



Subject: Status Update for Niagara's South Coast Tourism Association

To: Council

From: Chief Administrative Office

Report Number: 2021-123

Meeting Date: May 10, 2021

Recommendation:

That Chief Administrative Office Report 2021-123 be received for information purposes.

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on the status of Niagara's South Coast Tourism Association and the initiatives underway to keep the destination marketing organization active.

Background:

Niagara's South Coast Tourism Association ("NSCTA") was established in 2012 as a destination marketing organization ("DMO") and is comprised of four municipalities: Town of Fort Erie, City of Port Colborne, Township of Wainfleet and City of Welland. From 2017 to the first quarter of 2020, the NSCTA was largely inactive in promoting south Niagara tourism and generating visits to this area of the region.

When it became known to the four municipalities that the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario ("TIAO") would receive \$30 million from the FedDev Ontario Regional Relief and Recovery Fund ("RRRF") to support DMOs financially during the COVID-19 pandemic, they all agreed to apply before the June 5, 2020 deadline. Upon notification of a successful application, it was further agreed that this funding should be used to make the NSCTA active once again.

Once the NSCTA received a total of \$473,963.75 in funding, efforts were quickly taken by the City of Port Colborne's Corporate Services Department to initiate a Board of Directors and draft association by-laws in consultation with the City's solicitor. At the

July 13, 2020 Council meeting, Council approved Corporate Services Department Report 2020-91 to appoint a Board of Directors. At the October 13, 2020 Council meeting, Council approved Corporate Services Department Report 2020-145 to adopt the by-laws previously approved by the NSCTA board.

Of the total funding amount, approximately 70% or \$331,774.00 was distributed among all four municipalities in a 67% equal split and a 33% split based on population. Using their respective allotments, the municipalities carried out projects aimed at supporting the reopening and recovery of the local tourism market. The remaining 30% or \$142,189.75 of the funding was allocated to DMO initiatives (at \$100,600.00) and administrative expenses (at \$41,589.75).

Over eight months, appointed staff from the four municipalities worked as part of a committee to develop a strategic plan using the allocated 30%. The primary objective of this plan was to generate visitation to local businesses and south Niagara attractions, and to re-establish the NSCTA and keep it active beyond 2020-21.

A final report attesting to how the total funding amount had been spent, including detailed descriptions, was submitted to TIAO on February 28, 2021. After successfully completing an audit of its expenses, the NSCTA received notification at the end of March that the process had officially come to a close.

Discussion:

Staff from the four municipalities meet on a bi-weekly basis to coordinate and report on the various DMO initiatives in their strategic plan. Many of these initiatives have been underway for several months, and only a small number – marked with an asterisk (*) – remain on hold until restrictions around COVID-19 are loosened, and leisure travel is allowed to resume. They are as follows:

- Redevelop the niagarasouthcoast.com website
- Introduce a new logo and develop the South Coast brand
- Publicize a new promotional video
- Complete Google My Business Listings for tourism stakeholders
- Continue participation in Great Taste of Ontario passport program
- Launch a South Coast passport program*
- Execute a digital advertising campaign*
- Build social media presence and increase user engagement
- Develop content for marketing and communications
- Remain active members of the Tourism Industry Association of Canada (TIAC) and Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO)

The outcomes of the initiatives listed above will culminate, not only in a revived online presence for Niagara's South Coast, but also a renewed foundation as a DMO. The City

of Port Colborne's tourism coordinator and manager of strategic initiatives will continue to contribute at the committee level to moving these initiatives forward and increasing the potential economic benefits of tourism for Niagara's South Coast communities.

Financial Implications:

There are no financial implications.

Public Engagement:

Once the above-listed initiatives are ready for visibility in the public domain, they will be publicized, either individually or separately, through various media relations activities. From that point onwards, the NSCTA plans to further engage tourism stakeholders across the four municipalities on activities and projects related to strategic planning and branding.

Conclusion:

This report provides an update on the status of Niagara's South Coast Tourism Association. Funding from the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario, through the FedDev Ontario Regional Relief and Recovery Fund, allowed the NSCTA to re-establish itself as a destination marketing organization and focus on implementing a series of initiatives. With many of these initiatives underway, the objective is to keep the NSCTA active beyond 2020-21 in order to realize the potential of tourism and its benefits in Niagara's South Coast.

Respectfully submitted,

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Report Approval:

All reports reviewed and approved by the Department Director and also the City Treasurer when relevant. Final approval is by the Chief Administrative Officer.