



Media Release

THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF VERNON
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: April 30, 2021

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Tourism Vernon modernizes approach to visitor servicing

Tourism Vernon is modernizing its approach to visitor servicing to help tourists and local residents activate their Vernon adventures and discover new places.

During its Regular Meeting of April 26, Council endorsed a recommendation from the Tourism Commission to move away from the bricks and mortar visitor centre model and implement a mobile visitor services team that will provide timely and effective support to visitors and residents who are looking for information around the community and online.

With the goal of *meeting visitors exactly where they are with exactly what they need*, Tourism Vernon's visitor servicing team will hit the streets this May and spend time at popular locations such as Kin Beach, Ellison Provincial Park and throughout downtown Vernon. The team will also interact with the public via phone, email, and Facebook chat.

An enhanced digital presence – including website improvements and new digital maps – will round out the updated visitor servicing program.

The decision to close Vernon's Visitor Information Centre (VIC) is a response to an organically occurring change in technology and how people are finding new ways to source information. Over the last several years, Administration has been monitoring the steady decline in visitation to the Vernon VIC. In 2006, the VIC had 25,429 visitors. In 2019, that figure dropped by 58% to 10,583 visitors. The VIC did experience a slight uptick in usage in the summer of 2014 when centralized, but the downward trend has continued since then.

"Promoting Vernon and its tourism and hospitality businesses must be one of the top priorities as the sector moves toward recovery," said Mayor Victor Cumming. "With fewer resources available, the Tourism Commission and City Council have carefully considered how our investments will be most effective and how we can reimagine our visitor servicing to showcase Vernon, meaningfully connect with visitors and residents, and continue offering exceptional customer service."

On April 3, 2020, the Vernon VIC was closed to the public following recommendations from health officials to cancel non-essential travel. Since that time, staff have continued to answer visitor calls and emails, while also researching and utilizing new platforms to reach potential visitors.

“More and more people are using online platforms to research and book their trip, and this behaviour seems to continue once they are here in Vernon,” said Torrie Silverthorn, Tourism Coordinator. “Visitors are relying heavily on the internet for their information, so we need to make sure we’re capturing that audience. Our mobile team will offer the in-person engagement so many people love, while at the same time ensuring we’re meeting visitors where they are, and not the other way around.”

The Tourism Vernon social media channels continue to be a hub of activity and inspiration for world class four-season recreation, relaxation, and wellness opportunities across the Greater Vernon area. Tourism Vernon uses these channels to showcase for outstanding accommodations, food and beverage, attractions and unique experiences in our great area! The new mobile team’s location schedule will also be found on Tourism Vernon’s website and social media channels.

“Several other communities across BC are using this same mobile approach,” said Kevin Poole, Manager, Economic Development and Tourism. “Not only have those communities seen positive results in connecting visitors to local attractions, but they’ve also seen an increased number of local residents beginning to explore their own communities and discovering local businesses or attractions they didn’t know existed. This in turn has helped residents become ambassadors for their communities and spread the good word of what’s available in their own backyard.”

“The tourism research in British Columbia and across Canada has been clear,” said Claus Larsen, Tourism Commission Chair and Director of Accommodation, Predator Ridge Resort. “Travelers are searching more, booking more and buying more on mobile devices. They’re operating in a digital space already, so we are pivoting our efforts to offer a practical approach that helps connect visitors with local attractions and activities, and introduces area residents to new opportunities which match changes in the market.”

To learn more about Tourism Vernon and exciting places to explore in the area, please visit www.tourismvernon.com.