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<b>Date</b>	Monday, September 24, 2018
<b>From</b>	Rob Armstrong, Acting Chief Administrative Officer
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Visitor Information Centre</b>
<b>Report No.</b> CAO2018-09	<b>Roll No.</b> N/a

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## Recommendation

That Committee of the Whole recommend Council of the Municipality of Meaford direct staff to explore the utilization of the Chamber of Commerce Apple to enhance visitor information services and bring forward a 2019 budget enhancement as necessary.

## Background

Following the service delivery review of Visitor Information Services at Council on Monday October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017, it was recommended that the Economic Development Advisory Committee review best practices for the delivery of Visitor Services and that they report back to Council prior to September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

The working group members were: Councillor Shirley Keaveney, Chair Victoria Yeh, Alan Boivin, Liz Harris, and public member Donna Earl.

The working group of the Economic Development Advisory Committee reviewed the terms of references at their January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

The working group recommendations are attached as appendix A.

The Terms of Reference of the working group are attached as appendix B.

## Analysis

Currently, the Visitor Information Centre is located at the Meaford Hall Arts & Cultural Facility in the Box Office Lobby. It is operated primarily as a self-serve centre providing information about local businesses, tourist attractions, maps and events. Municipal Staff operating the Box Office respond to visitor inquiries by phone, email or in person.

The centre operates year-round, 7 days a week when Meaford Hall is open, including some evenings, weekends and statutory holidays.

During the months of January to the end of August 2018, the Visitor Information Centre was open beyond typical business hours (8:30am-4:30pm at least until 7pm) 58% of the time, typical business hours 39% of the time and not open at all, 3% of the time.

The annual operating budget is \$21,750. This budget is used for the labour costs to answer phones, email inquiries, in person inquiries, stock the visitor information centre, and attend brochure swaps and applicable staff training.

The Meaford Chamber of Commerce operated Visitor Services in 2013. They saw a total number of visitors to the Meaford Chamber of Commerce office on Trowbridge and the Apple on Sykes street for the calendar year of 5,790. The Trowbridge location operated year round, Monday – Friday from 9 am to 4:30 pm. The Apple was open from July 1 to Labour Day, 7 days/week and then weekends until Thanksgiving. The hours of the Apple were Monday – Thursday 10am to 6pm, Friday from 10 am to 7pm, Saturday 10 am to 5 pm and Sunday 11 am to 3pm.

Since the visitor centre has been moved to Meaford Hall, their numbers have been:

2014 = 9,114,

2015 = 11,680,

2016 = 10,975,

2017 = 11,826

Prorated 2018 amount of 9,237.

The Meaford Chamber of Commerce Apple is in need of some repairs which would be the responsibility of the Meaford Chamber of Commerce. Consideration of this will factor into any partnership for this facility.

## Financial Impact

Should the Municipality of Meaford wish to enter into a partnership with the Meaford Chamber of Commerce to operate the Apple as an adjacent Visitor Information Service kiosk, a budget enhancement will be required as part of the 2019 budget process. Details on a potential partnership would still need to be discussed with the Chamber of Commerce and presented to Council.

Meaford Hall will continue to provide Visitor Services Information year round with an appropriate allocation.

## Implications

Over the past four years, Meaford Hall has established itself as one of the area's premier locations for visitor's information services. This location compliments and supports existing uses within Meaford Hall. During the summer of 2018, new signage was installed beside Sykes street to guide visitors to the location of visitor information centre and new signage directing people to the location of accessible public washrooms.

## Strategic Priorities

This report supports the mission, vision and values of the Municipality of Meaford, as well as the goals and objectives set out in Council's Strategic Priorities 2015-2018, particularly with respect to:

**Focus Area:** Growing Our Economy  
**Objective:** Establish Meaford as a Tourism Destination

- A.** Profile and market the wide range of visitor attractions across the Municipality of Meaford both regionally and provincially.
- B.** Promote the Municipality of Meaford as a four-season destination using a place-based marketing approach with particular emphasis on our natural environment, culture and heritage, leisure experiences and authenticity of place.

**Focus Area:** Growing Our Economy  
**Objective:** Enhance Strategic Partnerships

- A.** Work with agency and public sector partners not limited to the Meaford Chamber of Commerce, Meaford Business Improvement Association, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the Georgian Triangle Tourism Association, the Apple Pie Trail, Regional Tourism Ontario 7, the Four County Labour Market Planning Board, and provincial and federal funding departments.
- B.** Enhance collaborative marketing initiatives in partnership with other local attractions and businesses.

## Consultation and Communications

Tour of similar communities by Liz Harris and Shirley Keaveney (Appendix A)  
Meaford Chamber of Commerce Staff

Update provided to the BIA Board on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2018.

Consultation with Municipal Staff, Susan Lake Manager of Meaford Hall, Cathie Lee, Stephen Murray and Hailey Thomson.

## Conclusion

The delivery of visitor information services requires consistent hours, must be accessible, visible and have knowledgeable staff. The current set up at Meaford Hall meets these requirements, however an enhancement to the current model through a partnership with the Meaford Chamber of Commerce to operate a visitor information kiosk in the Apple should be explored further.

## Supporting Documentation

Appendix 1 – Visitor Information Economic Development Working Group Final Report

Appendix 2 – Visitor Information Economic Development Working Group Terms of References

Respectfully Submitted:

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Robert Armstrong, RPP  
Acting CAO / Director of Development and Environmental Services

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Prepared by:  
Stephen Murray, Economic Development and Tourism Officer

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# MEAFORD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE



## Visitor Information Working Group

Final Report

Prepared by: Victoria Yeh, Alan Boivin, Shirley Keaveney, Liz Harris, Donna Earl

July 11, 2018

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 1. Working Group Purpose (per Terms of Reference [TOR])

The purpose of the Visitor Information Services Working Group is to review the provision of Visitor Information Services and develop recommendations for the provision of those services in the future.

## 2. Objectives (per TOR)

- The objectives of the Visitor Information Services Working Group shall include:
  - A. Research into models and levels of service for visitor information in comparable communities, including but not limited to opening hours, online service provision, manned vs. unmanned services, cost of service provision.
  - B. Conducting a survey of visitors attending the Meaford Visitor Information Centre.
  - C. Making recommendations to Council on the future provision of visitor information services in the Municipality.

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## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 3A. Visitor Information Services in comparable communities

Based on conversations with Visitor Information Centres at neighbouring comparable communities, a physical tourism office with face-to-face contact is needed and worthwhile. Visitors of all ages are seeking information from visitor centres. Information sought is generally on local sights/activities, restaurants and accommodations. Many visitors are also looking for public restroom facilities.

Observations from visits to comparable neighbouring communities:

- **Creemore**
  - Brewery is essentially their tourism centre; Beer tastings, bus tour
  - Centre received grants for building improvements and maintenance of heritage architecture
- **Wasaga**
  - Tourism office combined with Chamber office; Visible, large flyer display area
  - 200 visitors / day
- **Collingwood**
  - Tourism office off main strip, combined with museum display
  - Will be phasing out visitor centre with flyers; to focus on face-to-face contact
- **Niagara-on-the-lake** is funded by Chamber only
- **Midland**
  - Visitor centre at harbour
  - Sports/rec centre is the visitor centre off-season
- **Hanover**
  - Year round Visitor centre
  - Operates cooperatively with library
- **Elora**
  - Year round 10am-5pm, operated by welcome centre staff; chamber driven funding.
  - Most common questions asked: gorge, accommodations and restaurants.
  - Seasonal community; trying to build winter activities awareness
- **Port Elgin**
  - Visitor centre run out of chamber office; operates 7 days/week
  - Tourism office funded by municipality

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### 3B. Survey of Visitors Attending the Meaford Visitor Information Centre

The Working Group suggests deploying the following survey to current visitors.

We strongly recommend deploying surveys with the parallel objective of **collecting email addresses** to build the Municipality's tourism database for future outreach efforts. Municipality needs to offer an incentive to people to share their email (e.g. monthly draw for a \$100 gift certificate to Meaford Hall)

#### **Proposed Survey Questions**

1. What is your age group?  
34 and under, 35-50, 51-64, 65+
2. Postal code
3. Where have you looked for information about Meaford?  
Meaford.ca / Visitor Info Centre / Social media / Word of mouth / Flyer / Other / Nowhere
4. What were the main reasons you came to Meaford today?  
I live here / Looking for things to do / Looking for accommodations / Looking for a place to eat / /  
Washroom / Directions / Other specify
5. Enter your email \_\_\_\_\_ and let us know if you would like to  
☐ Enter a draw for a \$100 gift certificate to Meaford Hall  
☐ Join the Meaford.ca mailing list for upcoming events.



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### 3C. Recommendations to Council on Future Provision of Visitor Information Services

#### Strategic Objectives

A Visitor Information Centre shall provide Meaford visitors and residents with information about the municipality and its tourist attractions including accommodations, dining, sights and entertainment. Such information shall help enable positive experiences and provide visitors with a reason to stay and return to Meaford.

Visitor Information Services needs to be built upon and support the Municipality's overall Tourism Strategy.

#### Considerations

- Partnerships and communication with other organization stakeholders should be strong to avoid duplication of work.
- Need to engage community and stakeholders and develop a simple way for them to participate.
- Visitor info must be accessible, universal, simple, friendly; make visitors feel comfortable asking for guidance
- While our principal focus is on Meaford, we need to collaborate with other visitor info centres in region
- Need a holistic plan: Online presence will give us REACH, and face-to-face interaction will give us DEPTH of contact with visitors

#### Recommendations

The following are the "Action Items" of Meaford's Tourism Strategy (per Council 2015-2018 Strategic Priorities), along with this working group's recommendations to support this strategy:

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### Action Item A:

“Profile and market the wide range of visitor attractions across the Municipality of Meaford both regionally and provincially.”

#### Working Group Recommendations:

- Need to evaluate reach and effectiveness of new [meaford.ca](http://meaford.ca) tourism video.
- Should work on a second tourism video highlighting winter activities and attractions
- Meaford should establish an “Ambassador” program wherein a core group of local volunteers (led by a paid coordinator) is sent on experiential tours of the Municipality’s many attractions in order to be able to authentically share their experiences with other residents and visitors and act as the face of Meaford’s tourist strategy.

### Action Item B:

“Promote the Municipality of Meaford as a four-season destination using a place-based marketing approach with particular emphasis on our natural environment, culture and heritage, leisure experiences and authenticity of place.”

#### Working Group Recommendations:

- Need to update central Tourist Map
- Re-open the Apple seasonally (Victoria Day through till Thanksgiving), 11am - 7pm, ideally 7 days/week. If budget is constrained, priority days to be Thursdays through Sundays + special events and holidays. Continue to utilize Meaford Hall during Winter months as primary Visitor Info Centre.
- The Apple has the best Reach with its excellent visibility along the main downtown strip, and is also an obvious and universal visual cue for both tourists and residents seeking information.
- Cost and Considerations: the Apple will require some upfront repairs to a small exterior wood panel and the A/C unit, and will incur future maintenance costs.
- Other options for partnerships: municipality, chamber, BIA, neighbouring community partnerships

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### Action Item C:

“Evaluate how to strategically expand existing events (such as MIFF and the Scarecrow Invasion) offered in the Municipality as well as developing new events as attractors to the area.”

#### Working Group Recommendations:

- Need to make a greater effort to involve Meaford in regional arts & culture events (e.g. Peak to Shore Festival, Kiwanis Music Festival, Georgian Bay Symphony, Fringe Festival, etc.)
- Help introduce new audiences to Meaford Hall with unique events (e.g. screening major sports events) in order to remove barriers to discovering this venue
- Municipality should consider hosting / co-operating on a major Winter event (e.g. cross-country skiing tour along rail trail)

### Action Item D:

“Implement and work towards the MEDS (Meaford Economic Development Strategy) as updated in July 2014.”

#### Working Group Recommendations:

This report supports our MEDS strategy by offering recommendations to greet, inform, educate, encourage and retain our visitors, thus working towards the mission of growing the number of tourism visits to Meaford which eventually will grow the population of Meaford and increase our tax base allowing economic development and other initiatives to move forward.

The MEDS (Meaford Economic Development Strategy), originally adopted by council Feb. 5th, 2010 is summarized below:

- Tourism is 1 of 4 primary pillars along with agribusiness, retail and green.
- Mission of MEDS – To “develop specific strategies for growing the economic strength and resilience of the Municipality of Meaford”.
- Focused on growing municipal tax revenue 30% by 2020 – we know most new residents of Meaford arrive first as tourists or visitors confirming the necessity of strong welcome centre services.
- Aim – to increase tourist visits by 25%, double overnight stays, double number of off season visitors and make Meaford known as a cultural destination.
- Tourism: There are four main strategies in the Tourism pillar:

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1. Preserve & develop the attractions we already have • Community Improvement Plan Heritage Designation • Waterfront • Communities in Bloom • Urban forestry Develop new attractions • Events, especially in the off-season • Wellness as a potential tourism theme for Meaford (eg encourage development of spas) • Snowmobiling & winter attractions.

2. Market Meaford to our target audience. Develop clear marketing focus and strategies • Expand marketing range • Participate in regional marketing • Market cross-over of other pillars with Tourism, cover all tourism assets, but focus especially on culture & outdoor recreation

3. February 5, 2010 Meaford Economic Development Strategy Page 14 Version 2
  - Support people exceptionally well when they're here.

4. Signage • Customer service • Cross-attraction linkages



# Council's Strategic Priorities

October 2015

2015-2018





# Growing Our economy

## ► Establish Meaford as a Tourism Destination

Action Items	
<b>A</b>	Profile and market the wide range of visitor attractions across the Municipality of Meaford both regionally and provincially.
<b>B</b>	Promote the Municipality of Meaford as a four-season destination using a place-based marketing approach with particular emphasis on our natural environment, culture and heritage, leisure experiences and authenticity of place.
<b>C</b>	Evaluate how to strategically expand existing events (such as MIFF and the Scarecrow Invasion) offered in the Municipality as well as developing new events as attractors to the area.
<b>D</b>	Implement and work towards the MEDS strategy as updated in July 2014.

## ► Enhance Strategic Partnerships

Action Items	
<b>A</b>	Work in partnership with Grey County to support and align with their economic development and tourism strategies.
<b>B</b>	Work with a range of community partners not limited to service clubs, not-for-profit organizations, healthcare providers and agencies, education providers, private business and tourism operators.
<b>C</b>	Ensure that resourcing and funding is maximized through applications for relevant grants from foundations and other levels of government.
<b>D</b>	Work with agency and public sector partners not limited to the Meaford Chamber of Commerce, Meaford Business Improvement Association, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the Georgian Triangle Tourism Association, the Apple Pie Trail, Regional Tourism Ontario 7, the Four County Labour Market Planning Board, and provincial and federal funding departments.
<b>E</b>	Enhance collaborative marketing initiatives in partnership with other local attractions and businesses.

## Economic Development Advisory Committee

### Visitor Information Services Working Group Terms of Reference

#### **1. Introduction**

Council of the Municipality of Meaford has requested that the Economic Development Advisory Committee review the provision of Visitor Information Services within the Municipality and provide recommendations to Council for service provision in 2019 and onwards.

The *Visitor Information Services Working Group* has been created to assist the Economic Development Advisory Committee in completing research and developing recommendation that can be considered by the Advisory Committee and presented to Council.

#### **2. Purpose**

The purpose of the *Visitor Information Services Working Group* is to review the provision of Visitor Information Services and develop recommendations for the provision of those services in the future.

#### **3. Objectives**

The objectives of the *Visitor Information Services Working Group* shall include:

- 3.1. Research into models and levels of service for visitor information in comparable communities, including but not limited to opening hours, online service provision, manned vs. unmanned services, cost of service provision.
- 3.2. Conducting a survey of visitors attending the Meaford Visitor Information Centre.
- 3.3. Making recommendations to Council on the future provision of visitor information services in the Municipality.

#### **4. Committee Composition**

Membership on the *Visitor Information Services Working Group* will consist of at least three members of the Economic Development Advisory Committee, and other such members of the public that the Advisory Committee deems appropriate.

Members shall be nominated in an open meeting of the Economic Development Advisory Committee.

## **5. Chairperson & Reporting Relationship**

5.1. The *Visitor Information Services Working Group* shall elect a Chair from the members appointed by the Economic Development Advisory Committee.

5.2. Decisions of the Working Group shall be reached by consensus.

5.3. The *Visitor Information Services Working Group* shall make recommendations to the Economic Development Advisory Committee.

5.4. The Advisory Committee shall bring a report to Council prior to September 30, 2018 with recommendations on the future provision of visitor information services in the Municipality.

## **6. Committee Term**

The *Visitor Information Services Working Group* shall conduct research between January 2018 and August 2018, and make recommendations to Council via the Economic Development Advisory Committee prior to September 30, 2018.

## **7. Conduct**

The Working Group shall meet as deemed necessary by its members.

Summary notes from each meeting shall be published as part of the Economic Development Advisory Committee agenda, and a verbal report shall be presented.