Staff Report 2023-0030

Meeting Date: March 7, 2023

Subject: Visitor Management Task Force Summary Report and Next Steps

Submitted By: Emily Quinton, Officer, Tourism and Culture, Economic Development

RECOMMENDATION

That as a result of the work done by the Visitor Management Task Force, the recommendations as outlined in Staff Report 2023-0030 and Schedule A, be approved and implemented.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Council requested staff coordinate a Visitor Management Task Force to address issues identified in scenic areas of Caledon as a result of increased numbers of visitors at certain times of the year.
- A Task Force was formed comprising of members of the community, local businesses, staff and other agencies following staff-led research and public engagement regarding tourism and the impacts of visitors to Caledon's hamlets, villages and rural spaces.
- Members of the Visitor Management Task Force, in collaboration with staff, proposed suggested tactics to shape a Visitor Management Strategy that address challenges and opportunities arising from increased visitation to Caledon's scenic areas and service centres.
- Staff are supporting the continuation and expansion of tactics, programs and partnerships initiated by Visitor Management Task Force as part of the annual operating budget of involved divisions.
- Vehicle traffic and enforcement-related issues requires a concerted effort from multiple levels of government and agencies working together and was determined to be outside the scope of this Task Force.

DISCUSSION

Background

In 2021, Council passed resolution requesting staff to develop a destination management plan with particular focus on some of the increased pressures experienced in rural areas, villages and hamlets during certain times of year. During the pandemic these areas experienced a significant increase in visitors putting a strain on the limited services and amenities available and causing a negative experience for residents. Specifically, residents faced issues with parking, public waste collection, washrooms, public green spaces, conservation parks and small hamlets.

TOWN OF CALEDON

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on next steps based on the recommendations from the Visitor Management Task Force.

Stakeholder Engagement

In response, staff scheduled 10 virtual sessions in each of Caledon's hamlets and villages to engage residents and businesses and discuss challenges experienced because of increased visitation. Through these discussions, several feedback themes emerged including noticeable pressure on village and park infrastructure (parking, waste, crowding, restroom availability), disagreeable visitor behaviour, and a desire to see businesses and the Town capitalize on the opportunity presented by increased tourism in Caledon.

The stakeholder engagement conversations identified several actions to improve the visitor experience. Suggestions included:

- the development of improved wayfinding signage for businesses, themed itineraries and travel routes,
- Seasonal marketing campaigns to build Caledon's voice and reputation as an exciting tourism destination
- parking solutions for patrons of businesses in villages and hamlets, enhanced communication and business support (specifically, a need for the establishment of local Business Improvement Areas), and
- promoting "shoulder season" attractions to distribute visitor demand.

To expand on the community outreach, staff launched the Have Your Say: Visitor Management engagement project in Winter of 2021 to solicit feedback, generate ideas, and quantify impacts of pandemic-fueled tourism increases from Caledon communities identified within the Caledon Tourism Strategy (2014). Respondents indicated the following were the top three challenges residents faced:

- excess garbage and litter,
- lack of access to parking
- poor visitor conduct

Staff asked residents and business operators for their suggested priority focuses to manage visitors and attract tourism. The top responses included:

- increased washroom facilities,
- increased by-law enforcement presence,
- developing a technology based mobile tourism information solution
- marketing under-visited areas in Caledon.

TOWN OF CALEDON

Of note, all of Caledon's communities identified the behaviour of motorists (speeding, distracted driving, noise) as one of significant urgency to be addressed. To focus on the visitor-specific needs of the Town's communities, staff isolated road safety and motorist conduct as a distinct and separate Town-wide issue to be addressed outside of the scope of the Terms of Reference of the Visitor Management Task Force.

Visitor Management Task Force

As a result, and at the direction of Council in January 2022, the Town developed a Visitor Management Task Force to make recommendations on how the municipality can actively promote and manage a positive tourism experience for visitors and residents of Caledon's communities. The Task Force consisted of Town staff, two Councillors, seven community representatives, three members at large and representatives from the Region, Ontario Parks, conversation authorities and central counties tourism. The Task Force developed a subsequent work plan based on the areas of concern identified in the stakeholder engagement. The Task Force worked with key stakeholders, Town Staff and organizations to address the action items below:

1) Lack of washroom facilities
- Temporary Portable Washroom facilities were installed in high-traffic areas such as:
    - Royal Courtyards Bolton
    - Caledon Brick Works
    - Palgrave Forest
    - Mississauga Road
    - Caledon Trailway
    - Mississauga Road and Cataract Road
    - Forks of the Credit Road

2) Wayfinding Signage and Directional Messages
- Staff installed portable signage in the vicinity of hubs and trailheads directing visitors to both seasonal and permanent public washroom facilities. The signs included QR codes that link to Google Maps to show walking routes to the washrooms.
- In Fall 2022, a Visit Caledon "Know Before You Go" Social Media campaign launched to share important information to prospective visitors to share tips on how to be a respectful tourist and make the most of a trip to Caledon. The five Instagram posts for the campaign had an average reach of 512 views.
- Additional signage requests were made to Ontario Parks and Credit Valley Conservation on routes from the 401 and GTA to high traffic areas in Caledon highlighting reservation requirements.

TOWN OF CALEDON

- Report a Problem stickers were applied to all Town owned garbage cans with QR codes linking to the Report a Program service request. Stickers have been scanned 14 times since their installation in late fall.
- The Visit Caledon website was updated to reflect the "Know Before You Go" campaign aimed at helping promote sustainable and smart tourism practices. This section of the website was in the top 10 highest performing subpages of the Visit Caledon website when it was launched in August and saw a 400% increase in views between then and October.
- Plans were included in a 2023 Visit Caledon website update to integrate a map feature highlighting public and visitor amenities such as public washroom locations, public parking locations, location of waste receptacles and cycling infrastructure
- Physical Visit Caledon map brochures were updated to reflect more current attractions and activities, with more time-sensitive and business-specific information removed. Trackable QR codes were added in several places in the brochure directing users to regularly updated digital cycling maps and heritage walking tours, ensuring content longevity and relevance.
- Activations were held in under-marketed service centers to offset visits to frequented areas in Ward 1. Activations included:
  - The Art Crawl in Caledon East
  - The Bolton Summer Market
  - The Taste of Bolton
  - Free movie nights in Caledon Village
  - The Caledon Village Summer Market
- Signage was installed at Belfountain Public School Parking Lot from August to October to promote the Parking at Public Schools program, providing free parking on weekends for visitors within Belfountain. The sign QR code was scanned 54 times over the course of the season.
- A partnership launched with Park Bus in Fall 2022 to shuttle visitors from Downtown Toronto to Albion Hills and Glen Haffy Conservation Areas. The pilot was successful in reducing the number of vehicles on the road and parking spots and promoting the discovery of Caledon experiences outside of those that experience high volumes of tourism in Ward 1. All available trip dates were sold out early, and the program was deemed a success by both the Town and Park Bus staff with 96 seats sold. https://www.parkbus.ca/albionglen
- A pilot program, "Ask Me", to meet with cyclists and pedestrians on the Caledon Trailways to enforce good visitor etiquette and educate visitors about the Town of Caledon's amenities
- A layered approach to enhanced by law enforcement and OPP presence during peak fall colours to manage traffic, parking and congestion was agreed upon and launched September 24th, 2022

TOWN OF CALEDON

- The Visitor Management Task Force determined that a separate mobile Tourism App platform to address visitor information access was not the appropriate solution for the Town at this time, and that the current tourism website and other applications that already have high user engagement are better suited to meet the objective of providing visitor information (Google Maps, AllTrails).
- Town Staff accessed external funding to aid in promoting Caledon's tourism experiences and local businesses in Caledon to a broader audience during the "Fall for Caledon" marketing campaign.
- As directed by the Terms of Reference, Town Staff will continue to participate in Service Plan exercises aimed at addressing the need for additional parks, trails, and associated amenities (such as public washrooms, adequate parking, wayfinding, active transportation, and traffic management).

Recommendations and Next Steps

Based on the success of the programs and action items completed by the Task Force, the Economic Development and Tourism division is proposing to integrate these projects into the annual operations and work plans, as outlined in Schedule A. This can be achieved with minimal impact to the existing operating budget through partnerships, grant opportunities, and collaboration across Town departments including Community Services and Operations. The Task Force is recommending that the Town continue to provide the following items as future levels of service, annual requests or new items for Staff to research:

1. Annually, Economic Development and Tourism staff to develop a Community Engagement plan in partnership with OPP and the Town's Municipal Law Enforcement Division, focused on the hosting of a resident open houses in areas of the Town that experience higher volumes of visitors each spring to answer any questions residents might have about visitor management, provide information on regulations and offer helpful tips on how to interact with visitors, and prepare for peak tourism season.

2. Town staff from Engineering Services and Municipal Law Enforcement proceed towards the development of Special Enforcement Area(s) with input from Economic Development and Tourism staff based on information gathered during the term of the Visitor Management Task Force.

Conclusion

The presentation of this Report concludes the term and objectives of the Visitor Management Task Force. As outlined in Staff Report 2022-0025, the Task Force is considered dissolved as a result of the delivery of a final report outlining the

TOWN OF CALEDON

recommendations for the Town to implement in an effort to create a positive visitor experience.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

To implement and continue service delivery of the actions items successfully completed in the duration of the Visitor Management Task Force, Town Staff will utilize funds from existing budgets to finance the implementation of the recommendations.

COUNCIL WORK PLAN

Subject matter is not relevant to the Council Workplan.

ATTACHMENTS

Schedule A: Visitor Management Annual Strategy

TOWN OF CALEDON