



THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF VERNON

**MINUTES OF THE  
TOURISM COMMISSION MEETING  
HELD WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 18, 2021  
VIA ZOOM**

**PRESENT: VOTING:**

Claus Larsen, Accommodation Provider, Chair  
Richard Rolke, Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce  
Susan Lehman, Downtown Vernon Association  
Mayor Victor Cumming (Alternate Member)  
Brett Woods, Biking  
Councillor Kari Gares (Appointed Member)  
Kevin O'Brien, Attractions  
Michael Van Horne, Golf  
Ricardo Smith, Sports and Events

**NON-VOTING:**

Ian Jenkins, Silver Star Mountain Resort  
Councillor Dalvir Nahal

**ABSENT:**

Gale Woodhouse, Arts & Culture  
Clinton Bialas, Restaurant  
Samantha Jones, Sparkling Hills Resort  
David Gibbs, Accommodation Provider  
Dauna Kennedy, Arts & Culture, Vice Chair  
Mike Fotheringham, Okanagan Indian Band  
Troy Hudson, Ski

**STAFF:**

John Perrott, Staff Liaison, Manager, Economic Development & Tourism  
Torrie Silverthorn, Manager, Tourism  
Karen Savill, Administrative Assistant, Economic Development and Tourism  
Tina Johnson, Counter Clerk

**ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 8:09 a.m.

**LAND  
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

*As Chair of the City of Vernon's Tourism Commission, and in the spirit of this gathering, I recognize the City of Vernon is located in the traditional territory of the Syilx people of the Okanagan Nation.*

## TOURISM COMMISSION MINUTES

AUGUST 18, 2021

### ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Moved by Councillor Kari Gares seconded by Richard Rolke:

THAT the agenda for Wednesday, August 18, 2021 Tourism Commission meeting be adopted.

**CARRIED.**

### ADOPTION OF MINUTES

Moved by Kevin O'Brien, seconded by Councillor Kari Gares.

THAT the minutes of the Regular Tourism Commission meeting held Wednesday July 21, 2021 be adopted.

**CARRIED.**

### UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

### WILDFIRE MESSAGING UPDATE

The Manager, Tourism provided a recap of events of the last few weeks and presented a power point presentation regarding the Wildfire Messaging Update:

- News regarding the White Rock Lake, Kelowna, West Kelowna and Penticton fires had heightened over the weekend.
- Highway closures including Coquihalla are being checked on a daily basis.
- Travel Advisory Targeting Interior of BC. Trying to clarify "parts" hesitant to identify particular City. Not specifically saying "Don't go to Vernon or Kelowna" but we want to make sure we are in line with the Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association (TOTA) and Destination British Columbia (DBC) with our messaging.
- A DMO's role during an emergency is to amplify accurate information to ensure everyone's safety.
- Focus is on the long-term and ensuring that visitors have a good experience.
- We have been receiving intense phone calls that visitors are not having a good experience in Vernon. We want to keep this in mind.
- View Tourism Vernon Stakeholder and Communication Network. We've been working with them to ensure we are in the loop re tourism perspective.
- BC Wild Services
- Evacuation orders rescinded, alerts in the last 10 days are still in effect.
- Next Steps are to focus on White Rock Lake Fire, COVID, Air Quality and Transportation.
- Pause on some marketing. We don't want to be on National news for wild fires and then advertise for people to come to Vernon.

- Marketing that was deferred can be pushed into fall. The outlook for the fall is still positive.

Open to Questions:

- Is Vernon on essential travel only? Yes, but only a recommendation.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**2022 BUDGET  
OVERVIEW**

The Manager, Economic Development & Tourism presented a power point presentation regarding the 2022 budget overview. The following points were discussed:

- Budget process takes approximately five months. Revenue forecasting is challenging with the MRDT three-month lag time. We just received revenue for May. We are projecting 70% of our usual MRDT revenue for 2021 – with combined MRDT & OAP revenue projected for \$875,000
- The City provides a lot of money and in-kind support in the form of overhead, finance, IT, HR, the Manager, Economic Development's salary and half of the Administrative Assistant, Economic Development & Tourism's salary.
- We've grown, would like to increase to 7% for Visitor Servicing. This would put us on par with other DMO's admin. budget.
- Creation of new "Visitor Servicing / Community Liaison" position.
- New role would be to support and reinforce work that the Manager, Tourism and the Manager, Economic Development & Tourism are doing. This person would be the line of communication between Tourism Vernon, hotels and visitors.
- Provided comparison to Revelstoke, Penticton, Kelowna, Tofino, to see if we are in the ballpark.
- Goals are focused on normalizing after COVID – reset.
- We heard from a lot of businesses that they would like to see more engagement.
- Based on stakeholder feedback, we are focusing on service delivery and a budget that supports recovery for Vernon as a destination.
- Mobile visitor servicing is great but visitor servicing extends throughout the year. If we are sponsoring events, we need to be on site. Tourism Vernon should have representation and a presence.
- We will be focused on stakeholder engagement as we go into an MRDT renewal year.
- We will make it a priority to establish metrics to determine how we are doing and if we are on track.

## TOURISM COMMISSION MINUTES

AUGUST 18, 2021

- We will spend money efficiently and effectively.
- Other DMO's all have seats at advocacy tables. Their Managers have time to be there to help shape Tourism.
- There is currently \$500,000 in the Tourism Reserve Fund right now

### Questions:

- A question was asked regarding event support - does this fit under the new position?
- The Manager, Tourism responded - we meet with Josh Welter, Executive Director of the Sports & Cultural Society of the North Okanagan (SCSNO) next week. We will discuss where we can do better? What we need as a Community? We see how important it is. This will play a key role in shaping these goals.
- A question was asked - how is this (SCSNO) position funded?
- The Manager, Tourism responded - 50% by Tourism Vernon.
- A concern was expressed regarding capacity next year if pandemic is in check we will see wave of visitors. Concerned both the Tourism Coordinator and Manger's focus on marketing Visitor Services, even with new position, will be over whelmed. Concerned of staff capacity to keep up. Even with new position there will still be challenges.
- The Manager Economic Development & Tourism responded - Inquiries coming in the off-season. We do have additional backstop. Metrics will help to determine if we need to enhance that role in the future. We see the 2022 Budget as a holding budget. In 2023 we may be able to make more dramatic changes. Our focus will be to reach out to stakeholders.
- It was suggested that Tourism Vernon should utilize the Downtown Vernon Association and the Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce.
- There was a question as to where we are at with our shift to online visitor servicing? – The old Visitor Centre, is the way of the past. Everyone using online apps, this is the way to the future.
- The Manager, Tourism responded – the recovery budget included a lot of improvements to website. There have been some challenges with our current website being too expensive for simple improvements, for example it would have cost \$6,000.00 just to turn on an alert bar. We can do text internally and basic word edits, but rely heavily on website provider for

more complex edits and the prices are high.

- A question was asked - Why do we have this website provider? Is it for a specific reason? It is specific to City of Vernon?
- The Manager, Tourism responded - It went out to bid in a competitive request for proposal (RFP) process. This contractor had worked with several other DMOs. Initially their pricing was more competitive. Service levels were good initially, but we have recently put in a number of complaints due to these challenges.
- A comment was made – It looks like we got rid of the old Visitor Centre and now and now we are just re-creating the same old model in-house. We talked 6-7 months ago regarding going towards cutting edge but now we are talking about moving to a service centre type model again.
- A suggestion was made to pause questions until the Manager, Economic Development & Tourism could finish his presentation which would address a lot of the concerns and questions being expressed.
- There was further discussion regarding following through with the “future is digital approach”.
- We can’t forgo human visitor servicing. We need to find balance.
- A comment was made – I’m not against having an additional person, but we don’t have a functional website at this time.
- The Manager, Economic Development & Tourism continued his presentation. There was an ask for \$170,000.00 to be pulled from the Tourism Reserve fund for a new Tourism Vernon website with a chat bot, the MRDT renewal process, and additional tourism marketing and promotional activities.
- It was requested that administration bring a breakdown of how the \$170,000 would be allocated among these three priorities.
- A question was asked regarding the five-year average of administrative costs - Is 16% the norm?  
ACTION: The Manager, Economic Development & Tourism will review and do a comparative analysis and bring to the September 15, 2021 tourism commission meeting.
- A tourism commission member advised that when he voted to revoke the Visitor Centre, he voted to support enhanced digital but also to continue visitor servicing with a heavier digital

**TOURISM COMMISSION MINUTES**

**AUGUST 18, 2021**

approach.

- There was a clarification that we are not proposing a bricks and mortar visitor servicing model, we are proposing a combination approach with a new website with a chatbot feature and a new Visitor Servicing / Community Outreach position. We are not at an advanced stage with technology yet that an artificial intelligence function can replace a live human to service visitors.
- A comment was made in support of the new Tourism Vernon website. You need a good foundation to add onto. Agreement that we need to see a further breakdown of the \$170,000 ask.

**TOURISM BUDGET  
2022 DISCUSSION  
DEFERRED**

Moved by Councillor Kari Gares seconded by Brett Woods:

THAT further discussion of the 2022 Tourism Budget be deferred to the September 15, 2021 Tourism Commission Meeting.


**CARRIED.**

**DATE AND TIME OF  
NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Tourism Commission is scheduled for **Wednesday, September 15, 2021** at 8:00 a.m.

The Tourism Commission meeting adjourned at 9:29 a.m.

**CERTIFIED CORRECT:**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Chair