

Clause No. 4 in Report No. 3 of Committee of the Whole was adopted, without amendment, by the Council of The Regional Municipality of York at its meeting held on February 20, 2014.

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**2014 YORK REGION ARTS COUNCIL
TOURISM MARKETING COLLABORATION AGREEMENT**

Committee of the Whole recommends adoption of the following recommendations contained in the report dated January 23, 2014 from the Executive Director, Corporate and Strategic Planning:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. York Region renew its Tourism Marketing Collaboration Agreement with the York Region Arts Council and provide them with \$50,000 in 2014 for Region-wide tourism promotion.
2. The Executive Director, Corporate and Strategic Planning be authorized to execute the necessary agreement.

2. PURPOSE

This report recommends that approval be given to renew the formal funding partnership between The Regional Municipality of York and the York Region Arts Council to ensure a continuance in the support of the delivery of Region-wide tourism, arts and culture promotion.

3. BACKGROUND

York Region Arts Council is the Region's primary partner in promoting tourism, arts and culture to local consumers

As previously reported to Regional Council on January 24, 2013, since the advent of Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs) across the province in 2009 and the subsequent scaling down of York Region's in-house tourism operations, York Region has embarked

on a collaborative approach to promoting local tourism events and assets to consumers located inside and outside the Region. This has been achieved by partnering with three external entities: Central Counties Tourism, York Region Media Group (YRMG) and York Region Arts Council (YRAC).

York Region is contained within Regional Tourism Organization Zone 6 along with Durham Region and the Hills of Headwaters, which includes the Town of Caledon in Peel Region, the Village of Erin in Wellington County and the whole of Dufferin County. Central Counties Tourism (the marketing name of RTO6) is responsible for promoting York Region to external markets across Ontario and beyond.

Since 2011, the Region has partnered with the YRMG to deliver the annual Yorkscene Discovery Guide, which is distributed throughout York Region and to tourism information centres across Ontario.

In 2012, York Region first partnered with the YRAC to develop and promote Yorkscene.com – an online resource to find all things tourism, arts and culture in the Region. In 2013, this partnership was renewed with a focus to expand the reach and awareness of the Yorkscene brand and to drive traffic to the website via promotional efforts in local media, on social media channels and through attendance at community events, festivals and other outreach activities.

This ongoing partnership with YRAC ensures valuable services continue to be provided efficiently to local consumers and the local tourism and culture community.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Tourism, arts and culture are important elements to support York Region's economic health

The Region's arts and culture assets provide a foundation for tourism within the community. Whether it is the Region's museums and theatres, or its natural environment and historic downtowns, these all combine to provide opportunities for local residents and visitors to explore and enjoy the Region's arts and culture community.

Arts and cultural events also create occasions to showcase these assets and how they fit into the fabric of the community; demonstrating why a given community is an attractive place to live, visit or invest.

Innovation plays an important role in the Region's *Economic Development Action Plan* and is recognized as an important element to the community's economic prosperity. Given this, it is important to note the role of arts and culture within the innovation ecosystem. They not only provide entertainment and help create complete communities and a

sense of place within the Region, but they also help inspire ideas, designs and messages that help inform new business opportunities.

York Region Arts Council has a mandate to foster arts and culture, which supports York Region's tourism economy

The YRAC is the community connection to the Region's arts and culture assets. The organization provides a venue for collaboration among municipal arts councils while promoting activities that happen across all nine municipalities in York Region. Given this connection, they are an ideal partner to continue outreach efforts to the arts and culture community in support of tourism activity across the Region.

Through marketing collaborations in 2013, traffic at yorkscene.com has almost quadrupled versus 2012

To help support tourism marketing within the Region, YRAC, YRMG and the Region collaborated on further refining the www.yorkscene.com website, as well as developing and implementing a range of strategies and tactics to promote the website to local residents.

The following are some of the highlights that resulted from this collaboration:

- Industry Tourism Summit – in March 2013, YRAC, Central Counties and the Region collaborated on delivering a tourism summit with local industry stakeholders. The purpose of the event was to inform stakeholders on the strategic partnership between York Region, YRAC, YRMG and Central Counties Tourism and the opportunities to work with the partners to promote tourism activity in the Region. The event attracted over 250 industry stakeholders.
- Website Enhancements – the yorkscene.com website received a number of enhancements, including integration of the Central Counties Tourism Event Calendar into the Yorkscene website – the first such successful municipal and Regional Tourism Organization website integration in Ontario.
- Website Promotion – a range of tools were used to promote the website, including a monthly e-newsletter, as well as two sweepstake contests that ran in July and December.
- Summer Sweepstakes – this initiative ran between July and September, 2013 and attracted close to 10,000 entries. It also resulted in the addition of 2,500 new Yorkscene Facebook followers and generated 22 times more website traffic as compared to the same period in 2012.

As a result of these collaborations, there was a significant overall increase in website visitors from 18,012 in 2012 to 71,398 in 2013, a nearly four-fold increase.

York Region Arts Council is seeking direct funding support from York Region to continue and expand its delivery of local tourism support services across the Region

To ensure Yorkscene.com continues to reflect the tourism and cultural opportunities in the Region, it is important to continue collaborating with YRAC on the management and promotion of Yorkscene.com to the local tourism market.

It is proposed that the formal funding arrangement between YRAC and the Region be continued in 2014. The agreement will articulate roles and responsibilities, align with the Region's goals, identify requirements related to reporting and use of Regional funding.

The following provides an overview of the proposed 2014 work plan the Region and YRAC will work together to achieve:

- **Marketing and Support:** develop and deliver a coordinated marketing plan that supports driving traffic to Yorkscene.com to promote the Region's tourism, arts and cultural assets.
- **E-newsletter and Social Media Channel Development:** focus on tactics that will grow the York Scene consumer and industry stakeholder e-newsletter subscriber databases (currently 13,000 and 800 subscribers respectively) as well as the number of Yorkscene's Facebook and Twitter followers (currently 3,150 and 1,780 followers respectively).
- **Website Content Development:** expand and deliver up-to-date tourism related content for Yorkscene.com, including: event calendar listings, tourism business directory information and experience package development.
- **Product Development:** work with Central Counties Tourism to develop and promote arts and cultural assets to would-be visitors to York Region.
- **Customer Service Support:** field tourism related calls and emails from local residents and potential visitors that originate through yorkscene.com.

Yorkscene.com is successfully establishing itself as the primary source for "Things to Do" in York Region

The tremendous growth in traffic to yorkscene.com in 2013 is indicative of a healthy increase in local consumer awareness of the site and of its purpose: to be a source for things to do in York Region. In 2013, over 900 listings promoting events and assets located throughout the Region were uploaded to the event calendar and 72% of visitors to the website viewed the "Things to Do" section of the website.

By collaborating with YRAC on the 2014 work plan items, the goal will be to leverage this momentum and continue to raise awareness of and solidify yorkscene.com as the principal source for local tourism information for York Region's residents. This will help

drive greater tourism activity within York Region, as residents and visitors explore and enjoy the many arts and culture assets that can be found locally.

To deliver on these goals resources and to properly promote the Yorkscene.com website, YRAC has requested support in the amount of \$50,000 in 2014. This funding would allow YRAC to provide greater support to the website and act as the Region's customer support mechanism for fielding tourism related inquiries.

Link to key Council-approved plans

Tourism, arts and culture related initiatives support the *2011 to 2015 Strategic Plan* objective to "Increase the Economic Vitality of the Region", and in particular the job growth and number of small business start-ups indicators of success.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Partnership with YRAC is a cost-effective solution for delivering tourism promotion in York Region

York Region supported YRAC for website development and local marketing in both 2012 and 2013 in the amount of \$45,000. The 2014 Corporate and Strategic Planning budget includes \$50,000 for YRAC from the Economic Strategy Branch to support ongoing website management, customer service delivery, and arts and culture product development for the tourism market.

This partnership is a cost-effective arrangement for York Region given that YRAC has its own office space, an accomplished staff and well-established relationships throughout the local arts and culture community and with York Region's media outlets.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Tourism is an important sector to the economies of the municipalities within York Region. The Region will continue, through its partnerships, to support local tourism marketing in collaboration with YRAC. The Region has also fostered coordinated dialogue between the Region, the local municipalities and Central Counties Tourism to ensure alignment of priorities. This dialogue will continue through regular economic development partner meetings.

7. CONCLUSION

The Region continues to play an important role in supporting and promoting tourism, arts and cultural programs in partnership with York Region Arts Council, York Region Media Group and Central Counties Tourism.

With these partnerships now well established, there is a need to build upon the relationship with YRAC by providing them with \$50,000 in exchange for leading the marketing and promotion of arts and culture tourism to local residents. This partnership will also continue to leverage resources from Central Counties Tourism and York Region Media Group to support local tourism operators by promoting local tourism opportunities to audiences within York Region and beyond.

For more information on this report, please contact Doug Lindeblom, Director, Economic Strategy at doug.lindeblom@york.ca or 905-830-4444, Ext. 71503.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.