



THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF VERNON

**MINUTES OF THE
TOURISM COMMISSION MEETING
HELD WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2021
OKANAGAN LAKE ROOM - 8:00 AM**

PRESENT: Claus Larsen, Accommodation Provider, Chair
Clinton Bilas, Restaurant
Councillor Gares, City of Vernon (Appointed Member)
Dauna Kennedy, Arts & Culture
Kevin O'Brien, Attractions
Michael Van Horne
Richard Rolke, Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce
Troy Hudson, Ski

NON-VOTING: Ian Jenkins, Silver Star Mountain Resort (Non-Voting)

ABSENT: Gale Woodhouse, Arts & Culture
Mayor Cumming (Alternate)
Brett Woods, Biking
Bobby Bissessar, Accommodation Provider
Ricardo Smith, Sports & Events
Mike Fotheringham, Okanagan Indian Band

STAFF: Hannah Lucich, Tourism Coordinator
Karen Savill, Administrative Assistant
John Perrott, Manager, Economic Development & Tourism
Torrie Silverthorn, Manager, Tourism
Tracy Mueller, Committee Clerk

ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 8:00 AM

**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.

**ADOPTION OF
AGENDA**

Moved by Richard Rolke seconded by Dauna Kennedy:

THAT the agenda for Wednesday, November 17, 2021 Tourism Commission meeting be adopted.

CARRIED.

ADOPTION OF MINUTES

Moved by Dauna Kennedy, seconded by Kevin O'Brien:

THAT the minutes of the Regular Tourism Commission meeting held Wednesday October 20, 2021 be adopted.

CARRIED.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

2900 PLAZA SURVEY AND FEEDBACK

The following comments were made:

- Staff will be taking a report with recommendations to Council on Monday, November 22, 2021.
- Tourism and Economic Development staff conducted their annual "Business Walks" as a form of outreach in preparing the report.
- The main feedback received from downtown business owners was that it would be important to begin the consultation / planning process early for the closure in summer 2022.
- Staff noted that the Executive Director position for the Downtown Vernon Association is vacant and that there is a hiring process that is currently underway.

NEW BUSINESS

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

The Tourism Manager posed the following two (2) questions to members of the Commission for contemplation:

1. What is your organization's biggest pain point?
2. What is your organization's projected outlook for 2022?

Common Themes were as follows:

- **Resourcing /Staffing / Seasonal Workers** - Meeting the needs of the business community and grow the base with limited resources, it's difficult to attract and retain seasonal workers, and find suitable housing. There is lack of affordable housing stock.
- **Supply Chain Issues** - It is difficult to stay positive with supply chain issues. With restrictions it is difficult to plan, specifically, in determining how much to invest when there are last minute shutdowns or capacity limitations / restrictions.

- **Lack of Communication (Mixed Messages)** - The pain point is working in a vacuum without having all the information. Until a few days ago were not worried about food. There is another winter ahead with good occupancy. There are some groups on the books for next summer and it should be a good winter.
- **Planning and Programming** - Everything is on the shelf right now. Planning the year in a "mythical sense" of what a standard Okanagan summer looks like. Communication is difficult right now because of the shortages, it's not just pushing out communications, there is a need to do the homework regarding timing of promotions.
- **Climate Change / Weather** - The weather has been a big challenge, have done two factory resets in two weeks, are fortunate that snow happened or business would have been cancelled. Have teams from all over Canada, have teams arriving for Canada Cup from the US. Completed a biathlon range, giving Vernon a top tier infrastructure project.
- **Predator Ridge Expansion** - The timeline for the project, which includes a new lodge building containing several new hotel rooms, is within the next two years; the outlook is positive for 2022 and beyond.

A brief overview is as follows:

- Building 33 minimum 1-acre lots, Predator Ridge Drive is being carried through.
- To achieve the new development, they propose to remove 7 KM of the current trail; however, it will be replaced with 50 KM of new trail; therefore, there will be a net gain by the end of the development.
- A new village will be planned in the Backcountry. It will be a mountain bike village; with a look and feel of the Banff Springs Hotel, it's estimated there will be 190 new rooms. This hotel is, however, further off in the planning phases.
- There will be one new lodge building built in the near future, going next to the existing lodge buildings. It will include underground parking, Starbucks and a Hockey Canada themed restaurant, lounge and patio.

QUARTERLY UPDATE Weather Challenges / Alberta Marketing / Emergency Notifications:

- The weather and the challenges with the highway are causing issues for the tourism sector in general. Staff noted that unfortunately there are no firm time estimates on the repairs needed for the Coquihalla Highway and HWY 1.
- In terms of the roads / safety, it was discussed that there are geotechnical issues and it is important for the team of engineers assigned to the review to ensure that roads and bridges are safe.
- To address the challenges and forthcoming travel restrictions pertaining to highway access from the lower mainland, staff have refocused targeting advertising in Alberta for the time being.
- When it comes to Emergency Communications, Tourism Vernon follow the provincial standards- set by Destination BC, in partnership with the Province of BC. The role of a DMO in a situation like the highway closures is a support role. The role is to provide accurate, informative information sources to the public and tourists and amplify the provincial government's messaging associated with the situation.
- Staff spoke about the need to be accurate, informative, but also want to communicate that Vernon is still open for business and inspire future travelers to continue to plan their trip to Vernon in the future.
- Staff shared an update on an emergency communication strategy that is specific to Tourism Vernon, it will be worked on over the next few months.
- It was discussed that there is a "Know Before You Go" page on the Vernon website. Messaging in this regard has been straight forward and more corporate as it is meant to be the accurate, reliable source of information for emergency situations and the global pandemic
- If there is a crisis, there will be updates regarding the impacts to the private, local industry Facebook group to be used as a "local source" for information for tourism business owners and operators.

Snapshot of Travel in BC Now:

- Staff noted Domestic Visitation in BC was up 1.0% from this same time period in 2019. On a positive note, we are getting close to achieving 2019 numbers in several data categories, it gives hope that we are moving towards recovery.
- BC domestic visitation is encouraging, everything else is performing in keeping with industry standards at the time.
- The regional share of travel is holding steady with the Thompson Okanagan Tourism region remaining in the top 3 places to visit in BC Thompson Okanagan slipped into the number three position as one of BC's places to go as opposed to the number 2 spot where it was all summer.

Paid Social Media / Activity Guides:

- Running a paid campaign on Facebook and Instagram nearly 365 days/year in the background.
- There was an outdoor leisure campaign and a fall campaign that performed well, producing above or on par with industry benchmarks for engagement and click rates.
- The fall activity guides produced as website content and pushed out with paid social, performed well.
- The winter activity guide is underway and a second activity guide with more budget friendly, affordable family activities is also underway

Digital and Consumer Targets:

- BC is the top market for visitors to Tourism's website. October was the officially longest time that the Ontario market showed up in the top three markets.
- Year to date stats -- roughly 131,000 visitors to the website, it is down 9% from last year, staff would like to see us get back to on par or better by the end of the year.
- There is a consumer e-newsletter, media e-newsletter, and industry newsletter which are all good sources of info for Tourism stakeholders.
- If anyone wants to sign up for these updates please send a message to the Tourism Manager.

- Staff would like to see the click through rate / engagement and signup rates go up on newsletters. There will be more targeted e-newsletter campaigns planned for 2022.
- Staff shared a version of the winter video that will run on SportsNet, City TV, YouTube and NHL.com. The Video is called: Explore Vernon this Winter.

British Columbia Magazine & Other Media:

- Staff are working on relationship building with British Columbia Magazine. A travel journalist will attend Vernon in February 2022 and prepare a two (2) page spread about winter attractions in Vernon. The magazine has a great readership and wide distribution.
- Adding into the mix, staff are working with Global News, SportsNet.

Local Partnerships & Campaigns:

- Vernon "Hot Sips" Trail Campaign -- comprised of the coffee shop trail. Staff worked with various coffee shop owners, mapped them out, and will combine with Beach Radio promotions, and have a page in the Visitor Guide and on the website to get people into the coffee shops.
- Staff are working on creating a "Local Experts" Campaign, preliminary details are as follows:
 - Setting up a digital campaign
 - Working with local experts to engage in providing written and photo content for advertising channels and website
 - Will be a win/win for everyone, because it is affordable content, posted by people who are passionate about their sports and sector and willing to share local insider tips. Tourists also love hearing about the local's tips.

Summer Photoshoot (Stock Images):

- Staff shared some excellent images that were taken over the summer. Initially, they were looking for lake and outdoor images but had to pivot to mostly indoor locations due to the smoke and fire circumstances.
- The photoshoot yielded approximately 400 photos which will be incorporated into upcoming campaigns.

- Staff noted that visiting u-pick orchards is on people's "must do" list when they visit Vernon and we will build that theme into future campaigns, and now have good quality u-pick photos to support those campaigns.

**LETTER OF SUPPORT
REQUEST**

Karen Savill, Administrative Assistant, Economic Development & Tourism, provided an overview regarding a request received from the Ribbons of Green Trails Society.

Staff noted that the letter of support was requested to assist the Society in applying for the 2022 RDNO Greater Vernon Trails and Natural Spaces grant which would allow the Applicant to facilitate the installation of 6 interpretative signs along the Great Canal Trail; and that the proposed signage would include QR Codes.

Moved by Richard Rolke seconded by Dauna Kennedy:

THAT the Tourism Commission endorse providing a letter of support to the Ribbons of Green Trails Society to assist their 2022 RDNO Greater Vernon Trails and Natural Spaces grant to install six (6) interpretative signs along the Great Canal Trail with QR codes.

CARRIED.

**PROOF OF
VACCINATION
REQUIREMENTS**

- Staff noted that all City Staff and Committee members will be required to provide proof of vaccination in January 2022 as per the notification that was distributed to all staff and community volunteers.
- In response to a question from the Commission, Staff clarified that no personal information will be captured, the Director of Community Infrastructure will attend the first meeting in January 2022, and will utilize a COVID-19 Passport Scanner. Once Commissioner passports have been scanned, Commission members will be granted entry to the Council Chamber.
- Prior to the January 2022 meeting, if any members of the Commission have any requests or concerns regarding the policy they are invited to reach out to the staff liaisons in private.
- Staff, in response to a question from a member of the Commission clarified that this policy is City of Vernon specific. All other rules / regulations citizens are required to follow remain at the discretion of Public Health Officer for BC.

**COMMITTEE
RE-APPOINTMENT
REQUESTS**

Staff thanked all individuals on the Commission for reapplying and noted they would be advised after Council completes their deliberations.

**CALL FOR
MARKETING
COMMITTEE
MEMBERS**

The Manager, Tourism provided a brief overview of the requirements for membership on the Marketing Committee.

- The time obligation is two meetings in 1 - 2 hours in length. The aim is to put together the tactical marketing plan to review as a group.
- The following members of the Commission volunteered to serve on the Marketing Committee:
 1. Richard Rolke
 2. Claus Larsen
 3. Michael Van Horne
- Staff noted that Vicky Proulx, Executive Director of the Vernon Winter Carnival will be joining the Marketing Committee.

**DATE AND TIME OF
NEXT MEETING**

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

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Councillor Gares, seconded by Troy Hudson:

THAT the Tourism Commission meeting of November 17, 2021 be adjourned.

CARRIED.

The Tourism Commission meeting adjourned at **9:00 AM**

CERTIFIED CORRECT:



Chair