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Item No.
Community Planning & Economic Development
July 23, 2015

TO: Chair & Members of Community Planning & Economic Development Standing Committee

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed by
Maggie MacDonald, Managing Director, Government Relations & External Affairs.

DATE: July 8, 2015

SUBJECT: Tourism – Business Kiosk – Prospect Road

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

At the March 26 the Community Planning & Economic Development Standing Committee meeting, **MOVED** by Councillor Adams, seconded by Councillor Fisher that the Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee request a staff report outlining the information sources and funding opportunities that are available in regard to developing a tourism/business kiosk. **MOTION PUT AND PASSED.**

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipal Charter – Sections 71 and 72

BACKGROUND

The municipality is moving to regulate advertising signs on sections of the Prospect Road. This will eliminate some current signs for local businesses to be replaced with standardized signage controlled and maintained by the municipality. These changes will impact some businesses and their tourism opportunities. Some businesses want to locate a tourism/business information kiosk at the beginning of Prospect Road to alert tourists to businesses on the road before Peggy's Cove.

Regional Council has previously decided to get the municipality out of direct work on tourism. The municipality no longer supports visitor information centres (VICs). The municipality now works with organizations like Destination Halifax to promote tourism and tourist attractions in Halifax to outside markets.

The Nova Scotia Tourism Agency (NSTA) recently closed the provincially owned and operated VICs in Digby and Pictou. It continues to operate 6 centres: year round ones at Halifax Airport, Halifax Waterfront, and Amherst and seasonal centres at Peggy's Cove, Port Hastings and Yarmouth.

DISCUSSION

In February, when the province closed two of its own visitor information centres, provincial officials pointed out that today's visitors often take a different approach to getting information about Nova Scotia. For many people, the internet, smart phones and social media have supplanted paper based documents and face to face contacts for getting information both before and during visits. In this context, the role of the traditional VIC is changing.

Face to face contact continues but often people go to attractions and get information while there rather than stop for information about attractions at a purpose built visitor information centre. Destination Halifax staff advise that rather than build an information centre, it may be more useful to develop an attraction that will cause visitors to stop and visit. While visitors are at the attraction, they may well seek information about other attractions.

While the province is cutting back its expenditures on its visitor information centres, it does provide modest support to about 50 centres owned and operated by other bodies – regional tourism associations, municipalities and local businesses. The province provides grant funds to offset some of the costs associated with running and staffing a VIC. NSTA has developed criteria to ensure high quality standards for visitor services in the most strategic regional locations. The criteria use a consistent, merit based, province wise funding approach. (See Attachment A – **Regional/Local Visitor Information Centre (VIC) – Points Criteria and Funding Formula**)

NSTA research reveals that many visitors to Nova Scotia are turning to mobile devices for travel information, as well as other uses of technology such as GPS.

To promote alternatives to staffed VICs, NSTA has developed guides to construct an information kiosk (<http://www.novascotiaturismagency.ca/visitor-information-kiosk-kits>). This option requires resources (i.e. construction, access, timely info, maintenance), but it provides visitor information servicing 24/7/365 without relying on full-time staffing. Operating costs are also lower than a traditional VIC.

The province has produced *A Guide to Starting and Operating a Local Visitor Information Centre in Nova Scotia*. (http://novascotiaturismagency.ca/sites/default/files/page_documents/visitor_information.pdf)

Funding for local and regional VICs falls under Partnerships within NSTA. Program funding has been allocated for the 2015 season. The Local/Regional VIC Funding Program is under review and subject to change in future. NSTA partners with regional tourism associations which administer visitor servicing funding based on the RTIA/DMO priorities. It is not certain that this program will continue in 2016. If it does the budget would likely remain the same. The addition of a new VIC requesting funding would put pressure on funding within a fixed budget envelope.

Building a visitor information centre on the Prospect Road may be one solution to the challenges facing businesses along the road. Experienced tourism professionals suggest that businesses consider other approaches, too:

- Make more information available at the Peggy's Cove VIC since the lighthouse already attracts many people
- Make effective information available at other existing VICS, both provincially owned and others
- Partner with businesses that move people along the road
- Develop a more robust presence of a business or group of business on the internet or through other social media tools
- Work with Destination Halifax and NSTA on creative solutions to the problem.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications for the municipality in this report.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There has been no community engagement in preparing this report.

ATTACHMENTS

A – Regional/Local Visitor Information Centre (VIC) – Points Criteria and Funding Formula

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/boardscom/standing.php> then choose the appropriate Standing Committee and meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210, or Fax 902.490.4208.

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ATTACHMENT A

Regional/Local Visitor Information Centre (VIC) Points Criteria and Funding Formula

The following criteria and funding formula was developed by the Nova Scotia Tourism Agency (NSTA) and the destination marketing organizations/regional tourism industry associations which administer the funds on behalf of NSTA. Nova Scotia has more than 50 local/regional VICs yet the demand for visitor servicing is changing and funding is limited. The objective of the criteria is to ensure the highest quality standard for visitor services in the most strategic regional locations using a consistent, merit-based, provincial-wide funding approach.

DMOs/RTIAs/Administrators reserve the right to support VICs deemed strategically aligned with their Visitor Servicing Plan in their respective regions. This may mean a reduction in funding for previously funded centres, or communities looking to establish new centres may not have access to funding.

VIC Requirements

- If agreed to by the DMO/RTIA, funding may be used for the following, as deemed important to the delivery of quality visitor servicing:
 - Staffing
 - Technology upgrades
 - Maintenance
- All local and regional VICs must supply visitor statistics to their RTIA or DMO within one week after the end of the month. Accurate visitor statistics are required by government and the research division of NSTA.
- Successful VIC applicants must provide a year round contact person on their application form to ensure someone is available to answer questions and verify information as required.

Province-wide VIC Funding Formula

Each RTIA/DMO partner receives a sum of money from NSTA to support local/regional VICs. The funding will be allocated using the following formula:

Points Criteria

Hours of Operation

Open July & August | 7 days/week | 8 hours/day = **1 point**

Bonus points are given for the following:

Open May to October = **1 bonus point**

Open Year Round = **1 bonus point**

Total Points Possible= 3

Strategic Location

VIC is close to a major tourist experience/ significant travel motivator = **1 point**

ATTACHMENT A

VIC is not co-located with another business and the purpose of the centre is to exclusively provide visitor services = **2 Points**

A bonus point is given if the VIC is located on a main travel route = 1 Point

Total Points Possible = 4 points

Visitor Statistics (averaged over three years)

Under 500 Visitors = **0 points**

500 - 1000 = **1 point**

1000 – 2000 = **2 points**

2000 – 5000 = **3points**

5000 – 10000 = **4 points**

10000+ = **5 points**

Total Points Possible – 5 points

Cost/Visitor

VIC applicants must submit their annual budgets for the past three years, in addition to visitor statistics to determine the cost /visitor of operating the VIC. Less than \$2/visitor – **1 point**

Total Points Possible – 1 point

Quality

All VICs must meet the quality criteria as per the inspection list and provide the score from the previous 3 years inspection reports conducted by the RTIA if possible.

Offers experiences that make a difference for the customer **1 point**

Promotes provincial experiences in addition to regional **1 Bonus Point**

Total Points Possible – 2 points

Funding Formula Example

Step 1:

DMO/RTIA VIC Funding Total (divide by) Total Points for all VICs in Region = Dollar Value Per Point

Ex: \$ \$50,400/230 points = \$219

Step 2: Total Points for VIC "A" X Dollar Amount Per Point = Total VIC Funding Allocation for VIC A

Ex: 6 points X \$219 = \$1315