

King sets its sights on attracting tourism

By Mark Pavilons

King is setting its sights on attracting more tourists to the municipality.

Teaming up with regional neighbours, King has launched its tourism committee and the first of three initial working sessions was held Jan. 16 at The Kingbridge Centre.

The group, consisting of local stakeholders from almost every interest group, is eager to get going.

The next task force working session is slated for Feb. 13.

The development of the plan is a work in progress and the draft plan will be presented to the Sustainability Committee first and then on to council in late March early April if all goes well.

They are using the 64-page "Community Tourism Planning Guide" as a resource in identifying goals, direction, mission statements and meeting parameters.

The group's task is not only in identifying and promoting existing tourist attractions, but identifying tourists, pinpointing voids and reaching out to local businesses who benefit from tourism.

Committee member and Councillor Avia Eek said King is one of the most unique municipalities in York Region, and, perhaps, in Ontario. "We have many jewels in King that many are not aware of," she said.

As an example, she pointed to the Holland Marsh and its unique canal system, that draw many dignitaries to the area.

"We will identify the many opportunities that already exist, and could exist, for this Township from an economic development viewpoint related to tourism," she said.

Mayor Steve Pellegrini said there's a lot of interest expressed by many groups across King Township.

"It's all about partnerships," he said. "We all have a part (to play) in it."

Once a tourism strategy is complete, it will require council approval and public involvement in implementing the goals (much like King's Sustainability Plan).

Established in 2010, Central Counties Tourism forms one of Ontario's 13 official Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs). The region is made up of three sub-regional Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) - The Hills of Headwaters Tourism Association, York Region Tourism and Durham Tourism.

A community tourism plan is a written document produced on behalf of a community by a group of people representing a broad cross-section of interests within that community. The plan provides a framework for business, local government, cultural, and other organizations to analyze tourism resources and concerns, and to encourage tourism development and promotion.

The Community Tourism Planning Guide gives communities the necessary tools to review how successful their activities have been in the past and, perhaps, how to identify new partnerships and opportunities for the future. For instance, cultural enterprises and traditional tourism businesses are growing economic forces in Central Counties. Where there is a mutual lack of awareness of each other's value, a closer association between the two sectors should prove beneficial to both.

In many communities throughout Central Counties, tourism is recognized as an industry that can make a positive contribution to the economic and social well-being of residents.

However, some communities may view tourism in a negative light if they perceive a threat to traditional lifestyles and related natural resources. Effective tourism planning can be used to balance the economic opportunities with the cultural and natural sensitivities of the area. Planning at the community level often ensures that a wider range of perspectives is brought into the process.

It is increasingly important for residents to seize the opportunity to prepare tourism plans within their communities.

Community-based plans can minimize or eliminate negative impacts of increased visitation. They can identify the educational requirements and support necessary for residents to start their own tourism business operations and to obtain employment in the industry. They should also identify areas in which the natural resources necessary to support tourism activities need to be conserved. Many communities possess outstanding tourism assets, including major attractions, golf courses, conservation areas, agricultural fairs, museums and other cultural facilities like [whale watching california](#) excursions for example.

Tourism attractions and related services translate into visitor spending in communities, and help to retain retail services that might otherwise struggle. The positive impacts of tourism have enabled people to stay in their local area or district, and help to buffer the effects of fluctuating commodity prices.

A tourism plan can help to ease tensions and align citizens on tourism projects that are beneficial to the area. A tourism plan prepared with widespread local involvement and support helps to ensure that community and district residents can optimize the benefits available from tourism activities, while successfully dealing with any real or perceived negative circumstances.