



Municipality of North Grenville

To:	COUNCIL	Meeting Date: 2021/02/03
Subject:	Tourism Strategy Recommendations	Report No: CAO-003-2021
Prepared by:	Matt Gilmer, Economic Development Officer	File No: C7-CAO

RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Council:

1. Approve the hiring of 1 full-time tourism coordinator for a 24-month contract to assist with the implementation of the North Grenville Tourism Strategy;
2. Approve the tourism service delivery model as outlined in this staff report [CAO-003-2021 – Tourism Strategy Recommendations]; and
3. Direct staff to report back to Council concerning the establishment of a Tourism Advisory Committee, including proposed terms of reference and membership.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose

- To present recommendations from the newly developed North Grenville Tourism Strategy

Key Findings

- The Municipality has made efforts to support the growth of the tourism industry over the past two years
- A tourism strategy was completed with grant funding from RT09
- The engagement process revealed community support for growing tourism
- The tourism strategy provides a suggested structure for tourism delivery and provides recommendations to grow the industry
- The tourism strategy was presented to Council on January 12, 2021

Financial Implications

- Creation of a full-time permanent tourism coordinator position to assist with the implementation of the North Grenville Tourism Strategy
- Funding for the full-time position will come from reserves
- All other budget items have been approved as part of the 2021 Municipal Budget

BACKGROUND

In 2019 North Grenville launched a new, dedicated tourism program. This included the launch of a new Explore North Grenville website, the hiring of a tourism summer student, the launch of tourism social media channels, and the creation of the first dedicated visitor guide in 2020.

Regional Tourism Organization 9 (RTO9) provides matching grants through their partnership fund each year to assist destinations in creating new tourism programming and strategies. The Municipality received \$20,000 to create a tourism strategy. Total cost of the project was \$40,000 with the remaining \$20,000 coming from the 2020 Municipal budget. A request for proposal (RFP) process was conducted and MDB Insight Inc. was awarded the contract. A steering committee was formed including the North Grenville Chamber of Commerce, the Old Town Kemptville Business Improvement Area (BIA), the Mayor, and staff.

The tourism strategy process included:

- Creation of workplan and charter
- Set-up of a steering committee
- Review of background materials
- Three site visits
- One-on-one stakeholder interviews (14 conducted)
- Resident and business survey (236 completed)
- Industry group consultation (seven attendees)
- Public information session (seven attendees)
- Asset mapping
- Tourism delivery analysis
- Tourism landscape review
- Economic impact assessment
- SOARR assessment
- Benchmarking review

The steering committee reviewed the key findings report in November, and a first draft of the tourism strategy in December. The Draft Tourism Strategy was presented to Council on January 12th, 2021 and staff was directed to report back to Council with a plan for tourism service delivery and budget.

ANALYSIS

The strategy has three strategic priorities:

1. Brand the destination as current, innovative, curious, generous, and family-oriented
2. Leverage existing assets as backdrops for high-yield, high-value experiences for tourists and locals
3. Collaborate with business operators and others to build strong, reliable, unique tourism draws

Under each strategic priority steps have been identified that will help the Municipality achieve the mission – *the Municipality of North Grenville demonstrates leadership and supports its businesses and community groups to marshal the assets, infrastructure, administrative capacity, programs, and financial resources to develop and promote the local tourism industry.*

To achieve these steps the Municipality must decide on a budget and service delivery structure for tourism.

The strategy offers four service delivery models:

1. Municipal Tourism Department, with funds from the operating levy and/or MAT, using municipal staff and passive support from the tourism industry support. Council is ultimately in charge.
2. Municipal Tourism Department with Pay-to-Play Program for the industry, with funds from the operating levy and/or MAT, using municipal staff, matching funding from the tourism industry, such as annual fees and other charges, and a Council-appointed Advisory Committee. Council is ultimately in charge.
3. Municipally funded Tourism Contract, with funds from municipal grant and/or MAT, with funds flowing to an existing arms-length organization with their own staff or seconded municipal staff, additional funding from the tourism industry, and an arms-length board of directors reporting annually to Council.
4. Autonomous Tourism Association, an independent non-profit organization, supported financially by tourism businesses, perhaps receiving a small grant from the municipality, operated with little or no staff and/or volunteers, and an independent board of directors.

The tourism strategy recommends model number two, Municipal Tourism Department with Pay-to-Play Program for the industry, for the Municipality of North Grenville.

Staff is recommending that the Municipality move forward with model number two. The following steps will be taken in 2021 to lay the foundation for this service delivery model:

- Hiring of a full-time permanent tourism coordinator with skill sets in economic development, business support, and marketing
- Establish a Council-appointed Tourism Advisory Committee
- Explore pay-to play programs (e.g., NG Tourism Guide)
- Work with the Old Town Kemptville BIA and Chamber of Commerce to discuss their involvement in the implementation of the tourism strategy

Staffing Structure

Staff is recommending that the Municipality hire a full-time permanent tourism coordinator for a 24-month contract. The coordinator will play a key role in galvanizing support from the tourism sector, collaborating with other departments (Parks and Recreation, in particular), and assisting with the evolution of Kemptville Campus into a world-class, state-of-the-art tourism destination. The majority of the coordinator's time and effort will be focused on product development and destination development. This work will be supported with additional spending on working with businesses to improve their customer service, build their online presence, develop itineraries, shape story ideas and messages, explore solutions to challenges, and increasing the capacity of entrepreneurs and community leaders to respond to tourism opportunities.

Staff has also applied for funding through Canada Summer Jobs to hire a summer student to assist the tourism coordinator with the implementation of the strategy. Activities for summer staff may include greeting tourists and answering questions in high-traffic locations and at large events, assisting with social media engagement, updating website content, and other support.

The tourism coordinator and summer student will report to the economic development officer.

Tourism Advisory Committee

As part of the tourism service delivery model, MDB is recommending that a Tourism Advisory Committee of Council be established, made up of five to seven tourism operators with direct involvement in serving visitors. The committee will provide recommendations to Council on the implementation of the tourism strategy and feedback to staff on product development initiatives and marketing. It is recommended that Council direct Staff to prepare a Tourism Advisory Committee report for Council to discuss at a later date.

Pay-to play programs (e.g., NG Tourism Guide)

As part of the tourism service delivery model, MDB is recommending that pay-to-play revenue-generating programs be established to offset the cost of the tourism budget. Known in some communities as a “partner program,” revenue would flow from the tourism industry as part of an annual participation fee and/or a project fee. Staff is recommending that the Municipality continue to explore pay-to-play revenue-generating programs to help cover the cost of the tourism program. This funding model was used to help pay for the 2020 tourism guide.

Budget Structure

The strategy notes that the Municipality cannot expand its tourism program within the current budget and recommends that the Municipality work towards the following budget structure.

Proposed Annual Tourism Budget	Annual Expenses
Salary & Benefits (Tourism Development Coordinator and summer staff)	\$ 75,000.00
Marketing, Advertising & Promotions (digital & print)	\$ 60,000.00
Product Development (photo/video, web development, fam tours)	\$ 25,000.00
Meetings, Workshops, Materials & Supplies	\$ 25,000.00
Association Memberships, Conferences, Prof. Dev., & Other	\$ 15,000.00
Total Budget	\$ 200,000.00

As advised by MDB insights, staff is recommending that the Municipality take a phased-in approach to the 2021 tourism budget. Covid-19 has created many uncertainties for the local tourism industry. Staff must work with tourism businesses in 2021 to capitalize on a shift in consumer preferences to more localized travel options, the buy-local movement, and visitors' increased prioritization of the outdoors. Staff will continue to build the foundation of the tourism industry in North Grenville and ensure that businesses are prepared for when travel restrictions are lifted.

Staff is recommending the following 2021 tourism budget:

Proposed 2021 Tourism Budget	Description	Budget	Funding Source
Tourism Coordinator Position	Hiring of a tourism coordinator	\$ 52,000.00	New Budget
Marketing, Product Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Product Development (photo/video, web dev., fam tours) •Tourism Guide •TODS Signs + 2 new Area Profile Signs •Downtown and Hamlet banners •Marketing Campaigns 	\$ 52,400.00	Approved 2021 Budget
Event Management	•Assist with community-led events and festivals (downtown promenade)	\$ 28,000.00	Approved 2021 Budget
Total Budget		\$ 132,400.00	

Staff is recommending that Council approve the additional expense required to hire the new tourism coordinator. The 2021 approved budget included \$6,200 to hire a summer student tourism coordinator. Staff is recommending that those funds be reallocated to help cover the cost of the new full time tourism coordinator. After reallocating these funds, the total cost of the new tourism coordinator position for 2021 will be \$45,800. The other items listed in the proposed tourism budget were included as part of the 2021 approved Municipal budget. Staff will continue to look for ways to leverage the current tourism budget and apply for additional funding when available.

Staff will reevaluate North Grenville's tourism priorities in time for the 2022 budget deliberations and will present a new tourism budget and workplan to Council.

Strategic Alignment

- Strategic Focus Area 1: Sustainable, Strategic Growth (Goal 5: Become a tourism destination)
- Outcome: Explore development that enhances our tourism potential

COMMENTS

The strategy will require a high degree of collaboration and significant investment between multiple stakeholders to be successful. It is only through cooperation that the community will achieve its vision and build a competitive destination in the long term. The strategy will provide a shared vision for tourism, a framework for stakeholders to collaborate, and a direction for tourism development in North Grenville.

EXISTING POLICY/BY-LAW

None.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

This item has been identified in the current budget: Yes ☐ No ☒ N/A

This item is within the budgeted amount: Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A

PUBLIC INPUT

Public consultation included a resident/business survey, industry session, and public session. The feedback showed a desire to increase tourism in North Grenville.

INTERNAL/EXTERNAL CONSULTATION

Key internal staff and external stakeholders took part in one-on-one interviews. RTO9 and the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville's tourism program administrator were consulted in the engagement process.

CONCLUSION

The Municipality has completed the tourism strategy process, resulting in a document that will guide the growth of the industry over the coming years. The tourism strategy builds upon the assets that North Grenville is blessed with, seeks inspiration from the positive aspirations of citizens and entrepreneurs, and leverages the cooperative nature of the community to reimagine a future of prosperity.

SIGNATURE

Prepared by:

Original Signed By

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Submitted for

Council consideration by:

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ATTACHMENTS

- **Attachment 1:** North Grenville Tourism Strategy