



Report to Council

Department: Development Services
Division: Economic Development
Date: September 8, 2020
Prepared by: Nelson Silveira, Economic Development Officer
Report Number: Economic Development-2020-14
Subject: Agri-Tourism Strategy
Number of Pages: 5

Recommendation(s)

That Economic Development-2020-14 entitled Agri-Tourism Development Strategy prepared by Nelson Silveira, Economic Development Officer dated September 8, 2020 be received, and

That Council provide a resolution supporting the Town of Essex grant application in the amount of \$25,000.00 to the Tourism Economic Development Recovery Fund through the provincial Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries , and

That Council approve reallocating up to \$25,000.00 in funding from the 2020 Tourism Marketing Budget to create an Agri-Tourism Strategy in 2021.

Purpose

To provide Council with an overview of recently announced grant funding through the province that would support the creation of an Agri-Tourism Strategy for the Town of Essex.

Background and Discussion

Production in the agriculture sector has long been a driving force of economic development in the Town of Essex. Agriculture also has important links to tourism including the rural landscapes, locally-grown products and authentic experiences provided by our agricultural heritage and culture that attract visitors to the region. Over the past several years farmers and the agriculture sector have been challenged by several factors which impact their ability to derive income from their land. These challenges range from the need to adopt new technology and competition from growers in other regions, to the aging demographic of farmers and need for new workers to meet current and future workforce needs.

However, agri-tourism in the Town of Essex as an approach to economic development has been embraced as a way for farmers to add value to their businesses. For example, our local wineries, bed and breakfasts, and road side stands operating on properties that are primarily for agricultural production are all types of businesses that represent on-farm diversification. Recent trends in tourism focus on a new type of visitor looking for sustainable, environmentally-conscious holidays and authentic travel experiences – experiences that fit well with many of our agri-tourism offerings.

Supporting agri-tourism initiatives and on-farm diversification is not new to the Town of Essex. In 2017, the Town of Essex extended the Colchester Community Improvement Plan to include County Road 50 as a way to stimulate economic and destination development along this stretch of road. On-farm diversified uses are also permitted in the Town of Essex Official Plan as secondary uses to the principle agricultural use. Activities include home occupations carried out for remuneration in a dwelling or in an accessory building, subject to regulations concerning size in the Zoning Bylaw.

Recently, Council developed the 2019-2022 Town of Essex Corporate Strategic Plan that has outlined priorities and strategies to be achieved over the term of this Council. In this plan,

Council has identified multiple action items that would support the creation of an Agri-Tourism Strategy including:

1. Emphasizing the agricultural economy;
2. Developing a comprehensive tourism strategy; and
3. Developing agri-tourism and eco-tourism offerings.

In order to move forward with a focused approach to tourism development in the Town of Essex that concentrates on our largest tourism industry, the preparation of an Agri-Tourism Strategy would provide the Town with vision and direction. Although the town has a variety of tourism drivers, it is important to consider that the majority of them are often tied or somehow affiliated with our local agri-tourism offerings.

Tourism Economic Development Recovery Fund

On August 6, 2020, the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries announced that it would be investing \$1.5 million through the new Tourism Economic Development Recovery Fund (TEDRF) to help the province's tourism industry and welcome back visitors after the COVID-19 emergency. The TEDRF program aims to support projects that will increase tourist visitation and visitor spending in Ontario by:

1. Developing innovative tourism products and experiences;
2. Increasing domestic and/or foreign private sector tourism investment;
3. Supporting workforce development, including strengthening employment opportunities in the tourism sector and building the capacity of the tourism workforce;
4. Supporting tourism sector associations' efforts to advance the competitiveness and growth of the tourism industry.

Should Council endorse the application, Administration intends to request a \$25,000.00 matching grant to support the creation of an Agri-Tourism Strategy. Although the strategy will guide priorities for Administration with actionable items, implementing the action items is just

as vital as creating a strategy.

Project	Cost
Complete Agri-Tourism Strategy	\$30,000.00
Implement action items identified in Agri-Tourism Strategy	\$20,000.00

Our regional destination marketing organization, Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island (TWEPI) has expressed that this project supports agri-tourism on a local level and would have a positive impact on the entire region. TWEPI has therefore confirmed their commitment by contributing \$5,000.00 towards the project.

If approved by Council, a grant application with letters of support from local stakeholders will be submitted to the Province in September 2020. Administration is prepared to take an expedited approach to completing the Strategy since it must be completed by March 31, 2021 if we are successful in obtaining provincial funding.

Financial Impact

During budget deliberations, Council approved \$45,000.00 to support our tourism marketing efforts in 2020. However, during the COVID-19 emergency, our region experienced a pause in what is usually considered the busiest tourist season. As a result, marketing initiatives and dollars spent on programs to attract visitors did not take place as anticipated. Like many other organizations, we shifted expenditures to support “Buy Local” campaigns, giveaways to local businesses, and began planning for the future. As we begin to ramp up our tourism marketing efforts again, we have identified unspent tourism funds that could be redirected to support the preparation of an Agri-Tourism Strategy.

Of the \$45,000.00 that Council approved in the Tourism Marketing Budget, \$10,196.53 has been spent so far in 2020. A transfer of up to \$25,000.00 to support this project would leave

Administration with a balance of \$9,803.47 to be used on planned marketing campaigns for the remainder of the year.

Consultations

Jeffrey Morrison, Director, Corporate Services/Treasurer

Link to Strategic Priorities

- ☐ Manage, invest and plan for sustainable municipal infrastructure which meets current and future needs of the municipality and its citizens.
- ☐ Create a safe, friendly and inclusive community which encourages healthy, active living for people of all ages and abilities.
- ☒ Provide a fiscal stewardship and value for tax dollars to ensure long-term financial health to the municipality.
- ☒ Manage responsible and viable growth while preserving and enhancing the unique rural and small town character of the community.
- ☐ Improve the experiences of individuals, as both citizens and customers, in their interactions with the Town of Essex.
- ☐ Improve the Town's capacity to meet the ongoing and future service needs of its citizens while ensuring the corporation is resilient in the face of unanticipated changes or disruptions.

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	Agri-tourism Development Strategy - Economic Development-2020-14.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Aug 31, 2020

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lori Chadwick", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Lori Chadwick, Director, Development Services - Aug 31, 2020 - 11:56 AM

No Signature - Task assigned to Chris Nepszy, Chief Administrative Officer was completed by delegate Doug Sweet, Director, Community Services/Deputy CAO

Chris Nepszy, Chief Administrative Officer - Aug 31, 2020 - 2:53 PM