

The Regional Municipality of York

Committee of the Whole
Planning and Economic Development
September 19, 2019

Report of the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner

2018 Annual Tourism Update

1. Recommendation

Council receive the 2018 Annual Tourism update for information.

2. Summary

This report provides Council with an update on 2018 annual 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 2019.

Key Points:

- The partnership with the York Region Arts Council continues to deliver tangible results beyond tourism promotion
- Successful collaboration between York Region Arts Council, York Region, local municipalities and the province continues to strengthen tourism opportunities in the Region
- 2019 tourism, arts and culture programs will provide more entertainment options for residents

3. Background

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

York Region continues to be one of the fastest growing municipalities in Canada. Attraction to the Region is not only due to residential and business growth, but also the high quality of life.

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 and rural and agricultural lands. Throughout the Region, historic towns, shopping malls and cultural assets such as theatres, art galleries, fine dining, local fairs and festivals are available to residents and employers as are the many parks, trails and forests. A vibrant arts and culture scene adds significantly to creating holistic communities; the sort of places that attract businesses and residents to live, work, or invest.

The York Region Arts Council is a key Regional partner to deliver tourism promoting place-making activities

The York Region Arts Council provides community connection to York Region's arts and culture assets and tourism operators. The organization has a mandate 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 municipalities in York Region.

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 development and 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 Hills of Headwaters. 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 related activities. This includes the Visiting Friends and Relatives program, support for marketing activities and an annual tourism symposium.

4. Analysis

2018 tourism, arts and culture outreach activities were performed at festivals which hosted over 500,000 attendees

The partnership with the York Region Arts Council continues to deliver increased community engagement at events and through the website. In 2018, the York Region Arts Council, Central Counties Tourism and the Region collaborated on several tourism activities. The

team from the Arts Council attended 13 events across the Region which hosted 500,000 people. They engaged attendees and cross promoted activities increasing the visibility of the Experienceyorkregion.com brand to local residents.

Based on the Ontario Tourism Regional Economic Impact Model (TRIEM), the economic impact of visitors to York Region festivals is \$44 million in visitor spending, contributing to \$34.5 million in GDP and 424 jobs.

The rebranded website saw an increased engagement with visitors and is a one-stop resource for tourism activities

In 2018, York Region Arts Council rebranded its website YorkScene.com as Experienceyorkregion.com. The new platform continues to provide a user-friendly experience and ticketing features for event promoters. The website acts as a one-stop resource for tourism and provides a link to the York Region Festivals Trail operators.

The refreshed brand saw an increase in the total number of pages visited (3,075,924), up by 21% from 2017. Visitors spent an average of four minutes per visit, twice the industry standard, (up by 37.5% from 2017).

With support from Central Counties Tourism, the Arts Council was also able to increase the social media following across its platforms to more than 181,000. This includes a 1.7 per cent increase in Facebook followers, 11 percent increase in Twitter followers and 124 per cent increase in Instagram followers.

York Region Arts Council partnered with stakeholders to assist with agri-tourism promotion

York Region, with additional financial support from six local municipalities, worked with York Farm Fresh to create and distribute the York Farm Fresh Guide Map for 2018. The maps list local farm stands, farmers market and food-related festivals. It is designed as a resource to encourage residents and visitors to explore and enjoy a day trip shopping for local farm fresh products within York Region. The York Farm Fresh maps were embedded in the Experience York Region Magazine produced through a partnership between the Arts Council and the York Region Media Group.

Distribution of the map included:

- 75,000 maps produced and distributed to partnering municipalities, York Farm Fresh, and York Region Arts Council
- 60,000 Experience York Region Magazine published by York Region Media Group each including a copy of the map
- 139,000 visitors to Experienceyorkregion.com with ability to download a digital version of the map

Thirteen tourism, arts and culture related stakeholder information sessions were held in 2018

York Region Arts Council delivered tourism, arts and culture related activities in partnership with the Region and local municipalities to facilitate information sharing. The activities include:

- Nine stakeholder discussion sessions with the local municipalities
- Tourism symposium held on March 22, 2018 hosting 116 attendees. The symposium provided a learning opportunity to apply postal codes to identify potential customers with selective preferences using the Environics Analytics Envision 5 tool.
- A business to business tourism information session in collaboration with six municipalities in Fall/Winter of 2018/2019
- Two entrepreneur development cohorts through the Artrepreneur program in Whitchurch-Stouffville and Georgina served 21 participants. This program, delivered in conjunction with the four small business enterprise centres in York Region, teaches entrepreneurs in the creative sector the business skills required to support a profitable business. Since 2015, the program has generated nearly \$2M in economic benefit to the Region.

York Region renewed the partnership with the Arts Council in 2019

The Region renewed its one year funding agreement ending December 31, 2019 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

Program delivery is well underway with the leadership of a new Executive Director who joined the Arts Council in June 2019. This includes promotion of the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) tournament in Aurora and providing information on places to eat and activities for the athletes.

5. Financial

The Council approved Planning and Economic Development branch budget includes an allocation of \$76,000 in 2019 to assist the 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. The effect of reduced Provincial funding to Central Counties Tourism will be monitored to understand the impact on service delivery of the Arts Council.

6. Local Impact

The Region continues to support local tourism marketing initiatives through the York Region Arts Council and Central Counties. 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 in 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 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 Doug Lindeblom, Director, Economic Strategy at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 71503. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

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