



THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF VERNON

**MINUTES OF THE
TOURISM COMMISSION MEETING
HELD WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2021
OKANAGAN LAKE ROOM at 8:00 AM**

PRESENT: VOTING:

Claus Larsen, Accommodation Provider, Chair
Dauna Kennedy, Arts & Culture, Vice-Chair

Bobby Bissessar, Accommodation Provider
Brett Woods, Biking
Clinton Bialas, Restaurant
Councillor Kari Gares (Appointed Member)
David Gibbs, Accommodation Provider
Gale Woodhouse, Arts & Culture
Kevin O'Brien, Attractions
Mayor Victor Cumming (Alternate Member)
Michael Van Horne, Golf
Ricardo Smith, Sports and Events
Richard Rolke, Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce
Susan Lehman, Downtown Vernon Association
Troy Hudson, Ski

NON-VOTING:

Ian Jenkins, Silver Star Mountain Resort

ABSENT: Mike Fotheringham, Okanagan Indian Band

STAFF: John Perrott, Staff Liaison, Mgr., Economic Development & Tourism
Torrie Silverthorn, Manager, Tourism
Tracy Mueller, Committee Clerk

CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order at 8:02 am

TOURISM COMMISSION MINUTES

SEPTEMBER 15, 2021

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.

Before the start of the meeting, the Chair requested that the Tourism Commission meeting agenda be varied as follows:

- To address Item 5 (a) - Tourism 2022 Budget at the end of the September 15, 2021 Tourism Commission Agenda, directly following Item 6 - New Business.

The Chair declared a potential pecuniary interest, due to a family relationship and therefore advised members of the Commission that we would recuse himself from voting and participating in the 2022 Budget discussion to mitigate an actual or perceived conflict of interest.

Moved by Richard Rolke seconded by Gayle Woodhouse:

THAT the agenda for Wednesday, September 15, 2021 Tourism Commission meeting be varied and adopted as amended.

CARRIED

3. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Moved by Richard Rolke seconded by Gayle Woodhouse:

THAT the agenda for Wednesday, September 15, 2021 Tourism Commission meeting be adopted.

CARRIED

4. **ADOPTION OF MINUTES**

Moved by Richard Rolke, seconded by Clinton Bialas:

THAT the minutes of the Regular Tourism Commission meeting held Wednesday August 18, 2021 be adopted.

CARRIED

The meeting was started with roundtable introductions.

Commissioner Bobby Bissessar joined the meeting at 8:05 am

Commissioner Bissessar was introduced to the group. He provided members of the Commission with a brief overview of his professional experience and background and shared that his aim is to get the "Outback" and associated tourism aspects more widely known for the City of Vernon and is looking forward to working with the rest of Commission in order to make that happen and bring more tourism opportunities to the City.

Commissioner Michael Van Horne joined the meeting at 8:08 am

Earlier in the meeting, the agenda was varied.

6. **NEW BUSINESS**

a) **Marketing Update**

Staff provided members of the Commission with an overview in the form of a PowerPoint presentation depicting fall photography that will be used for the Fall Tourism campaign of various tourist spots / amenities and website stakeholder referrals.

In response to a question from the Commission regarding website analytics, staff confirmed they were able to provide both "click-through" and referral conversions and would be happy to provide further detail at an upcoming meeting.

Discussion ensued and it was suggested by a member of the Commission that the Vernon City Tourism consider engaging a digital agency to also track e-commerce in relation to "click through rate".

In terms of programming success, staff advised that the Tourism Visitor Centre Program was extremely successful this season and that was largely due to the two (2) stellar seasonal spokespeople who were hired and assigned to the project. Staff noted that both temporary staff members hired to support the Visitor Centre created a very positive online following during their summer term, the aim is to re-hire them for next year's campaign.

Commissioner Susan Lehman joined the meeting at 8:13 am

ACTION: The Manager, Tourism to provide a detailed analysis of current (and planned) website analytics related to tourism at an upcoming meeting.

- b) Okanagan Military Tattoo - request for letter of support BCFEE
- c) Okanagan Rail Ride - request for letter of support BCFEE

Staff noted that there were some other requests received since the Agenda was issued last week also for consideration.

Discussion ensued among members of the Commission; it was determined that rather than address each individual request, the Commission preferred to create a "blanket letter of support" for such requests that meeting the approved criteria.

It was further discussed that members of the Commission would all be required to both agree and support the following criteria due to the urgency of the requests presented timing is of the essence; the deadline is in September for grant funding.

Criteria:

- BC Fairs, Festivals & Events Recovery Fund (BCFEE)
- Must be a pre-existing, established event in Vernon

Moved by Richard Rolke, seconded by Clinton Bialas:

THAT the Tourism Commission approve requests for support for the items submitted; and any subsequent requests fit the agreed upon criteria as follows:

1. BC Fairs, Festivals & Events Recovery Fund (BCFEE)
2. Must be a pre-existing, established event in Vernon

CARRIED

ACTION: The Chair suggested that this item be discussed at the next meeting Tourism Commission meeting; and requested that staff add it as an agenda item.

The Chair further suggested that it would be beneficial for members of the Commission to keep an open mind when reviewing "creative" and "out of the box" concepts.

Before Item 5 (a) Tourism 2022 Budget was discussed, the Chair declared a potential conflict of interest based on the reason noted at the start of the meeting.

The Chair recused himself and left the meeting at 8:21 am; Commissioner Dauna Kennedy, assumed the role of Chair.

Earlier in the meeting the agenda was varied

5. TOURISM 2022 Budget

- a) The Manager, Tourism provided members of the Commission with a PowerPoint presentation outlining the proposed Tourism 2022 Budget.

The following key points were discussed:

- Staff reviewed the 2022 Plan & Budget for the benefit of the Commission and provided a Power Point Presentation.
- The 2021 MRDT has come in better than expected, some hotel operators have experienced a banner July.
- Reviewed financing and the numbers that have been spent on contractors. The message is loud and clear that we need to get on the digital train.
- Staff provided an overview of the contracted services and the current expenditures. We are spending funding on external contractors on management of digital channels.
- It was discussed that given the tourism climate, it would be advantageous and timely to have digital marketing managed internally.
- The request will need to be vetted through Council and HR, the estimated that staffing costs would go up \$165,000 this year. The monies saved in contracting fees would be applied to digital marketing.
- Having an internal team would assist with cohesive messaging of content and quality control.
- Vernon would be modelling delivery of service similar to other adjacent municipalities.

- One of the proposed new roles would be Visitor Servicing Supervisor. This individual would be the "thumb on the pulse" person and allow us to be more proactive and would serve as an ambassador.
- The other proposed role would be Content Marketing Specialist who would focus on digital marketing.
- Both roles would ensure that the website content would match what visitors are looking for.
- The request is to draw \$170,000 potential draw from reserve. This would facilitate the MRDT Renewal Process (estimated at \$30,000), recovery marketing campaigns and the new website (budgeting \$25-30 K).
- Contractors would shift from more of a core role, to a supportive role. Contractors would be used, as needed for one-off specialty projects.
- Staff has not gone forward with an RFP.

A member of the Commission expressed concern regarding the proposed website refresh budget and noted it seemed modest.

In response, Staff noted that there were significant improvements realized with the recovery campaign, there are other integrations that will be rolled into the new website; however, staff confirmed that there is maneuvering room to include a buffer as MRDT should come in a bit higher. Staff noted they are confident that there will be additional cost savings realized.

Mayor Cumming joined the meeting at 8:36 am.

A member of the Commission posed a question regarding the onboarding time for the proposed new positions.

Staff confirmed that a request for approval would be presented to Council at the September 29, 2021 Council Meeting for consideration. The process is such that Council will consider the request for the early adoption process; should the request receive Council endorsement; the new positions could feasibly be put in place for the start of 2022.

It was clarified, for the benefit of the Commission that the proposed part-time admin person will have their time split between Tourism and Economic Development.

Staff closed their presentation by saying that the aim for the funding request is to create a more sustainable and operational structure.

The motion was split as follows:

1. *THAT the City of Vernon's Tourism Commission supports the use of up to \$170,000 from the tourism reserve to fund the 2022 Tourism Operational Budget to fund the MRDT renewal process, new tourism website, and additional tourism marketing and promotional activities.*

Moved by Richard Rolke, seconded by Clinton Bialas:

THAT the City of Vernon's Tourism Commission supports the use of up to \$170,000 from the tourism reserve to fund the 2022 Tourism Operational Budget to fund the MRDT renewal process, new tourism website, and additional tourism marketing and promotional activities.

CARRIED

2. *THAT the City of Vernon's Tourism Commission supports the creation and funding for a Visitor Services & Community Specialist as part of a request to Council for the 2022 budget process, funded using MRDT funds.*

Moved by Richard Rolke, seconded by Kevin O'Brien:

THAT the City of Vernon's Tourism Commission supports the creation and funding for a Visitor Services & Community Specialist as part of a request to Council for the 2022 budget process, funded using MRDT funds.

CARRIED

3. *THAT the City of Vernon's Tourism Commission supports the creation and funding of a Digital Marketing Specialist as part of a request to Council for the 2022 budget process, funded using MRDT funds.*

Moved by Brett Woods, seconded by Kevin O'Brien:

THAT the City of Vernon's Tourism Commission supports the creation and funding of a Digital Marketing Specialist as part of a request to Council for the 2022 budget process, funded using MRDT funds.

CARRIED

The Vice-Chair added an additional agenda Item 7 - Round Table Discussion to the meeting agenda.

7. Roundtable Discussion

Commissioner Woodhouse - Provided an update and noted that the Arts Council will be doing the community engagement piece. The Arts Council has gone through marketing and will be getting a new website in place soon; the aim is to have it up and running in November 2021. The intent of the new site is to look at how to attract tourists to the arts and culture community within Vernon.

Commissioner Bissessar - Is excited to be part of the Commission and noted that the influence of digital marketing is critically important. In his new role, he spent the summer redoing the website and getting photography on the destination. The sheer magnitude of the property is staggering. Is currently working to "dial in" the digital arena to create a strong foundation to build visitor interest.

Mayor Cumming - Noted that Forestry Management, given the current wildfire situation in the interior is one of the key topics of discussion at UBCM.

Commissioner Van Horne - Tourism not a lot going on, on a personal note, spent time downtown in the summer. Raised concern regarding affordable housing so that workers can have housing options. Staff noted that product development and stakeholder engagement. Information sharing is important and feedback is shared at the local biking sector. It is important to enhance communication.

Discussion ensued, and it was acknowledged by the group that current issues facing many businesses are: labour / housing and mental health were issues for hiring people during a pandemic.

Commissioner Bialas - Noted that with his business, they brought in additional benefits as staff incentives, and have pivoted to use local suppliers. Expressed regret that due to COVID-19, the closure of portions of the downtown sector were a missed opportunity due to the lack of capacity in terms of staffing.

With respect to the new Provincial Health Mandate for Proof of Vaccinations - there has been a lot of media, lots of discussion around it. Using consistent posters from both BC / Interior Health has assisted in messaging.

Commissioner Hudson - Noted that he currently has 40 staff; however, with the reduction in capacity due to COVID, there are no events. They will be starting with the Canada Cup Olympic Qualifier, a booking with an event at Silver Star that could build into a gigantic event this November - December opportunities are sold out for teams to train. It is shaping up to be a very good season. Doing an upgrade to infrastructure and will add further off-season training opportunities.

Commissioner Jenkins - Mentioned "Crankworks" -- noted that it was not possible due to social distancing requirements; at the moment they are back to having no spectators at the event. It will be on TV on October 2nd. Cassandra Zerebeski started on Monday and has relocated to Vernon moved from Squamish. Opened the Vernon office and will have the site available for passed food and also pickup.

Commissioner O'Brien - Funding - BC Recover Grand. Kal Paddle Festival yearly. A launch lane is going to be put into Kal beach with a narrow corridor for boats. The Kal Classic will be difficult to host due to the segregation of boating and swimming. The paddle boats are not kept on the beach. Received a letter from Coldstream Council asking to keep their craft off the beach; Coldstream issued a business license and they are looking to navigate that permitting process.

ACTION: Councillor Gares requested staff to include a Cultural Update at the next Tourism Commission meeting.

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Tourism Commission is scheduled for **Wednesday, October 20, 2021** at 8:00 am.

MEETING ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Richard Rolke, seconded by Bobby Bissessar:

THAT the City of Vernon's Tourism Commission meeting of Wednesday, September 15, 2021, be adjourned.

CARRIED.

The Tourism Commission meeting adjourned at 9:04 am.

CERTIFIED CORRECT:

Claus Larsen

Chair