



## Staff Report

If this information is required in an alternate accessible format, please contact the Accessibility Coordinator at 905-623-3379 ext. 2131.

---

<b>Report To:</b>	<b>General Government Committee</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	May 31, 2021	<b>Report Number:</b>	CSD-004-21
<b>Submitted By:</b>	George Acorn, Director of Community Services		
<b>Reviewed By:</b>	Andrew C. Allison, CAO	<b>Resolution#:</b>	
<b>File Number:</b>		<b>By-law Number:</b>	
<b>Report Subject:</b>	Future of the Tourism Information Centre		

---

### Recommendations:

1. That Report CSD-004-21 be received;
2. That Council approve the permanent closure of the Tourism Information Centre at 181 Liberty Street, Bowmanville;
3. That Council support the revised Tourism Service Delivery Model, as presented in this report; and
4. That staff continue to investigate future options for the building, that could include upgrading and re-purposing, relocation or demolition, and to provide all necessary funds in the 2022 budget, for consideration.

## Report Overview

This report provides an update to Council on recent operational changes that have been implemented for the delivery of tourism services by the Municipality. The COVID – 19 pandemic and changes to the 2021 operating budget have provided staff the opportunity to review the tourism service delivery model and to make changes that will improve tourism services going forward.

In September 2020, as recommended in the Organizational Structure Review, the responsibility for municipal tourism operations moved from the CAO's Office to Community Services. At that time, with the Tourism Information Centre (TIC) closed due to the pandemic, staff worked on an effective operating model to move tourism information and assistance from the TIC to our major indoor recreation facilities. By relocating our tourism information from the stand-alone centre on Liberty Street to our larger indoor facilities, staff are confident we can reach more residents and visitors to share what Clarington has to offer.

We are confident this new operating model will still allow staff to effectively partner with our tourism stakeholders, continue to support the valuable work done by our Tourism Advisory Committee and enhance collaboration with our local sports organizations all while utilizing the existing staffing resources in Community Services.

## 1. Background

- 1.1 In 1997, Council approved the purchase and relocation of the Nantucket Sales Pavilion, then located in Courtice, to be used as a "Tourism Office" in Bowmanville. The Pavilion was moved to its current site on Liberty Street South, as documented in report [ADMIN-25-97](#).
- 1.2 At that time, staff provided Central Lake Ontario Conservation Area (CLOCA) with the conceptual plan, which was approved to place the building where it is located today. Planning has confirmed that the location is completely located in a flood plain. As such, the location is zoned EP and access to the building must be above the flood level.
- 1.3 The Municipality has been offering Tourism services out of this building, known as the Tourism Information Centre (TIC), since 1997, sharing office space with the Clarington Board of Trade (CBOT) until 2013. In 2013, CBOT moved their offices from this location, and the Municipality began utilizing the entire space. Prior to 1997, a small tourism information kiosk was located at the local hotel located across the street (now named Best Western Plus Bowmanville.)
- 1.4 In 2015, both tourism partner groups, Clarington Tourism Marketing Board (CTMB) and Clarington Board of Trade, stepped aside from competing to deliver tourism services. At that time, tourism delivery as a municipal service was approved through Report [COD-023-15](#), and a full time Tourism Coordinator position was approved.

- 1.5 Since 2015, the Tourism Information Centre has been operating in its current state, with some changes to the staffing model. At that time, there was one full time, three part time positions and one summer student. Subsequently, the staffing model was evaluated and changed to become two full time staff and one part time position.
- 1.6 Pre-COVID-19, the TIC was operating Monday to Saturday, with small seasonal changes to the hours of operations. On March 13, 2020 the TIC was temporarily closed due to the Provincial restrictions, and to date has not re-opened.
- 1.7 With this closure of the TIC and a request from Durham Region to relocate their annual flu immunization to this location, the two full time tourism staff were relocated to the Garnet B. Rickard Recreation Complex (RRC). Staff continue to effectively operate the tourism portfolio and continue to partner with and support our tourism stakeholders as well as providing tourism information to visitors and residents.

## **2. Current Operating Model**

- 2.1 The most recent change to the Tourism operating model came through the Organizational Structure Review and the recommendation by Grant Thornton to relocate municipal tourism operations from the CAO's Office to Community Services. This recommendation was approved, and the transition became official in September 2020.
- 2.2 The staffing model further evolved in February 2021 with the changes to the annual operating budget. The \$50,000 budget reduction was achieved through the elimination of the part time position and the subsequent savings in operating supplies, utilities and repairs/maintenance realized by not reopening the TIC. Each year we apply to the Canada Summer Jobs Program to be able to hire a tourism summer student. As this subsidy covers the majority of the cost, we will continue to do so in the future, provided we are successful in receiving this funding.
- 2.3 As part of Community Services, the Tourism team started collaborating with Customer Services and Facility Services on the idea of creating Tourism displays within all of Clarington's recreation facilities. These have been designed and currently are being installed as an initiative through FedDev Ontario grant funding we received. These displays will have an updated look and will hold the same printed information that was originally held at the Tourism Information Centre. These new displays will provide the visitors to our recreation facilities information on local and regional tourism attractions.
- 2.4 These displays are being installed adjacent to our Customer Service Desks in the lobbies of our facilities (see Attachment 1). By providing these display areas in our facilities and educating our customer service staff on the tourism opportunities Clarington has to offer, we will be able to increase our outreach to the community and better support local tourism. Additionally, by providing this information in recreation facilities we can capitalize on the foot traffic we see each day. For comparison, a busy weekend at any of our larger facilities would see visits greater than those at the TIC in any given year.

- 2.5 A review of the visitor data for the last five full years of operation indicate that in 2016 there were 2,786 visitors to the TIC and in 2019 that number dropped to 1,396. The percentage of Clarington resident visits has ranged over the last five years from a high of 84% in 2015 to a low of 37% in 2019. Anecdotally, staff have observed a great number of our out of town visitors are stopping to get information on other tourist destinations (e.g. Niagara Falls) as they drive through Clarington.
- 2.6 This data indicates there is an opportunity to better serve the residents of Clarington, who are seeking information on places to visit and activities to partake in, than in the stand-alone operation at the TIC. The closure of the TIC, located near the 401, may impact convenience for out of town visitors, however, staff are confident the Tourism-Oriented Directional Signing (TODS) is very effective for many of our attractions. On the other hand, we will be providing tourism service information to out of town visitors who will be attending our large indoor and outdoor recreation venues for special events (e.g. baseball, soccer, and hockey tournaments.)
- 2.7 Tourism staff will also continue to work with our sport organizations as they plan for their events and assist, as needed. This includes making contact for accommodations, dining, attractions and activities, that will make the visit to Clarington, for participants and their families, a great experience.
- 2.8 Based on the downward trends of in-person visits and an increase in on-line access for Tourism information, staff will continue to work on enhancing our on-line presence through the Tourism website and in our social media accounts. It is evident that the pandemic has drastically changed how we seek information and we have seen residents and visitors turn to our social media accounts in greater numbers. For example, the total number of Facebook impressions/views for the Tourism posts increased from 869,680 in 2018 to 1,242,027 in 2020. Staff continue to see a rise in access to the website with approximately 80,000 views annually. We are confident these trends will continue and that on-line services will be key to the future success of our municipal tourism service delivery.

### **3. Future Considerations for the Building**

- 3.1 Although the current TIC is a relocated temporary new home sales pavilion, it has served our residents and visitors well over the years. With the recommended closure of this building for municipal tourism services, there is an opportunity to consider alternate uses that may be beneficial for the Municipality and the community.
- 3.2 With the scheduled renovation at 156 Church Street, some vacant space at 132 Church Street and the recently acquired farmhouse on Concession Road #4, staff are preparing a space allocation plan that could both accommodate municipal staff as well as provide space for our local community agencies and organizations.

- 3.3 Our Facility Services staff have identified some of the challenges for this building and what costs may be incurred to keep the building functioning effectively, for whatever purpose, in the future. In addition to the planned mechanical equipment replacement, accessibility has been highlighted as being deficient. This could involve the construction of a new accessible ramp, an automatic front entrance door and a new universal washroom.
- 3.4 Staff will continue to investigate potential alternate uses for this building and will continue to communicate with community groups who may have use of this space in the future. We will also finalize the costs associated with making necessary renovations to the building on this site. Should there be a suitable opportunity to relocate the building we will include the cost to do so. Should there be no suitable future use, staff will provide the cost of demolition. This information will be finalized and included in the Department's preliminary 2022 capital budget submission.

## **4. Concurrence**

- 4.1 Not Applicable.

## **5. Conclusion**

- 5.1 It is respectfully recommended that Council approve the permanent closure of the Tourism Information Centre and support the revised tourism service delivery model as outlined in this report. By providing high profile tourism information displays in our recreation facilities, educating our front desk customer service staff on tourism, increasing our on-line presence, and working with our local sport organizations to better serve their out of town participants, we are confident tourism services will be improved going forward.
- 5.2 There will be a clear communications plan to residents and visitors on the new locations and expanded opportunities to access information. This would include working with the Region of Durham and the Ministry of Transportation to update wayfinding signage.
- 5.3 We will continue to work closely with our tourism stakeholders and support the valuable work of the Tourism Advisory Committee with the goal of showcasing the great locations, events, and activities that Clarington has to offer. Our program will not only encourage our residents to "check out" their own backyard, but also provide a variety of reasons for those outside of Clarington to come and visit us.

---

Staff Contact: Lee-Ann Reck, Manager, Client Services, Community Services, 905-623-3379 ext 2508 or lreck@clarington.net.

Attachments:

Attachment 1 – Courtice Community Complex Wall Decal

Interested Parties:

There are no interested parties to be notified of Council's decision.