

King revamps its tourism plan

By Mark PavilonsEditor

Tourism is crucial to King's economy. Staff presented its Community Tourism Plan, showcasing just what the municipality has to offer to visitors. Aimee Artinian-Wong, King's economic development coordinator, noted work on the plan was derailed by the pandemic, but volunteer members of the Tourism Task Force (TTF) reassembled recently. She said you could feel their energy and passion in working on strategy. In-person meetings, she said, are crucial in gathering valuable information and input. Recent work really reignited the plan, bringing it to the draft stage. The plan and list of Township assets is not a complete list, but rather a snapshot of what's available in King. The first tourism plan was created back in 2014, in partnership with Central Counties Tourism. In the fall of 2019, the process for a refreshed plan began and a group of diverse stakeholders was assembled. The TTF includes an amazing selection of some 22 residents from all walks of life, along with Township staff. The intent was to review assets, markets, challenges, gaps and opportunities and after a pandemic-induced hiatus, work began again this past August. The new vision is as follows: "King Township is an idyllic countryside community where visitors refresh, recharge and revitalize. We have a strong sense of pride in our community and treasure our unique tourism, cultural, recreational and hospitality experiences which we will continue to showcase and share with the world." Four goals were identified in the process and included supporting and enhancing tourism coordination; increasing visitation; building greater awareness with both residents and visitors, and building on what brings visitors back. The staff report noted King has more than 165 tourism spots and the top five visitor markets include outdoor enthusiasts, festival and event attendees, equestrian enthusiasts, golfers and food lovers. Tourism in York involves some 81,000 jobs and an estimated \$356 million in revenue annually. Province-wide, tourism is a \$34-billion industry and employs almost 400,000 people. King has a number of what's called secondary attractions, which can not only motivate people to visit, but actually lengthen their stay. King does, however, lack accommodations to house visitors. Along with challenges, there are always opportunities to explore. The pandemic revealed just how versatile people and businesses can be to attract and retain customers. The action items addressed in the plan will help guide King over the next five years. Staff noted the document is a "living/breathing" plan which evolves over time. A well-executed Community Tourism Plan creates "pride-of-place" for residents, something that grows exponentially as residents understand the importance of the visitor economy. Key messaging, along with leveraging other tourism networks, will expand King's appeal. "With a township full of proud residents eager to talk with visitors about the best things to see and do, King will be thriving and driving new revenues and attracting new residents and businesses," states the plan summary. With council's endorsement, the idea is to launch action items within the plan to ensure tourism is supported and elevated. The plan is also to continue the TTF and hold regular meetings, to help build pride. "It is a critical time for King's tourism operators and stakeholders," said the staff report. "Moving forward" will help provide the guidance and direction to support and grow this important sector in the municipality. "No new money is needed and the Community Tourism Plan will use the existing annual budget of \$10,000.