



## **MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Mayor Bonnette and Members of Council

**FROM:** Allison Graham, Economic Development and Tourism Officer

**DATE:** November 6, 2020

**MEMORANDUM NO.:** MEMO-ADMIN-2020-0008

**RE:** Town Tourism Advisory Committee – Status Update

### **PURPOSE OF THE MEMORANDUM:**

The purpose of this Memorandum is to provide Council with an update on the Tourism Advisory Committee.

### **BACKGROUND:**

Tourism is a major component of Ontario's economy, supporting over 400,000 jobs and generating \$36 billion in spending. Locally, approximately 7,500 jobs are estimated to relate to the broader tourism sector in Halton Hills. This means that approximately 30% of all jobs in Halton Hills relate to or support the tourism industry, including retail, accommodation and food services, and arts and culture industries. COVID-19 has had significant impacts on the tourism sector, including in Halton Hills.

The Town's Tourism Advisory Committee was established in September 2019 through report RPT-ADMIN-2019-0034. The Committee advises and makes recommendations to Council and Town staff on matters pertaining to destination development and tourism. It represents diverse tourism stakeholder interests and provides valuable input into tourism-related projects and strategies. Members bring knowledge related to tourism development, retail sector, international customer trends, heritage and cultural matters, small business ownership, outdoor recreation, cycling tourism, hospitality, sports tourism, eco-tourism and regional partnerships. Most Committee members are residents of Halton Hills.

To assist the Town in amplifying tourism's economic benefits, the Committee's goals and objectives include:

- To advise and make recommendations pertaining to local tourism;
- To assist with the development and implementation of the tourism work plan;
- To increase awareness and elevate discussions on tourism issues;

- To be a centralized focal point for effectively building tourism as a key economic driver; and
- To build on existing tourism programs and services, with a focus on optimizing resources and facilitating collaboration/coordination amongst community service providers and other industry stakeholders.

Committee membership includes:

- Councillor Lawlor, Chair
- Leith Bengtson: Director of Marketing and Business Development at Toronto Premium Outlets; Past Chair of the Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce
- Kathy Gastle: Chair of LMM Heritage Society
- Greg Coman: Hiking and trails enthusiast; Photographer and small business owner; Member of the Halton Hills Camera Club
- Cari Bower: Director of Leisure Sales for the Fairmont Vancouver Airport
- Chuck Thibeault: Executive Director of Central Counties Tourism (Durham, York and Headwaters)
- Peter Rowe: Vice Chair of Heritage Acton
- Leslie Adams: General Manager of P.O.W.E.R.
- Stephanie Mazhari: Manager of Entrepreneurship Services at Halton Region

The Committee has remained active during COVID-19 and has continued to meet quarterly.

### **COMMENTS:**

The Town took over responsibility for the strategic management of tourism from the Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce in 2018. Since then, substantial progress has already been made. This has included:

- Collecting survey data from visitors at events in 2019 and analyzing demographic information to more fully understand the local tourism sector.
- Creating the Tourism Ambassador Program in 2019 to engage with and support local festivals and event organizers.
- Launching a brand new, modern and user friendly tourism website, [visithaltonhills.ca](http://visithaltonhills.ca), in 2020.
- Developing an interactive events calendars, connected to [haltonhills.ca](http://haltonhills.ca), to help raise the profile of local festivals and events.

- Updating a local tourism business directory as a basis for a future mapping project which will showcase local tourism opportunities.
- Creating new local experience packages, including 'COVID-19 safe' day trips in 2020 and marketing them digitally.
- Hiring a tourism student to assist with website support and business outreach, and successfully receiving provincial and federal grants to support this work.
- Launching a new tourism-specific Instagram social media account to amplify tourism's benefits, promote the sector, and connect customers and businesses during COVID-19.
- Presenting the "Discover the Hills" initiative - a new self-guided interpretive tour program that showcases Halton Hills' rich and diverse arts, culture, heritage and natural assets.
- Working with Regional Tourism Organization (RTO3) to gather enhanced photography of local tourism-related businesses to raise their profile, especially during COVID-19.
- Advancing the development of the upcoming new Economic Development and Tourism Strategy, which will have a dedicated focus on tourism as one of the Strategy's sub-strategies.

Working closely with Town staff, and despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, the Tourism Advisory Committee has assisted with several initiatives including:

- Providing input and support during the development of the brand new [visithaltonhills.ca](http://visithaltonhills.ca) website.
- Suggesting photography development during COVID-19 and what content is appropriate during a pandemic as it relates to supporting the tourism sector.
- Offering input to the development of the Town's new Economic Development and Tourism Strategy throughout each phase of the project.
- Working through solutions to encourage local spending by promoting businesses with additional tourism assets such as trails and conservation areas, arts and culture programming, trails and heritage tours.
- Identifying key tourism assets in Halton Hills.
- Providing insights into visitor market and demographic trends.

### **Next Steps:**

The Committee is assisting Town staff with:

- Methods to best engage local businesses and event organizers with the Visit Halton Hills brand and new website presence.
- Initiatives to support local tourism businesses and customer spending during COVID-19.
- Determining gaps in federal and provincial tourism business supports.
- Exploring options to support event organizers from a tourism development perspective.

## CONCLUSION:

By providing a stakeholder and community perspective, the Tourism Advisory Committee is a valuable resource to assist the Town in continuing to amplify tourism's economic benefits. With the Committee's assistance, in a relatively short time, significant progress has continued to be made. In response to COVID-19, the Committee has provided input and suggestions into key projects, including the launch of the new [visithaltonhills.ca](http://visithaltonhills.ca) website as well as the development of the new Economic Development and Tourism Strategy. Supporting and growing the local tourism sector is a key part of the Town's efforts to diversify the local economy, attract local jobs and raise quality of life.

Reviewed and approved by,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Damian Szybalski". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped 'D' and a trailing flourish.

Damian Szybalski, Director of Economic Development, Innovation & Culture

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "C. Mills". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped 'C' and a trailing flourish.

Chris Mills, Acting Chief Administrative Officer