

## Visitors Plan aims to frame Aurora as 'premier destination'

Aurora aims to position itself as a 'premier destination' through a new, detailed Visitor Growth Plan.

The Visitor Growth Plan was presented to Council at last week's Committee of the Whole meeting and is aimed to leverage the Town's current assets to draw in tourism and visitors from other area municipalities.

Developed by the Town's Economic Development Office with Central Counties Tourism, the Plan used geo-fencing research to determine the number of visits by unique visitors to key community hubs, such as local recreation centres and Town Square, and the data shows 'the Town's strong restaurants, shopping and sports facilities have made it a destination for visitors, which is a unique and unexpected strength of the municipality.'

The plan was presented to lawmakers by Angela Haynes, the Town's Senior Economic Development Officer, and said the Province defines a 'visitor' as someone who takes same-day or overnight trips to destinations 40-plus kilometres away from their home.

Haynes noted the Visitor Plan is developed around five key pillars: Champion, Connect, Collaborate, Create, and Communicate.

'To reach the next level, the Plan requires support from Council and a dedicated team focused on implementation,' she said, speaking to the pillar of Champion. 'Success will be driven by strategic goals, including clear accountability, a new advisory body, robust ambassadorship, and sustainable funding.'

The Connect pillar, she said, 'is based on cultivating a robust network among governance, businesses, and community organizations.'

'Success will be driven by strategic goals, namely centralized information, cross-sector alignment, investment in training, and bridging assets,' she said, before moving onto Collaborate. 'This pillar is based on forging active strategic partnerships, maximizing collective effort, and elevating visitor spending in Aurora. Success will be driven by implementing cross-promotion, activating a downtown hub, optimizing visitor flow, and fostering creative partnerships.'

Create, she said, is based on 'enhancing Aurora's appeal as a destination and ensuring high visitor readiness by focusing on compelling, best-in-class assets.'

'Success will be driven by support and collaboration on strategies that optimize wayfinding and curating signature experiences,' she said, shifting to Communicate, which she said would entail 'a focused marketing and communication strategy' that tells 'distinctive stories, researching targeted audiences through effective channels and compelling messages.'

'The consultation group envisioned the guiding principle of the plan as a transformation of Aurora into a compelling, vibrant and welcoming destination,' said Haynes. 'This will be achieved through strategic collaboration and a deep understanding of the Town's offerings, positioning Aurora as a place with a wide range of community champions who readily engage visitors and are focused on driving long-term success.'

'The plan strategically leverages Aurora's core assets, its rich heritage, downtown, and excellent community amenities. By using these unique strengths, the plan seeks to cultivate meaningful and 'high-quality experiences that inspire repeat visits and motivate guests to become our most passionate advocates'. As a strategic investment, the visitor growth plan is critical to the Town of Aurora as more guests will directly raise the Town's profile and drive sustained prosperity for local businesses and services. Ultimately, the collective benefits outlined here will not only significantly increase the Town's share of the visitor market, but will also contribute to a vibrant future for the Town of Aurora.'

The plan received the tentative support of Council at the Committee level, with several Councillors asking how success will be

measured going forward.

?We're going to look at leveraging all the assets and really tapping into what the Town has to offer and hopefully getting feedback from each of them in terms of number of visits, length of stay for hotels, for instance,? said Haynes.

Added Chuck Thibeault, Executive Director of Central Counties Tourism: ?For a lot of these businesses, the first step is getting them to recognize they play in the tourism sandbox. There is a very, very big difference if you think that you're only catering to locals and how you operate versus if you recognize that people are traveling from afar to come and see you because to get someone to travel 40 plus kilometers to one store is very, very difficult. However, when all those stores start to work together and the restaurants come in, and you've now created a destination that people know they've got five or six, seven things to do, then coming from a Georgetown or Mississauga or Kitchener is going to happen more often because they're all working together to create that.?

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