



CORPORATE REPORT
The Corporation of the Town of Wasaga Beach
Meeting Date: 7/29/2024

DATE: 7/9/2024

SUBJECT: Economic Development & Tourism Advisory Committee Annual Report

CONTACT: Economic Development & Tourism Committee (EDTAC)
Steve Harlow, EDTAC Chair
Kaitlyn Monsma, Economic Development Officer

REPORT NUMBER: 2024/08/22-24

RECOMMENDATION:

1. **THAT** the report titled: Economic Development & Tourism Advisory Committee Annual Report, to the Council meeting of August 22nd, 2024, be received as information.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

- **The Economic Development & Tourism Advisory Committee has been meeting since May of 2023.**
- **The Committee held numerous meetings and formed subcommittees to address key initiatives like the Tourism Destination Management Plan (TDMP), assistance with Ontario Parks, and the 50th Anniversary celebration.**
- **The committee would like to prioritize areas for the upcoming year which include supporting the execution of the TDMP, developing a festival strategy, promoting trail tourism, and expanding economic development expertise.**

BACKGROUND:

The Wasaga Beach Economic Development & Tourism Advisory Committee is pleased to submit our first annual report to the Mayor and Council members of Wasaga Beach. We have collectively dedicated our time and effort to provide advice on how to enhance our tourism potential and achieve economic development success.

In our efforts, we have adhered to the priorities laid out by this administration in the fall of 2022 regarding tourism and economic development. We believe that our advice to date aligns with and supports these public priorities. We also acknowledge that the advice we provide may not always be accepted or acted upon, as there are broader considerations, external factors, and emerging issues and opportunities that the Town needs to evaluate before implementing well-intentioned ideas.

This annual report is divided into three sections. Section one summarizes the key areas we focused on this past year. Section two outlines the areas we intend to explore in the coming year. Section three provides an administrative summary of our committee's activities.

We would like to take this opportunity to recognize the support we have received from staff over the past year, particularly Economic Development Officer Kaitlyn Monsma, who has provided outstanding guidance and organizational acumen. We thank you for the opportunity to undertake this work. We are collectively invested in making Wasaga Beach a place where residents are proud to welcome visitors and where businesses can thrive in the community we call home.

Current members:

- Steve Harlow, Chair
- Guy Patric Charrier, Vice Chair
- Ellen Timms, Council Rep. and Committee Member
- Peggy Harris, Committee Member
- Dan Kardos, Committee Member
- Talbot Biermans, Committee Member
- Carrie Plater, Committee Member
- Jennie Elmslie, Committee Member, Chamber of Commerce (From May 2023 to June 2024)
- Leslie Farkas, Committee Member, Chamber of Commerce (as of June 2024)

DISCUSSION:

Section 1 - Year One Summary

Over the course of the past year our committee discussed a broad range of matters. We sought to have a strong presence in the community-round tables, events, and collaboration opportunities with businesses. Minutes of all our meetings provide details of those discussions and subsequent actions and resolutions.

For the purposes of this report, we are highlighting the following:

- Tourism Destination Management Plan
- Ontario Parks
- Committee Mandate
- Sister City
- Festivals and Events
- 50th Anniversary

Tourism Destination Management Plan (TDMP)

One of the first tasks the committee undertook was to review the existing TDMP that was approved in 2018. Given the dramatic global changes to the tourism industry resulting from the impacts of COVID and other factors we quickly determined that a refresh was needed to guide us for the next five years. With the support of Council, Brain Trust was retained to oversee and develop a modernized plan with a revised set of recommended actions and implementation items.

Over the course of seven months, we undertook working sessions, and engagement in community consultations to help shape the resulting plan and recommendations for council

consideration. We see this as being an evergreen document that continues to evolve with the changing times and trends in the tourism industry. It is our view that this can help shape and guide the planning in the future.

During the time we worked with the consultant to develop the plan we wanted to ensure the recommendations were achievable and aligned with the identity of the community. We saw the need to look at finding ways to evolve the tourism appeal from day trippers to multi-day experiential family visitations. We understand that to be successful there will need to be new public and private sector investments to create the content and infrastructure visitors are seeking to truly be a year-round destination. We also recognized that we are in a competitive marketplace so our offerings and experiences must be unique

Ontario Parks

The Committee developed a five-point plan for how the Wasaga Beach Provincial Park, Nancy Island, and the Nordic Ski Centre could be operated in a manner that would be supportive of a tourism agenda (Appendix A). The Committee reviewed the legislation governing Ontario Parks, the over 40-year-old master plan and the current management and operating plans published by Ontario Parks (the owner, operator of the Parks). Efforts to involve and engage the Ontario Parks officials to our table and participate in a productive dialogue about how could better optimize the Park assets for tourism were not well received. As a result, it is our view a new partnership or governance model is needed. If the community hopes to make the worlds' largest freshwater beach be accessible, useable, and welcoming to residents and visitors year-round the current approach is not sufficient.

If the Beach and related tourism assets are not going to be managed as a premier tourism asset as originally intended the unique value proposition that we have to offer is at risk. The committee believes that an ideal model for future success should be to secure provincial support to own and operate the Park in a manner like how the Niagara Parks Commission and the St Lawrence Parks Commission operate. In those cases, the responsibility for those parks are under the Ministry of Tourism. They are not subject to the restrictions set out in the Provincial Parks and Reserves Conservation Act and in both cases, they have successfully developed world class destinations that balance economic and environmental interests. These insights were shared with the team to inform and inspire new approaches for collaboration with Ontario Parks.

Festivals and Events

The Committee engaged in discussions over the course of the year regarding the purpose and value of festivals and events from a tourism perspective. We see these as an integral part of community building, are enjoyed by residents and can benefit local business operations. We recognize staff in the Town have expertise and experience in managing and supporting these activities. As we observed the planning and execution of new, recurring, and unique events such as the 50th anniversary.

The committee established a working sub-committee to assist with the Christmas Market, which was launched in 2023. Comprising seven active members, the group served as a sounding board for ideas and facilitated information gathering.

Sister City Research

The Committee determined there could be value in considering if a sister city would be an opportunity to strengthen our tourism identity. As a result, a sub- committee was formed. Initially our Sister City Sub Committee was formed with Carrie Plater and GP Charrier, to do a discovery of other towns and cities that currently or have had sister cities to see what their benefits and concerns were with a program implemented. The main objective for our sub- committee was to increase tourism in The Town of Wasaga Beach by engaging in a cross promotional and educational way.

A reason behind this initiative was the desire to regain the tourist from Quebec and enhance our historical connection with the Wendat community just north of Quebec City. The committee ultimately decided it would be better utilized once a high school is obtained in Wasaga Beach whereby students could partake in some form of exchange or Grade 9 trip experience or` with sports teams playing in each other's towns.

It was the recommendation to the committee to disassemble the subcommittee at this time and wait until there were more resources to assist with the program such as a high school and hotel for larger accommodations.

50th Anniversary

With 2024 being our 50th anniversary, a sub committee was formed to begin a task force of individuals within our Advisory Group and individuals at large to engage with businesses and service groups to begin planning multiple events during the year to celebrate our town's 50th alongside the main events that were being planned by the Events Division. Two meetings were held, one on December 7 at Council Chambers and one on February 22. Both engaged the community to think of ways to promote the 50th by either creating a special event or adding a spin on a current event. The later of the two meetings also gave an opportunity for a round table discussion and list of what each group in our community was working on and when the event would take place. The committee reviewed the website that was created to join forces and have one general place to go to announce your event on our 50 Years Of Sunshine Website.

The subcommittee recommended a unique visual identifier be created to market events and activities related to the celebration. The Town developed a special non-commercial brand logo for the 50th. Many successful events throughout the community have already got underway, and there is more to come from all parts of our community. Other ideas brought forward by the committee included seeking a Provincial declaration to officially recognize Wasaga Beach Day – potentially as part of the annual Memories of Summer Event and the curation of a time capsule which could be located at the new Twin Pad Arena and Library complex.

Committee Mandate / Terms of Reference

The EDTAC recommended to Council last summer to amend the committee, formerly known as the "Advisory Committee on Tourism," to include a broader focus on the economy as a whole. In August 2023, the new terms of reference were approved, and the committee's name was updated to the Economic Development & Tourism Advisory Committee.

In June 2024, the terms of reference were updated again to add more members, ensuring the committee has broad representation from the entire economic landscape of the community, not just tourism. The committee has opened applications for these newly vacant seats.

Section 2 - Year Two (2024-25) Potential Areas of Focus

During the upcoming year, the Committee is proposing to undertake work in the following areas:

Support Implementation of TDMP

With the approval of the TDMP, the Committee will begin work to provide advice on prioritizing and implementing recommendations set out in the Plan. The committee will act as a sounding board for staff, background work where needed, and make recommendations to Council as needed.

Festival and Events Strategy

Firstly, the committee believes the Town needs to develop a stand-alone festival and events strategy that clearly articulates the purpose, objectives and success metrics for events. This is also a recommendation in the approved TDMP. Second, the committee also believes that planning horizon for events the Town hosts or issues permits for must be sufficient to achieve desired outcomes and results. Third, when it comes to permitting third party entities use of Town assets to host events, the committee believes that we must strengthen the high threshold for applicants to demonstrate they have the experience and capacity to be successful. Such events should be able to demonstrate how it is aligned with the Town's tourism identity, will benefit the local economy, minimize local traffic disruptions etc. Finally, we see value in spending the time and effort to develop options and a business case for a unique signature event that will be a tourism demand generator. Small to mid-sized festivals across Ontario are extremely popular and become must attend annual events reaching visitors far and wide. Ideally this would be a multi-day event that would appeal to a diverse inter-generational audience.

As Town staff develops a new festival and events strategy, the Committee will serve as a resource and sounding board as needed. We aim to provide input and advice to ensure the strategy's success, including identifying potential funding sources and sponsorship interests. The Committee also sees value in developing options for a future signature Wasaga Beach Festival to attract thousands of visitors with active recreation, live music, and the arts. Additional support will be provided to the WSE as needed, including integrating live music components into third-party events, strengthening the application process for third-party events, reviewing the event process for the Committee, and assessing venues for optimal use.

Trails Promotion and Enhancements

Trails tourism is a growing part of the tourism industry in Ontario and Canada. There is potential to increase the use and interest in the community's water-based and land-based trail systems. This may include infrastructure investments to optimize current and future networks and policy levers to enhance active cycling trails. The Committee will identify opportunities for these trails, such as boardwalks and river parades, and explore the feasibility of developing an organization to improve and operate local trails.

Expansion of EDTAC

With the newly added Economic Development component, it would be beneficial to expand the Committee's membership to include individuals with experience and expertise in Economic Development. We currently have strong representation from Tourism and the Community, and adding members with strengths in Economic Development will further bolster our efforts.

Small Business Strengthening & Business Gap Analysis

Our committee recognizes the opportunity to strengthen our small business community by leveraging community resources to educate and engage business owners. This will help build a robust small business community equipped with the necessary tools for sustainability and growth. We will address commercial space vacancies, turnover of businesses in specific locations, and the challenge of finding sufficient employees. A business gap analysis could identify opportunities to enhance business success, with initial research focusing on job fairs for the hospitality industry and trades. The Committee will identify opportunities for Council on this subject.

Indigenous Community Connections

With our treaty renewal and Land Acknowledgement, our committee would like to focus on our Indigenous heritage and engage with our community's Indigenous members. We will reflect on ideas from the July 13th Council meeting report and make recommendations on how to collaborate with Indigenous leaders.

Information

Accurate information is essential for executing successful marketing campaigns and securing support for new investments that strengthen our economic development and tourism prospects. We will recommend data sources to better understand our tourism target markets, including their demographics, experiences, and preferences.

Film and Live Music

The film production and live music industry are significant economic generators for communities across Ontario. Wasaga Beach has yet to realize these opportunities fully. We will provide input on attracting these industries to our community.

Other Matters as Requested

The Committee is ready to support the Town's efforts by providing input and advice on other matters as needed throughout the year to build a stronger, diversified economic base and a year-round tourism profile.

We will prioritize the most pertinent areas and ensure sufficient time and effort are committed to developing sound, evidence-based advice. While the list above is extensive, we recognize that not all topics may be addressed this year and will revisit and reprioritize them in 2025-26.

Section 3 – Administrative Summary

	Number of Meetings and Duration	Number of Members	Total Time Per Member	Total Time Combined
Regularly Scheduled Monthly Meetings	12 Meetings- 2hrs each	8	24 hrs	192 hrs
Meeting Prep for Regular Meetings and Assignments	12 Meetings - 1 hr each	8	12 hrs	96 hrs
Chair Prep with Staff Resource for Regular Meetings	12 Meetings - 30 minutes each	1	6 hrs	6 hrs
Sister City Sub-Committee	4 Meetings - 1 hr each	2	4 hrs	8 hrs
50th Anniversary Committee	5 meetings - 1 hr long	4	5 hrs	20 hrs
Christmas Market Committee	5 meetings - 1 hr each	5	5 hrs	25 hrs
TOTAL COMBINED				347 hrs

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS:Financial Implications:

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

CONCLUSION:

The Economic Development & Tourism Advisory Committee is proud to present our first annual report. Looking ahead, our priorities include implementing the TDMP, assisting in the developing a festival and events strategy, and promoting trails tourism. We also plan to expand our committee to include more expertise in economic development and strengthen our small business community.

We appreciate the support from Town staff, especially Economic Development Officer Kaitlyn Monsma. Our collective efforts are driven by a vision to make Wasaga Beach a thriving destination for residents and visitors alike.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve our community. We look forward to continuing our work in the coming year.

Authored by:

The Economic Development & Tourism Advisory Committee

Steve Harlow,
EDTAC Chair

Kaitlyn Monsma,
Economic Development Officer