

Clause 11 in Report No. 11 of Committee of the Whole was adopted, without amendment, by the Council of The Regional Municipality of York at its meeting held on June 25, 2015.

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## York Region 2015 Tourism Update

Committee of the Whole recommends:

1. Receipt of the presentation by Samantha Rodin, Executive Director, York Region Arts Council regarding “York Region Tourism Partnership”.
2. Adoption of the following recommendation contained in the report dated May 22, 2015 from the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner:

### 1. Recommendation

It is recommended that this report be received for information.

### 2. Purpose

This report updates Council on the agreement between York Region and the York Region Arts Council (YRAC), provides a review of activities in 2014 and the efforts to be undertaken in 2015 to promote local Tourism.

### 3. Background

Tourism, arts and culture are important elements to support York Region’s economic health

York Region’s arts and culture assets provide a solid foundation for tourism. Complemented by a diverse offering of tourist-friendly attractions and experiences, our museums, theatres and historic downtowns collectively provide many opportunities for visitors and local residents to explore and enjoy

the area. York Region is also home to Canada's Wonderland – one of the country's biggest tourist attractions – and will co-host the Toronto 2015 Pan American/ Parapan American Games, which will serve as a major tourist draw this coming summer.

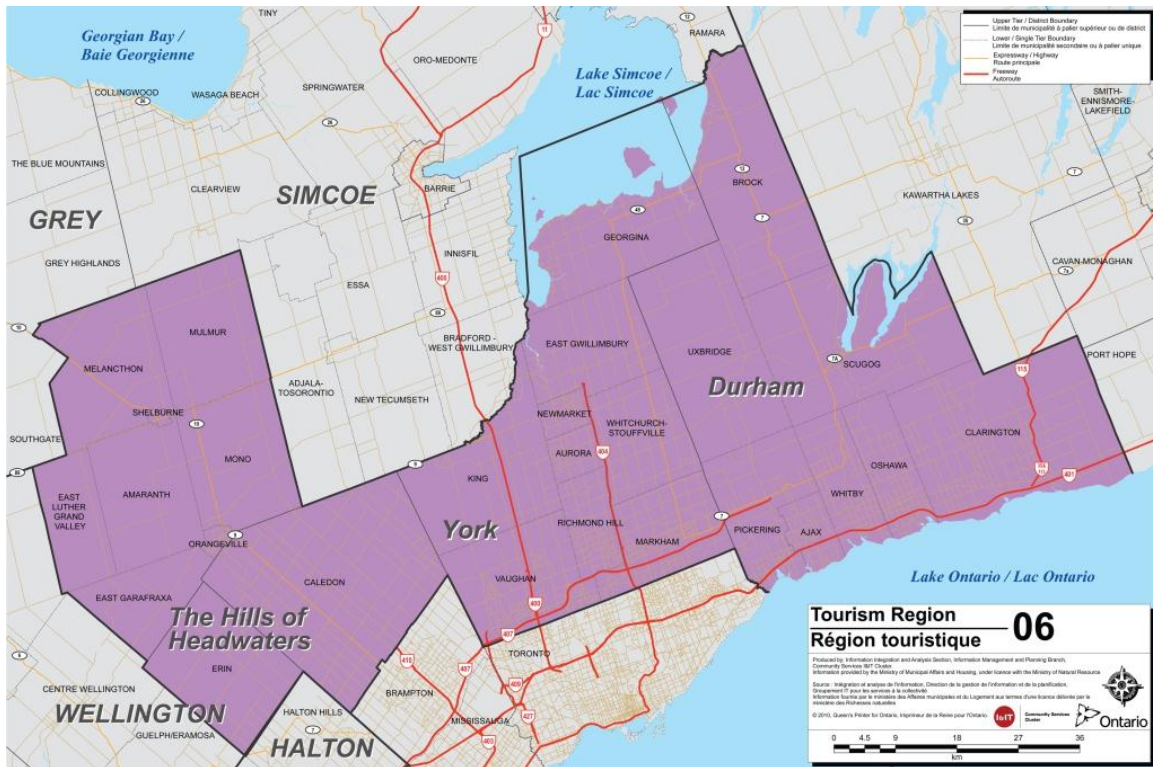
Arts and cultural events also create occasions to showcase assets and how they fit into the fabric of the community; demonstrating why a given community is an attractive place to live, visit or invest.

York Region's Tourism initiatives are delivered in collaboration with York Region Arts Council, Central Counties Tourism and York Region Media Group

York Region has embarked on a collaborative approach to promoting local tourism events and assets to consumers located inside and outside the Region. This has been achieved by partnering with three external entities: Central Counties Tourism, York Region Media Group and York Region Arts Council. This approach began with the advent of Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs) across the province in 2009 and the subsequent scaling down of York Region's in-house tourism operations, which was reported to Council in 2012 and 2014.

York Region is contained within Regional Tourism Organization Zone 6 (RTO6) along with Durham Region and the Hills of Headwaters area. Figure 1 displays the catchment area map for RTO6. Central Counties Tourism (the marketing name of RTO6) is responsible for promoting York Region to external markets across Ontario and beyond.

**Figure 1  
RTO6 Catchment Area**



Since 2011, the Region has partnered with York Region Media Group to deliver the annual Yorkscene Discovery Guide, which is distributed throughout York Region and to tourism information centres across Ontario. York Region Arts Council is the Region’s primary partner in promoting tourism, arts and culture to local consumers

In 2012, York Region first partnered with York Region Arts Council to develop and promote Yorkscene.com – an online resource for all things tourism, arts and culture in the Region. This partnership has been renewed annually.

The York Region Arts Council is the community connection to York Region’s arts and culture assets and operators. The organization provides a venue for collaboration among municipal arts councils, while promoting activities that happen across all nine municipalities in York Region. Given this connection, they are an ideal partner to continue outreach efforts to the arts and culture community in support of tourism activity across the Region.

The ongoing partnership with York Region Arts Council ensures valuable services continue to be provided to residents and visitors to York Region and to the local tourism, culture and arts community.

#### 4. Analysis and Options

Marketing collaborations and website enhancements have resulted in a more than 400% increase in website traffic for YorkScene.com since 2012

York Region, York Region Arts Council and York Region Media Group commenced a collaboration in 2012 to further refine YorkScene.com and to develop and implement a range of activities to promote the website to local residents. The following are some of the results of this collaboration:

- **Tourism Summits:** The second annual York Region Tourism Summit took place on March 25, 2014. The purpose of this event is to inform stakeholders about opportunities to work with local partners to promote tourism activity in the Region. This event attracts over 100 industry stakeholders each year.
- **Website Enhancements:** YorkScene.com received a major face-lift in July 2013 and is constantly being updated to capture events taking place across York Region and to increase its ranking by search engines like Google and Yahoo – which is how the majority of people search for tourism, arts and cultural activities.
- **Digital Media Promotion:** Throughout 2014 YorkScene's digital media assets (i.e. website, e-newsletters and Facebook and Twitter channels) were leveraged on an ongoing basis to increase awareness of local events and special offers, including five sweepstake contests featuring prizes offered by local tourism operators that are listed on YorkScene.com.
- **Summer Street Teams:** – Teams of youth represented YorkScene at ten community events and festivals held across York Region to raise awareness of the website and to encourage people to subscribe to the e-newsletter.

As a result of these collaborations, there was a significant overall increase in website visitors from 18,012 in 2012 to 71,398 in 2013 to 95,908 in 2014, an increase of more than 400 percent.

Yorkscene.com is successfully establishing itself as the primary source for "Things to Do" in York Region

The tremendous growth in traffic to YorkScene.com is indicative of a healthy increase in local consumer awareness of the website and of its purpose: to be a source for things to do in York Region. In 2014, over 1,000 listings promoting events and assets located throughout the Region were uploaded to the event

calendar, the majority of which promoted community-wide initiatives and family-oriented festivals and fairs.

York Region Arts Council's successful delivery of arts, culture and tourism services has resulted in a \$322,000 Trillium Grant to expand its role

In April 2015, York Region Arts Council was successful in its application to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for \$322K in funding to establish a York Region Festival Alliance. This accomplishment was directly influenced by the Arts Council's demonstrated success in delivering arts, cultural and tourism services throughout York Region.

The goal of the Festival Alliance is to strengthen and grow the York Region festival sector and the individual festival organizations that comprise it. This will be delivered by providing value added services that can help develop the local festival sector and by creating an annual York Region-wide multicultural celebration that is integrated into existing festivals.

As a result, in 2015 York Region Arts Council is exploring re-branding to more accurately reflect that it now contains three sub-brands under its corporate umbrella: York Region Arts, YorkScene and York Region Festival Alliance.

York Region has renewed its partnership with York Region Arts Council for 2015

The funding arrangement between York Region Arts Council and the Region was renewed for 2015 through the Regional Budget process. The agreement articulates roles and responsibilities and identifies requirements related to reporting and use of Regional funding.

The following provides an overview of the 2015 work plan the Region and York Region Arts Council will work together to achieve:

- **Marketing and Support:** Develop and deliver a coordinated marketing plan that supports driving traffic to YorkScene.com to promote the Region's tourism, arts and cultural assets.
- **E-newsletter and Social Media Channel Development:** Focus on tactics that will grow the York Scene consumer and industry stakeholder e-newsletter subscriber databases as well as the number of YorkScene's Facebook and Twitter followers.
- **Website Content Development:** Expand and deliver up-to-date tourism related content for YorkScene.com, including: event calendar listings, tourism business directory information and experience packages.

- **Product Development:** Work with local tourism operators and Central Counties Tourism to develop experiences that leverage arts and cultural assets and promote them to local residents and visitors to York Region.
- **Customer Service Support:** field tourism related calls and emails from local residents and potential visitors that originate through YorkScene.com.

Increased tourism opportunities and demands require increased support

York Region and York Region Arts Council have identified that in 2015 there is expected to be a marked increase in tourism activity. In the past, Central Counties Tourism has been responsible for promoting York Region as a tourism destination to audiences outside the Region. However, starting in 2015, as instructed by its Board of Directors, Central Counties Tourism will be providing access to additional funds and promotional resources for York Region (and the other two regions within the RTO6 catchment area) to lead the development of these activities. York Region Arts Council staff will lead the development of these promotions while Central Counties Tourism will play a supporting role.

The influx of tourism activity that will accompany the 2015 Toronto Pan American/Parapan American Games will also require additional resources to ensure adequate experience packages, promotional activities and materials are in place to meet the increased demand for tourist information throughout York Region.

To address these additional demands, while maintaining efforts to develop and promote the Yorkscene.com website, York Region Planning and Economic Development will provide staff support to assist with YorkScene.com content development and management. Access to this human resource will allow York Region Arts Council staff to dedicate more effort on experience development and coordinating tourism promotional efforts with Central Counties Tourism and York Region Media Group.

Link to key Council-approved plans

Tourism, arts and culture related initiatives support the *York Region Official Plan* objective “To encourage and support cultural, recreational, institutional and Tourism opportunities that enhance the Region as a place to work, live and visit”. These initiatives also support the *2015 to 2019 Strategic Plan* priority area to “Strengthen the Region’s Economy”, and in particular the strategic objective of “Fostering an environment that attracts, grows and maintains businesses”.

## 5. Financial Implications

Partnership with York Region Arts Council remains a cost-effective solution for delivering tourism promotion in York Region

The Regional Council-approved 2015 Planning and Economic Development budget includes \$70,000 for continued support of tourism promotion.

This partnership is a cost-effective arrangement for York Region given that York Region Arts Council has its own office space, an accomplished staff and well-established relationships throughout the local arts and culture community and with York Region's media outlets.

## 6. Local Municipal Impact

Tourism is an important sector to local municipal economies within York Region. The Region will continue, through its partnerships, to support local tourism marketing in collaboration with York Region Arts Council. The Region has also fostered coordinated dialogue between the Region, the local municipalities, York Region Arts Council and Central Counties Tourism to ensure alignment of priorities. This dialogue will continue through regular meetings and interactions with local municipal economic development partners.

## 7. Conclusion

York Region continues to play an important role in supporting tourism, arts and cultural programs in partnership with York Region Arts Council, York Region Media Group and Central Counties Tourism.

With these partnerships now well established, the focus will be on the continued development and promotion of local tourism opportunities to audiences within York Region and beyond.

For more information on this report, please contact Doug Lindeblom, Director, Economic Strategy at ext. 71503.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

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Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request