



THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF VERNON

**MINUTES OF THE
TOURISM COMMISSION MEETING
HELD MAY 15, 2024 AT 8:00 AM
OKANAGAN LAKE ROOM (COUNCIL CHAMBER)**

PRESENT: VOTING:

Ben Suranko, Biking
Shawna Patenaude, Arts & Culture
Rebecca Barton, Arts & Culture
Peter Kaz, Downtown Vernon Association
Mayor Cumming
Councillor Durning, Council Appointed
Jessica Dowswell, Accommodation Provider
Claus Larsen, Accommodation Provider, Chair
Clara Snedden, Accommodation Provider
Mike Van Horne, Golf
Janine Collard, Attractions
Gerran Thorhaugh, Restaurant

GUESTS:

Josh Welter, SCSNO

ABSENT: Ian Jenkins, Silverstar Mountain Resort
Kris Fuller, Sports & Events
Dan Proulx, Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce
Cassandra Zerebeski, Ski
Tim Isaac, Okanagan Indian Band

STAFF: Torrie Silverthorn, Manager, Tourism
Karen Savill, Visitor Services Coordinator
Hanna Lucich, Tourism Marketing Coordinator
John Perrott, Manager, Economic Development and Partnerships
Sue Wood, Manager, Legislative Services
Maia Knuhtsen, Tourism Summer Student
Cloe Carleton, Tourism Summer Student
Cocine Wattie, Project Coordinator
Jennifer Pounder, Records/Committee Clerk

ORDER

The meeting was called to order at **8:01 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.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Moved by B. Suranko, seconded by P. Kaz:

THAT the agenda of the May 15, 2024 Tourism Commission meeting be adopted.

CARRIED

ADOPTION OF THE MINUTES

Moved by S. Patenaude, seconded by J. Collard:

THAT the minutes of the March 20, 2024 Tourism Commission meeting be adopted.

CARRIED

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

NEW BUSINESS:

M. Van Horne and G. Thorhaug joined the meeting at 8:07 a.m.

STAFFING UPDATE

T. Silverthorn provided the following staffing update:

- S. Wood, Manager, Legislative Services, was introduced and provided a brief overview of what her position entails.
- C. Carleton and M. Knuhtsen were introduced as the Tourism summer students for 2024.
- Cocine Wattie has taken a temporary two-year position and we are hoping to hire her replacement and be able to introduce them at our June meeting.

J. Dowswell joined the meeting at 8:13 a.m.

QUARTERLY UPDATE: SPORT & CULTURE SOCIETY OF THE NORTH OKANAGAN

J. Welter, SCSNO, provided an update to the Commission and the following points were noted:

- The Esso Cup was a success. Brought an economic impact of \$1.3 million. It was a great success for our hotels, the volunteers were exceptional and the staff at Kal Tire Place were first class.
- 2024 and 2025 BC Athletics Cross Country Running Championships at DND in October.
- 2024 and 2025 Valley Cross Country Running Championships (details TBD).
- 2024 and 2025 Quidditch Championships at Polson Park in November.

- Input was asked from the Commission on their thoughts on considering more summer indoor sporting events (swimming, lacrosse, pickleball, etc.) due to the wildfires:
 - It was noted that a lot of events in the Okanagan have shifted away from that time of year.
 - It was recommended that recreation services be contacted with sufficient notice regarding indoor facility booking as events are already being penciled in for the new Active Living Centre for spring 2027.

TOURISM RESERVE DISCUSSION

T. Silverthorn reminded the Commission that there is a draw from the Tourism Reserve fund for approximately \$250,000 for this year. The following was noted:

- The current state of the reserve is approximately \$1.2 million.
- It was suggested that Vernon be “sold back” to the residents of Vernon.
- Prepare for discussion around affordable housing.
- With the Northern Rail Trail opening up May 10, 2024, it reminds us that in 2025/2026 another section will open around Mara Lake and its good for us to keep in mind people will need places to stay and there is going to be a need for shuttle services from Vernon to the Sicamous area for trail users. The regional marketing has fallen short and Tourism Vernon would like to take it into their own hands.
- C. Larsen requested there be a roundtable discussion at the next meeting based on emergency preparedness. Come prepared to discuss and learn from one another. We went the compassionate route during the Covid-19 pandemic and we need to have a message for wildfire season.
- K. Savill announced that she recently attended an Emergency Operation Center meeting with Sue Saunders, Emergency Program Coordinator, and advocated for evacuee placement to be spread out evenly throughout all hotels in Vernon. Sue will be working towards renewing all contracts with local hotels.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

A roundtable discussion ensued and the following updates were provided:

- J. Collard – The Ritz-Carlton Residences at Predator Ridge were announced last week. A FAQ handout was provided to the Commission (attached to these minutes as “Attachment 1”). The benefit for Vernon is the outreach power as they bring with them a mailing list of over 180 million subscribers from all around the world. It was also noted they have “Fred Talks” at Predator Ridge where a professional comes in and does a presentation for residents. If anyone is interested, please let me know.

- Cllr. Durning – We are still keeping a close eye on short term rental legislation. Mayor Cumming recently sent a letter to the government regarding Predator Ridge but have yet to receive a reply. Invasive mussel season has arrived and there are still being tracked; We are hoping to see an improvement.
- C. Snedden – April was a good month. May is turning out good as well. We are hoping summer pacing will pickup as we still have space available for June. Staffing levels are good.
- G. Thorhaugh – We are still recovering from Mother's Day. I am actively reaching out to people for events. I require two weeks notice as direction comes from head office in Vancouver and that takes some time.
- P. Kaz – Food Festival went well. We are creating new events as there will not be a Plaza this summer. We are still planning to close down part of 30th Ave and setup a pickleball court with food trucks, DJ, etc. in August. Staffing levels are good. June 15, 2024 is the 30th annual Sunshine Festival.
- J. Dowswell – I have been busy trying to book up July and August. In response to a question, and according to media reports, the following was confirmed:
 - Kelowna is behind for July and August for leisure activities.
 - Vernon is behind for June and August for hotels; and
 - Salmon Arm is behind for August for hotels.
- R. Barton - A lot of events happening. We have opened a new station in Kelowna and Vernon staff have been working there and promoting the North Okanagan as much as they can. Please let me know if anyone has any events coming up.
- M. Van Horne – The new building will hopefully be completed by July 1, 2024. Numbers are up so far. The out of town numbers are up by 60% for groups of 12 or more (groups coming from Calgary, Vancouver, Spokane, etc.).
- S. Patenaude – The Rail Trail Plein Air Event is coming up in Polson Park. Please come setup a tent or table if you have events to share. We recently hired a content creator and will be sharing content with Tourism Vernon.
- B. Suranko – The Bike Fest is from June 5-9 and fast approaching. We are still trying to work on trails on Vernon Hill. C. Larsen stated to let this Commission know if they can be of any help with a letter of support.
- Mayor Cumming – The new windows at the rear of the Vernon Lodge Conference Center are fabulous. Organizations have come to the City stating they have built short term rental housing and can no longer use it. Starting early this June, Polson Park Phase 1 will begin. This is necessary for the drainage of water that comes down from East Hill. Project must be completed by 2027 for the first Sockeye return of the fry released in 2023. Tourism is working on

sign placement on the construction fence being erected in Polson Park.

- C. Larsen – Amazed at the difference between 2012 to today. The Tourism Commission has changed in a positive way. Amazing talent has joined and members of Council regularly attend. Very proud of this Commission.
- T. Silverthorn reminded the Committee they are all invited to an Official Community Plan/Transportation Plan renewal engagement workshop. C. Wattie provided a brief overview and the importance of input from everyone.

INFORMATION ITEMS:

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting for the Tourism Commission is set for **June 19, 2024** at **8:00 a.m.**

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting of the Tourism Commission adjourned at 9:07 a.m. by call of the Chair.

CERTIFIED CORRECT:

 Chair