

The Regional Municipality of York

Committee of the Whole
Planning and Economic Development
February 6, 2020

Report of the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner

2019 Annual Tourism Update

1. Recommendation

Council receive the 2019 Annual Tourism update report for information.

2. Summary

This report provides Council with an update on 2019 tourism, arts and culture programs. It also advises Council of a renewed funding agreement with the York Region Arts Council to undertake tourism promotion and related activities across the Region in 2020.

Key Points:

- 2019 was a significant year for tourism, arts and culture experiences in York Region which attracted 500,000 people and generated millions of dollars in economic impact
- Successful collaboration between York Region Arts Council, York Region, local municipalities and the province continues to strengthen tourism opportunities in the Region and provide arts and culture professional development programming and stakeholder engagement
- 2020 tourism, arts and culture programs will provide more entertainment options for residents

3. Background

Tourism, arts and culture contribute to quality of life for York Region residents

York Region continues to be one of the fastest growing municipalities in Canada. Over 20,000 new residents are attracted to the Region annually.

York Region has unique demographic and geographic diversity, with urban corridors connecting east to west and south to north. These urban corridors intersect with the ecologically-significant Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt lands, situating urban areas next to environmental areas, rural and agricultural lands. Throughout the Region, historic towns, shopping malls and cultural assets such as theatres, art galleries, fine dining, local fairs, farmers' markets and festivals are available to residents and employers as are the many

parks, lakes, trails and forests. A vibrant arts and culture scene adds significantly to creating holistic communities which are the sort of places that attract businesses and residents to live, work, and invest.

The York Region Arts Council is a Regional partner for delivering place-making activities

The York Region Arts Council provides community connection to York Region's arts and culture assets and tourism operators. The organization's mandate is to foster arts and culture as York Region's primary partner in promoting tourism, arts and culture to consumers.

The organization facilitates collaboration among local municipal arts councils, promoting activities across all nine local municipalities.

York Region established a funding partnership with York Region Arts Council as a delivery agent to promote regional and local tourism activities in 2011. The partnership is renewed annually and covers three primary areas:

1. Development and implementation of a marketing plan to promote York Region as a place to live, work and play
2. Industry/local business engagement
3. Tourism, arts and culture website management

York Region Arts Council represents York Region on the Central Counties Tourism Board

Central Counties Tourism is the Regional tourism organization appointed by the Province to oversee tourism activities in York Region, Durham Region and the Headwaters area; which includes the Town of Caledon in Peel Region, the entirety of Dufferin County and the Town of Erin in Wellington County. York Region Arts Council holds a seat on the Central Counties Tourism Board representing York Region. The Arts Council partners with Central Counties Tourism to promote tourism activities. This includes the Visiting Friends and Relatives program, support for marketing activities and an annual tourism symposium.

4. Analysis

The Experience York Region initiative saw strong growth in 2019

In late 2018, the York Region Arts Council launched the Experience York Region initiative through the [ExperienceYorkRegion.com](https://www.experienceyorkregion.com) website as the one-stop resource for things to do in York Region. In 2019 the website highlighted 40 events which took place throughout all nine local municipalities and provided a free platform for promoting over 600 community events across York Region.

By the end of December, the Experience York Region website appeared in over 3.9 million searches on Google and other search engines. It also recorded more than 214,000 page

views by nearly 126,000 unique visitors. Of those who visited the website in 2019, 81% were new visitors, which indicates new audiences are constantly discovering ExperienceYorkRegion.com.

The Experience York Region brand was also supported by a new Festivals and Events guide, developed as a downloadable file from the website and as a printed booklet. The electronic version was downloaded over 50,000 times and 75,000 guides were printed and distributed at festivals and events and to tourism partners throughout York Region. Experience York Region social media channels on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram were also developed to amplify the content of the website.

Arts and culture professional development programming and stakeholder engagement reached over 1,700 participants

York Region Arts Council hosted or supported over 40 tourism, arts and culture related activities in the community. These were achieved in partnership with more than 50 local partners including the Region, Central Counties Tourism and local municipalities. Activities included:

- Tourism symposium held on March 4, 2019 hosting 70 attendees. The symposium focused on providing information on tourism retail trends and measuring success.
- Artist in Residency program providing 3 local artists with funding, mentorship and 3 months residency at the Kortright Centre.
- Artist Mentorship program bringing together 10 local emerging artists, and 10 established industry professionals, for a 12 month facilities mentorship friendship.
- Three entrepreneur development cohorts offered through the Artrepreneur program in Markham, Richmond Hill and Vaughan serving 43 participants. Delivered in conjunction with the small business enterprise centres in York Region, the program teaches business skills to entrepreneurs in the creative sector.
- Research into the creative state of York Region to better understand stakeholder needs. Over 120 individuals completed a survey to inform the report, and over 30 local organizations participated in the stakeholder consultation session. Collectively, they expressed interest in more networking, skills development and a framework for regional collaboration at a level with municipal involvement.

Festivals and tourism events in 2019 led to millions of dollars in economic impact

In 2019, festivals and events in York Region hosted over 500,000 people. The team from the Arts Council participated in 10 events across the Region and attendees cross-promoted activities increasing visibility of the Experience York Region brand and website to local residents.

The CP Women's Open golf tournament took place from August 19 to 25, 2019, at Magna Golf Club in Aurora. This tournament is part of the broader Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) tour and the only tour stop in Canada. This was the first time in 18 years this event was held in York Region and was deemed a great success by the LPGA.

Extensive collaboration between York Region, York Region Police and the Town of Aurora and Golf Canada was required to support the week-long tournament hosting more than 45,000 fans at Magna Golf Club. The event was instrumental in showcasing York Region to a global audience. Coverage of the tournament reached over 550 million households across more than 170 nations and territories worldwide and Golf Canada estimated the event had a projected local economic impact of \$15 million to \$18 million.

York Region is renewing its partnership with the Arts Council for 2020

The Region will be renewing its one year funding agreement ending December 31, 2020 with York Region Arts Council to undertake tourism promotion and related activities across York Region. The agreement includes:

- Maintenance of the ExperienceYorkRegion.com website
- Community and tourism industry stakeholders engagement
- Development and delivery of a marketing plan

Markham and Vaughan have launched new organizations to support tourism

In April 2017, the Province of Ontario passed legislation allowing lower-tier and single-tier municipalities to enact a Transient Accommodation Tax to support destination marketing programs. This legislation requires at least 50 per cent of the revenues collected be used to promote tourism activities.

At the end of 2018, Markham launched Destination Markham Corporation and in 2019 Vaughan launched Tourism Vaughan Corporation. Both corporations serve as destination marketing organizations funded by a four per cent tax levy from their respective municipalities. The organizations are in the early stages of development and are expected to strengthen and amplify messaging around tourism in York Region.

5. Financial

The Council approved Planning and Economic Development branch budget includes an allocation of \$77,500 in 2020 to assist York Region Arts Council with delivery of the marketing plan. This supports ongoing local tourism promotion, arts and culture programs and industry engagement for tourism. The partnership is a cost effective opportunity for the Region given York Region Arts Council's well established relationships throughout the local arts and culture community and with key stakeholders.

6. Local Impact

The Region continues to support local tourism marketing initiatives through the York Region Arts Council and Central Counties Tourism. This collaboration through the Arts Council will extend to local municipalities including Destination Markham Corporation and Tourism Vaughan Corporation. Tourism marketing programs are developed based on alignment with municipal, regional and provincial priorities through regular meetings and in collaboration with municipal economic development partners.

7. Conclusion

The Region continues to play an important role supporting and promoting tourism and place-making programs through a formal relationship with the York Region Arts Council and collaboration with various tourism stakeholders. These partnerships have led to increased community participation at events and through the ExperienceYorkRegion.com website, with tangible economic impact.

Economic Strategy will continue the relationship with the York Region Arts Council and leverage other opportunities to further support tourism related place-making activities to audiences within York Region and beyond. This will further enhance the Region's appeal as a great place to work, play and live in support of broader economic development goals.

For more information on this report, please contact Jonathan Wheatle, Director, Economic Strategy at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 71503. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

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