. The MOU commits the Town to offering the Chamber first right of refusal for the provision of outsourced tourism services, and sets out the framework under which any such work would occur. Pending approval of this report, the MOU is ready for signing by the Town and the Chamber.

2.3 Next Steps

Provided that Committee approves the recommendations of this report, the immediate next steps are to:

- Formally inform the Chamber of the new strategic approach to delivering tourism and Community Brand services, as outlined in this report and approved by Committee/Council.

- Issue appropriate communications.
- Recruit for the “Economic Development and Tourism Coordinator” position.
- Sign the new MOU that captures the direction outlined in this report.
- Set up a regular meeting schedule with the Chamber to coordinate tourism deliverables under the MOU, as required.
- Prepare a tourism workplan and begin implementation.

RELATIONSHIP TO STRATEGIC PLAN:

This report supports the following strategic priorities of Council:

- Work with the Chamber of Commerce, BIA’s, the Region, Halton Hills Cultural Round Table, and others to promote sports, heritage, countryside, agricultural and eco-tourism.
- Have regard to our “strong sense of community” in welcoming new residents and businesses to Halton Hills.
- Collaborate with community partners to continue to implement the Integrated Community Sustainability Strategy.
- Effective, efficient and economical delivery of the Town’s existing services.
- Explore and implement opportunities for improved web/social media communications.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The reallocation of existing funding will allow tourism services and the community brand guidelines to be delivered more strategically and efficiently, in alignment with Council’s Strategic Plan priorities.

As per the recommendations of this report, the tourism portfolio will be delivered by the “Economic Development and Tourism Coordinator”, working in collaboration with internal and external partners. This position will be funded using an existing operating budget that has already been held for a part-time permanent position and included in the 2018 Base Budget and net staff additions, plus the \$30,000 reallocated from the prior Chamber Tourism Agreement. Considering that the Chamber’s role in tourism has ended at the end of February, filling of the “Economic Development and Tourism Coordinator” position is key to ensuring the seamless management of this file and responding to existing workload demands.

While the hiring of the “Economic Development Assistant” was planned for early 2018, this was postponed due to the ongoing discussions with the Chamber regarding tourism services. In light of the Town assuming responsibility for tourism, the original part-time “Economic Development Assistant” position has been amended to a part-time “Economic Development and Tourism Coordinator” to ensure the best candidate can be recruited to deliver both economic development and tourism responsibilities. A workstation is in place to accommodate this resource.

As part of the 2019 budget, modest funding may be requested to support operations of the Tourism Advisory Committee. As with other Town committees, projects requiring additional funding would be put forward for Committee's/Council's consideration on a project-specific basis.

To ensure the seamless continuation of tourism services, since the expiry of the Agreement in December 2017, the Town has made monthly installments of \$2500 equivalent to the prior \$30,000 annual payment. These monthly payments ended at the end of February. Town staff continue to have discussions with the Chamber to ensure a seamless transition.

COMMUNICATIONS IMPACT:

This report supports the Town's efforts to operate strategically, efficiently, transparently and with accountability. Pending Committee approval, communications will be issued to inform stakeholders that the Town is assuming responsibility for tourism, while continuing to collaborate with the Chamber and building on prior successes.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS:

The Town is committed to implementing our Community Sustainability Strategy, Imagine Halton Hills. Doing so will lead to a higher quality of life. The relationship between this report and the Strategy is summarized below:

Do the report's recommendations advance the Strategy's implementation? Yes.
Which pillar(s) of sustainability does this report support?

- Economic Prosperity
- Cultural Vibrancy

In Summary, the Sustainability Implications of this report are as follows:

Tourism is part of the Economic Prosperity and Cultural Vibrancy pillars of the Community Sustainability Strategy. The recommended 'go forward' approach to delivering the tourism and Community Brand services will better enable the Town to ensure that the services are delivered efficiently and effectively.

Overall, the alignment of this report with the Community Sustainability Strategy is: Excellent.

CONSULTATION:

This report was developed following consultation with the Chamber's Chair of the Board of Directors, General Manager, and the Membership Services, Communications and Tourism Coordinator. Consultation also took place with the Town's Chief Administrative Officer, Councillor Lawlor (as the Town's representative on the Chamber's Tourism Committee), Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Librarian.

The Chamber's General Manager was notified of the proposed strategic approach to the management of tourism, as outlined in this report, via a letter dated January 22, 2018. The Chamber's Board Chair, and the Membership Services, Communications and Tourism Coordinator were copied on the letter. Collaborative discussions between the Town and the Chamber on this topic have and will continue.

CONCLUSION:

The recommended approach to the delivery of tourism services will enable the Town to deliver these services in a strategic, efficient, effective and transparent manner.

The anticipated roles and responsibilities for Town staff, especially in the Economic Development, Innovation and Culture; and Corporate Communications divisions are aligned with those divisions' business plans. Tourism also connects to the existing responsibilities of Recreation and Parks, and Heritage (Planning and Sustainability).

The Chamber of Commerce has indicated that the recommended approach will benefit its members by allowing the Chamber to reallocate resources to focus on policy development and advocacy.

The Town is well positioned to carry out the tasks outlined under the new approach. Town staff and the Chamber agree that the new approach is mutually beneficial.

Respectfully submitted,

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Alex Fuller, Manager
Corporate Communications

Reviewed and Approved by,

Brent Marshall
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