

Council approves continuation of visitor management initiatives]

Final report on Visitor Management Task Force submitted to Council at March 7 meeting

By Zachary Roman

It's no secret that Caledon's beautiful scenery attracts visitors from all around.

In 2021, Caledon Council passed a resolution asking Town staff to develop a visitor management plan in order to address some issues resulting from the increasing number of people visiting Caledon's rural areas.

As a result, a Visitor Management Task Force was formed that consisted of community members, local businesses, Town staff, Councillors, and other agencies.

At Council's March 7, 2023, General Committee meeting, Town staff presented a summary report on the Town's Visitor Management Task Force and outlined some next steps for Caledon to take.

Some of the items the task force was tasked with addressing included access to amenities like washrooms, lack of parking and illegal parking, littering, wayfinding and signage for visitors, creating tourism partnerships, and developing a communication plan for educating visitors.

According to the staff report, during the pandemic the Town's rural areas experienced a significant increase in visitors, which put a strain on the limited services and amenities available in those areas, which in turn caused negative experiences for residents of the areas.

The Town held a series of 10 online workshops focusing on each of Caledon's villages and hamlets to ask residents and businesses what their challenges were and get feedback and suggestions.

Through these discussions, several feedback themes emerged including noticeable pressure on village and park infrastructure (parking, waste, crowding, restroom availability), disagreeable visitor behaviour, and a desire to see businesses and the Town capitalize on the opportunity presented by increased tourism in Caledon, reads the report.

A survey of residents done by the Town in the Winter of 2021 found that their top visitor-related concerns were excess garbage, lack of access to parking, and poor visitor conduct. The survey also asked for top priorities for the Town to focus on, to which residents indicated increased washroom facilities and increased by-law enforcement presence as critical.

The report notes that every Caledon community identified motorist behaviour as an issue, so Town staff decided to address that major issue outside of the scope of the Visitor Management Task Force.

According to the report, the Task Force worked to address issues raised by the community beginning in January 2022.

To address the lack of washroom facilities in Caledon, the Town added temporary portable washroom facilities in Bolton's Royal Courtyards, at Caledon Brick Works, the Palgrave Forest, on Mississauga Road, at the Caledon Trailway, at Mississauga and Cataract Roads, and on Forks of the Credit Road.

To address issues with signage, the Town installed portable signage in the vicinity of trailheads and visitor hubs that directed visitors to available washroom facilities.

In Fall of 2022, a social media campaign was launched to share information about being a respectful tourist to potential visitors to Caledon. Caledon also requested additional signage from Ontario Parks and Credit Valley Conservation to highlight reservation

requirements for certain areas in Caledon.

The Town also secured additional parking by renting the Belfountain Public School parking lot on weekends from August to October and implemented a bus program to reduce demand for parking. Improvements to the Town's tourism website to make it user-friendly on mobile devices were also completed.

Other actions taken by the Town included the installation of 'Report a Problem' stickers with QR codes on garbage cans; the implementation of new events in under-marketed Caledon communities; and a plan to increase by-law and OPP presence that was launched in September 2022. A full list of actions taken by the Town can be viewed in staff report 2023-0030 on the Town's website.

The report, which was presented to Council at its March 7 meeting, came with two recommendations for Council to pass.

The first was for Caledon's Economic Development and Tourism staff to develop an annual plan with the Caledon OPP and Town by-law staff to prepare for peak tourism season.

The second was for the Town's engineering and municipal law enforcement staff to proceed with the development of 'Special Enforcement Areas' using information gathered from the Visitor Management Task Force. Important to note is that with the submission of their final report to Council, the task force is now officially dissolved.

Ward 4 Councillor Nick deBoer held the staff report and its recommendations for discussion at the March 7 meeting.

Before the report was discussed, Jason Schildroth, Caledon's Manager of Economic Development; Giuliana Giancotta, Community Project Manager; and Emily Quinton, tourism and culture officer, made a presentation on visitor management to Council.

deBoer said he'd been looking forward to hearing the results from the Visitor Management Task Force, and was very impressed with its results. He said the sky's the limit when it comes to tourism in Caledon and spoke of highlighting Caledon's agricultural businesses, craft breweries and more.

Ward 5 Councillor Tony Rosa, who served on the task force, said it was a pleasure to serve on it and that he was especially proud of the initiatives that served to educate visitors to Caledon.

Council passed Town staff's recommendations unanimously and they are recommended for adoption at Council's March 28 meeting.

Next steps for Town staff regarding visitor management include continuing the solutions that have already been implemented (as well as expanding on pilot programs), and continuing to maintain and grow Town relationships with the stakeholders most impacted by increased tourist presence, like residents and businesses in rural villages and hamlets.