

Staff Report

Report To: Community Development, Tourism and Culture Advisory Committee

Report From: Melissa Crannie, Tourism Marketing Coordinator

Meeting Date: June 11, 2021

Report Code: CS-21-072

Subject: 2021 Tourism Update

Recommendations:

THAT in consideration of Staff Report CS-21-072 respecting a review of the City's tourism operations in 2021, the Community Development, Tourism and Culture Advisory Committee receive the report for information purposes.

Highlights:

- Savour Owen Sound and Snowen Sound Frolics achieved a combined digital reach of 30,736. Reach refers to the number of unique users reached.
- 786 ballots were collected through Savour Owen Sound, from 18 participating local restaurants.
- The City has partnered with the Festival of Northern Lights to offer Visitor Services at Harrison Park during the Provincial order to better disperse park visitors throughout the City.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

[Strategic Plan Priority](#): City Building - KR2 - Increase pedestrian counts in the River District by 10%

Background:

Owen Sound Tourism functions under three pillars:

1. Product Development
2. Marketing and Promotion
3. Visitor Services

Product Development within the Tourism division promotes the City of Owen Sound as a tourism destination and develops experiences and activities that engage visitors and highlights the City's most attractive assets.

Marketing and Promotion connects Owen Sound and provides engagement and information about the City's assets through publications, advertising, a dedicated website, social media, and attending events and tradeshow to promote Owen Sound as a Tourism Destination. These channels focus on our culture, history, natural amenities, and services provided throughout the City.

Visitor Services – Tourism operates a seasonal Visitor Centre, from May to October, 7 days per week. The Visitor Centre is located in the former CN Rail station on the City's West Harbour, serving as a hub for tourists of Owen Sound and the greater region. Staff provide visitors publications, brochures, merchandise, and information regarding Owen Sound Tourism and Events, and is host to TD Harbour Nights concerts Sunday evenings over the Summer months. During other times of the year, Visitor Services is supported at City Hall, through [publications and digital resources](#).

Partnerships play a vital role in tourism operations. The City is fortunate to collaborate and partner with many key tourism stakeholders. Some of those stakeholders and partners include:

Grey County

Grey County Tourism is the Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for Grey County and operates within the newly formed Economic Development, Tourism, and Culture Department.

RT07

Regional Tourism Organization 7 provides strategic and collaborative leadership to build, sustain and grow tourism in [Bruce-Grey-Simcoe](#). RT07 aids with tourism planning, marketing, funding, and product development in our region and have been a key partner in support of Destination Marketing Organizations and private businesses throughout the pandemic.

Community Waterfront Heritage Centre

The Visitor Centre is located in the former CN Rail Station, which is shared with the Community Waterfront Heritage Centre (CWHC). The City occupies the most southern portion of the building where the main entrance is located while the CWHC occupies the remainder of the building. CWHC's railcar and caboose occupy the lands between the CN Station and the harbour.

Community Partners

Tourism staff works closely with a variety of community partners on specific tourism-related initiatives. This includes, but is not limited to Grey Roots, Roxy Theatre, Great Lakes Waterfront Trail Association, Ontario By Bike, Billy Bishop Museum, Tom Thomson Art Gallery, and the Owen Sound Downtown Improvement Association.

Analysis:

On March 12, 2021, the Community Development, Tourism, and Culture Advisory Committee approved the 2021 Tourism Workplan. Staff Report [CS-21-025](#) was based on the direction provided by Council through the Strategic Plan, various Master Plans, and is aligned with the capital and operating budget.

The purpose of this report is to review and summarize the activities of the Tourism division for 2021 to date.

Product Development Highlights Include:

Savour Owen Sound

- The 2021 Savour Owen Sound initiative pivoted to accommodate Public Health restrictions by promoting local restaurants through curbside pick-ups, online ordering, and deliveries, with success.
- The event included 18 participating local restaurants.
- The average online organic monthly reach was 2,405 people throughout the March-long campaign. The highest calculated organic daily reach was 8,532 people, with a combined Facebook and Instagram organic reach of 205,414 people.
- 786 Ballots were submitted for the chance to win the \$1,000 Foodie Basket giveaway at the end of the campaign. Ballots were collected, counted, and used as data to give an approximate outcome of participation for the event.

- Restaurant hosts and their guests had positive reactions to the event: “This is a great initiative for Restaurants during the implemented Public Health Guidelines surrounding Covid-19” and “We enjoy getting out to try new Restaurants during Savour Owen Sound, being able to support our favourite Restaurants while safely ‘dining in’ at home was something different and gave us something to look forward to and enjoy”.
- Each week, the City promoted a different Savour Owen Sound restaurant on Facebook and included a feature interview about the business on our website and a \$50 gift certificate giveaway to the featured Restaurant.
- Savour Owen Sound will continue in March 2022 pending budget approval.

SNOWen Sound Frolics

At the October 21, 2020 Community Service Committee meeting, Committee recommended:

"THAT in consideration of Staff Report CS-20-117 respecting the City's 2021 Events Calendar, the Community Services Committee:

- 1. Receive the report;**
- 2. Not proceed with the 2021 Events Calendar; and**
- 3. Request staff to bring back a report to Committee with options for spending the funds."**

Staff created the framework for a month-long event that encouraged outdoor activity while experiencing Owen Sound's outdoor amenities and promoting #hyperlocal tourism. The program encouraged our Community to enjoy a safe outdoor experience, supported local businesses by providing giveaways purchased from City businesses, encouraged local spending, staying active and healthy, while providing an experience to remind residents of why this is where they want to live! The outdoor self-guided activity was very well received with analytics calculating hashtag entries of 596 and a total of 101,946 online interactions during the campaign.

Marketing & Promotion Highlights Include:

Tourism continues to leverage our abundant trail networks and various self-guided tours. Excursions can be enjoyed by bike, motorcycle, ATV, snowmobile, or on foot. Maps and resources are available online and at the Visitor Centre for numerous [Owen Sound tours](#), including The Saints and Sinners - Corkscrew City Tour, the Owen Sound Historical Walking Tour,

Wiidosendiwag-Walking Together Tour, and the City Cemetery Tour. Tourism staff continues to support and promote Owen Sound as a cycling, ATV/Snowmobiling, and motorcycle friendly community, partnering with Grey County to continue to support these Initiatives.

The Restaurant Guide, City Map & Attractions, Harrison Park, Salmon Tour, Art Scene, and Corkscrew City Tour brochures have been updated with a fresh look and feel. The City Map & Attractions brochure along with the Harrison Park brochure have been combined to produce an all-encompassing directory that highlights all of our City parks, beaches, and open spaces, directing residents and tourists throughout the entire City.

Advertisements were taken out in various regional publications including Escarpment Magazine, Georgian Triangle Tourism Association, and Rrampt. All are accompanied by digital campaigns.

An ongoing initiative continues to be the [Great Waterfront Trail Adventure Cycling Initiative](#), a seven-day cycling tour through Grey-Bruce with a two-day layover in Owen Sound. Staff continues to liaise with the organizer; however, the event may be delayed to 2022 due to the uncertainty around travel and gathering restrictions.

Additional marketing and promotion highlights include:

- Partnering on a digital “Industry [Information Cheat Sheet](#)” launch with Grey County in early spring;
- Updating and expanding City stock images for use by all City departments in communication efforts;
- Increasing our reach and following on social media and utilizing social media to target specific demographics for campaigns;
 - Twitter – 9,423
 - Facebook – 14,653
 - Instagram – 4,014
- Emphasis on highlighting #hyperlocal tourism through:
 - Development of Experience Cards that will be available both online and printed, highlighting various COVID-Friendly options directed towards specific tourist profiles outlined by Grey County’s analytics for Owen Sound, i.e Adventurer, Culturati, Eco-Tourist, Family travellers, etc;
 - The Sound Outlook – Summer publication
 - Grey County “Cheat Sheet” website containing “top 10” lists of COVID-Friendly options to reference for Municipality use.

Visitor Services Highlights Include:

The City operates the Visitor Centre on the harbour's west side in the former CN Rail Station. The building is shared with the Community Waterfront Heritage Centre and is open to visitors from May to October.

Due to Provincial restrictions, the Visitor Centre was not permitted to open on the May long weekend as it would traditionally. To continue to offer Visitor Services and provide value to our local businesses and residents, the City proposed a partnership with the Festival of Northern Lights to utilize their kiosk as a pop-up Information Centre at Harrison Park. This allowed tourism to provide visitor services to local families and highlight other outdoor assets to park users to alleviate overcrowding and support #hyperlocal tourism in our area.

Provincial restrictions permitting, visitor services will resume at the Visitor Centre on the West Harbour and will once again open to the public and safely assist and direct visitors to the Scenic City. #Hyperlocal messaging will be emphasized and continue to safely promote our City, to leverage our ability to support and serve local tourists and their needs for shopping, accommodations, dining, and culture, following Public Health Guidelines. The information kiosk at Harrison Park will remain open on weekends as an additional resource to assist residents and visitors throughout the 2021 season.

Tourism staff also assisted Parks staff in the continued implementation of the Harrison Park Campground online booking platform by providing high-resolution photos of the campground and each of the 102 sites to optimize online functionality and the overall end-user experience.

Financial Implications:

Tourism services are supported through the City's 2021 Operating Budget.

Communication Strategy:

In addition to the presentation of the 2021 Tourism Workplan and this report, the Community Development, Tourism and Culture Advisory Committee will receive a 2021 Tourism Year in Review.

Staff will continue to work alongside the County of Grey, RTO7, and our Tourism Partners to align tourism messaging.

Consultation:

Grey County Tourism

Pam Coulter, Director of Community Services

Brent Fisher, Manager of Community and Business Development

Attachments:

None.

Recommended by:

Melissa Crannie, Tourism Marketing Coordinator

Reviewed by:

Brent Fisher, Manager of Community and Business Development

Pam Coulter, Director of Community Services

Submission approved by:

Tim Simmonds, City Manager

For more information on this report, please contact Melissa Crannie at mcrannie@owensound.ca or 519-376-4440 ext. 1245.