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Item No. 13.1.1
Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee
September 19, 2024

TO: Chair and Members of Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee

FROM: Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: August 28, 2024

SUBJECT: Integrated Tourism Master Plan 2030

ORIGIN

Staff Initiated Report Request

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Discover Halifax, Halifax Regional Municipality's (HRM) not-for-profit destination marketing organization, has promoted Halifax as a top Canadian destination since 2002. The 2019 Halifax Regional Integrated Tourism Master Plan (ITMP) has guided strategic tourism development, driven economic growth and supported the region's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. With twenty-eight (28) key initiatives, the ITMP aligns closely with municipal priorities, ensuring tourism benefits both residents and visitors.

The 2019 ITMP now requires an update. Discover Halifax is leading this update, targeting completion by March 2025. It will involve extensive engagement with community, stakeholders and other relevant organizations, to align with federal, provincial, and municipal strategies while promoting sustainable growth. An updated plan is expected to be brought forward to Regional Council in early 2025.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee forward the staff report to Regional Council for information.

BACKGROUND

Discover Halifax, established in 2002, is the official destination marketing organization (DMO) for HRM. A non-profit entity, it is dedicated to positioning Halifax as a premier, year-round destination for leisure, business, and events, focusing on maximizing economic and social benefits for residents, visitors, and investors. Governed by a Board of Directors from various tourism industry sectors, Discover Halifax collaborates with industry partners to showcase the best of the region and drive strategic tourism planning and investment. HRM holds three seats on the Board of Directors including the Mayor, one Councillor and the CAO or designate.

2019 Integrated Tourism Master Plan

In 2019, Discover Halifax in partnership with HRM, spearheaded the development of the ITMP, which is a comprehensive strategy designed to drive economic growth through targeted tourism investments and stakeholder collaboration. The initiative was supported by Regional Council, which provided financial and in-kind support. It was guided by a project team that included tourism consultants, HRM staff, and a community advisory committee with political and staff representatives.

The engagement process for the ITMP was extensive, including a project website, town hall meetings, industry working sessions, one-on-one interviews, and an online survey. This process involved over 300 participants and garnered 250 survey responses across 32 engagement events.

The ITMP has been instrumental in Halifax's pandemic recovery efforts, offering a clear roadmap for "shovel-ready" projects aligned with government initiatives. Endorsed by Regional Council, the plan provided stability and direction to the tourism industry during the COVID-19 crisis, fostering stakeholder collaboration and ensuring a unified approach to tourism development.

The ITMP outlines initiatives aimed at making Halifax a leading Canadian destination, increasing tourism revenue, creating jobs, and improving the quality of life for residents. By 2021, the ITMP had established a clear vision for the future of tourism in Halifax, emphasizing economic growth, community building, and a community-first approach that benefits all 210 communities within the region. The ITMP serves as a collaborative blueprint, guiding the collective efforts and resources of tourism stakeholders and the broader community toward shared goals.

One of the foundational elements of the ITMP is the importance of taking a "community first approach." This is both a principle and a goal of the plan and was a key theme that emerged from the engagement. It is also a lens through which each strategic theme is analyzed. The vision of the master plan is to be widely recognized as the favourite city in Canada.

The goals of the plan align with the Halifax economic growth strategy and are to:

- Grow tourism revenues
- Grow tourism employment
- Enrich the lives of residents
- Align with related strategies

The strategic themes of the plan are:

- Build and enhance Halifax's key demand generators
- Make it easy to get here and visit
- Develop responsible tourism
- Attract the highest yield and growth markets
- Be vibrant and alive, 365
- Establish, identify, and appoint tourism leadership

The plan identified 28 strategic initiatives associated with the above-noted strategic themes. While the municipality may play an indirect role in many of them, there are a number for which the municipality is lead or one of the lead organizations responsible.

ITMP emphasizes the importance of a collective impact model, where multiple stakeholders and organizations collaborate to advance strategic initiatives and realize community benefits. Discover Halifax's expanded focus on destination management is a shift from its traditional marketing role. Enhanced municipal funding and an increased marketing levy events reserve (MLSER) have enabled Discover Halifax to strengthen its capacity, including recently creating a Destination Development department. The organization is actively advancing strategic initiatives, with ongoing updates to Regional Council, and has

incorporated these responsibilities into its updated Service Agreement with HRM, reflecting its evolving role in the tourism sector.

Some key highlights and advances that relate to the ITMP include:

- Implementation of the Peggy's Cove Master Plan which represents a significant advancement in enhancing one of Nova Scotia's most iconic destinations. This initiative focused on improving infrastructure, accessibility, and visitor experience while preserving the essence of Peggy's Cove as a living community. With nearly \$10 million invested, the plan effectively addressed longstanding challenges, such as traffic congestion and inadequate facilities, by creating pedestrian-friendly spaces, accessible public washrooms, and a new viewing deck. These improvements have not only increased visitation and business activity but also sparked renewed interest in private investment, ensuring that Peggy's Cove continues to offer an authentic and memorable experience for all. Full implementation of the Harbour Islands Visitor Experience Strategy, particularly for Georges Island, has transformed it into a key attraction, drawing over 30,000 visitors since its opening.
- Efforts to establish a permanent national marketing program and expand beyond Atlantic Canada have significantly boosted Halifax's visibility on a broader scale.
- Adoption of ride-hailing services like Uber and Lyft has further enhanced accessibility, making it easier for visitors to navigate the region and enjoy its diverse offerings.
- The Wije'winen Centre, part of the Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre; designed with sustainability in mind, the turtle-shaped centre will feature solar panels, a green roof, and rainwater harvesting, symbolizing Indigenous teachings. Supported by approximately \$50 million in government funding and a \$1 land sale from HRM, the centre will provide expanded services for Halifax's Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, including a health clinic, community gathering spaces, and truth and reconciliation programming. Additionally, a Cultural Tourism Strategy launched in 2024 will promote Mi'kmaq culture through guided tours, traditional performances, and other authentic experiences, fostering both cultural awareness and economic opportunities.

The existing plan can be found at this link <https://discoverhalifaxdmo.com/integrated-tourism-master-plan/>

DISCUSSION

Plan Update – ITMP 2030

Discover Halifax and its partners recognize that the ITMP must be regularly reviewed. The ITMP review and update will be initiated with opportunities for all residents and relevant groups to participate and contribute to an updated plan. Development of a tourism plan is identified as a deliverable in the services agreement between the municipality & Discover Halifax. DH's role as the coordinator and backbone organization is consistent with the described destination management program in the service agreement.

The purpose of the review and update of the ITMP is to ensure that the ITMP:

- Aligns with relevant Federal, Provincial, and Municipal Plans;
- Has regard to the matters of significant regional or community interest;
- Is consistent with the objective of the Halifax Regional Municipality; and
- Conforms with the plans of Tourism Partners.

The project's ultimate objective is to establish new efforts and prioritize investments in the tourism industry. This will maximize the economic and social benefits for the people who live, visit, and invest in the region. This will be accomplished by identifying and aligning key relevant groups, current and envisioned projects, and tourism planning efforts for the region.

The updated plan will build on existing successes, advancing a comprehensive, collaborative, and strategic approach to tourism that unifies various sectors and stakeholders. This approach promotes sustainable and inclusive growth within the industry, ultimately benefiting all our communities.

By reigniting community-driven dialogue, DH aims to build on the important groundwork laid by previous efforts, setting forward-looking, community-focused goals that reflect the diverse needs of the over 200 communities across HRM. The ITMP has established a robust framework for Halifax's tourism growth, fostering collaboration and charting a clear course for the future. As HRM advances to the next phase through to 2030, the priority remains to maintain this momentum, ensuring Halifax continues to thrive as a vibrant, sustainable, and attractive destination for years to come.

Regional Engagement

In-person community engagement is a vital component of the updated ITMP. Discover Halifax's consultants will implement an engagement program to seek input and insight from key partners and residents. This engagement will provide a platform for meaningful dialogue on tourism's social and environmental impacts, ensuring that the resulting strategy is both sustainable and aligned with community values. Discover Halifax plans to conduct eight meetings across various locations within HRM to facilitate these discussions as follows:

1. Halifax Airport Area
2. Bedford-Sackville
3. Dartmouth-Cole Harbour
4. Halifax Peninsula
5. Peggy's Cove Coastal Region
6. Eastern Shore -Sheet Harbour
7. Eastern Shore - Musquodoboit Harbour
8. Musquodoboit Valley

The dates and locations for upcoming ITMP meetings and events will be announced once they are finalized with the consultants and will be shared through multiple communication channels and methods.

Tourism Sector Engagement

Discover Halifax estimates between 25-30 bilateral meetings with various relevant groups. Discover Halifax and its consultant will determine the relevant groups and partners for engagement. This work will include appropriate engagement with relevant groups and lead agencies as follows:

- Indigenous Tourism Leadership (supporting tourism strategies)
- African Nova Scotian Tourism Leadership (supporting tourism strategies)
- Acadian Tourism Leadership (supporting tourism strategies)
- Sectors (Accommodations, Retail, Food and Beverage, Tour Operators, Iconic Attractions, Nighttime Economy)
- Demand Generators and Infrastructure (Key relevant groups as identified)
- Marketing and Travel Trade (Key marketing partners as identified)
- Meetings and Conventions (M&C service providers and conference properties)
- Events (Key relevant groups as required)
- Transportation and Air Access (Airport, Rail, and transportation providers)
- Visitor Experience, Policy, Placemaking, and Wayfinding (City planning, Metro Transit, Parking, Build Nova Scotia, JRTA, etc.)
- Cruise & Shore Excursions (Port of Halifax, Atlantic Canada Cruise Association, etc) It will involve extensive engagement with community, stakeholders and other relevant organizations, to align with federal, provincial, and municipal strategies while promoting sustainable growth. .)

The consultant will consolidate and analyze the feedback to identify common themes, priorities, and recommendations. Then, using these insights, refine the tourism master plan, ensuring it reflects the diverse perspectives across HRM.

Project Administration and Guidance

The ITMP update will be resourced by full-time staff from Discover Halifax, who will manage the project consultants and handle contract administration. The Discover Halifax Board of Directors (the Board) and the ITMP Advisory Committee will provide broad leadership and guidance for the project. HRM has representatives on the Board and will have representatives on the advisory committee.

The Board will engage at crucial milestones, reviewing the consulting firm's approach and highlighting priority issues in Halifax's tourism industry. Board members may also join regional sessions and bilateral meetings relevant to their sectors. The Board will approve the final ITMP report before it is presented to Regional Council for adoption.

The ITMP Advisory Committee brings key partners with deep ties to community and economic development, many linked to or supporting the travel and tourism industry. Their role is to provide insights that ensure the ITMP aligns with broader community and economic priorities. The committee will meet several times during the ITMP process, offering input critical to maintaining a "community-first" approach. Their contributions help ensure the plan reflects the diverse needs and values of the region while also considering the social and environmental impacts of tourism.

Plan Endorsement

Discover Halifax aims to engage a consulting firm by early September 2024, with the project set for completion by March 28, 2025. The final plan will be brought to CPED and Regional Council in early 2025.

Regional Council's endorsement will be sought to grant official recognition to the plan, establishing it as a credible and authoritative guide for tourism development in the region and to ensure alignment with broader municipal priorities, promoting a unified approach to economic and community development.

Council support is crucial for securing buy-in from other levels of government, enabling effective collaboration among stakeholders, and ensuring the successful implementation of the plan. The endorsement also creates a framework for accountability, allowing the Council to monitor progress and oversee the plan's execution.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Discover Halifax and the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) are formalizing their partnership to jointly fund the update of the tourism master plan. ACOA is expected to provide financial support for this project. Discover Halifax plans to contribute matching funds to secure the overall project budget. Support from the municipality is through its existing, budgeted, operational funding of Discover Halifax. Additional contributions from HRM are not anticipated.

RISK CONSIDERATION

Risks associated with support for the ITMP 2030 are low. An ITMP will help to identify strategic risks in the area of tourism.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholder engagement will be undertaken by DH throughout the development of the ITMP 2030.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no environmental implications directly arising from the development of an ITMP. The 2019 ITMP was developed with a community first approach as a guiding principle, this approach is meant to reflect the value and diversity of the region, and recognize the social and environmental impacts of tourism on our communities. It is anticipated that the ITMP 2030 will have a similar approach to sustainability.

ALTERNATIVE

The Community Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee could decide not to forward the staff report to regional council for information.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter

7A The purposes of the Municipality are to

- (a) provide good government;
- (b) provide services, facilities and other things that, in the opinion of the Council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the Municipality; and
- (c) develop and maintain safe and viable communities.

29A (2) The Council may by by-law impose a marketing levy upon a person who, for a daily charge, fee or remuneration purchases accommodation in the Municipality.

29A (5) The marketing levy collected pursuant to this Section may be only used by the Council to promote tourism.

ATTACHMENTS

No attachments

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

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