

County holds online Tourism and Strategy Action Plan

Written By PAULA BROWN

Dufferin County held its community information session for the Tourism and Strategy Action Plan on Tuesday (Aug. 11).

The event, which was held virtually via Zoom, was co-hosted by Terrilyn Kunopaski and Zach Vanasse, from Bannikin Travel & Tourism, the consulting firm working with Dufferin County on the project.

At the beginning of the presentation Kunopaski spoke about the tourism industry in Ontario which, pre-COVID-19, brought in approximately \$32 billion annually.

"A lot of local tourism experiences are in high demand," said Kunopaski. "Firstly, international travel isn't all that accessible anymore, I'm not sure it is all that desirable anymore at least for the time being, so it's giving those places that are closer to home more visibility. With the concept of exploring your own backyard, those regions are being given a chance to shine."

Kunopaski also touched on how tourism isn't about people visiting for a short time but says it is about leaving a mark and driving investments economically.

Dufferin County began consulting with Bannikin through the Town of Orangeville following the end of their contract with Headwaters Tourism Association. In September 2019 Dufferin County council chose not to renew its \$90,000 per year contract with Headwaters Tourism Association, following a report from the department of Planning, Economic Development and Culture ending the 25 year partnership.

The tourism project is set up into three phases with the first starting back in June with research, the information session, and interviews and workshops with stakeholders. The second phase, which starts in September, will be the actual development of the strategy plan. In the final phase the strategy will be presented to Dufferin County council.

Following the presentation a number of the 20 participants in the meeting weighed in on possibilities for the plan.

"The great outdoors and agri-tourism are key pillars to Dufferin County's tourism potential," said Kunopaski. "No theme parks needed."

A lack of unique accommodations in the community was noted as a gap for tourism in Dufferin County. Rather than have brand name chains for hotels, Bannikin suggests accommodations that show the character of Dufferin County.

"Smaller in size and with a sort of charm that would complement the region," said Kunopaski.

One participant in the session spoke about the number of hiking trails and cycling paths in Dufferin County, which Vanasse suggested were both being looked at as a big part in attracting visitors.

David Nairn, artistic director at Theatre Orangeville, addressed arts and culture as a tourism point.

"I feel that we really need to not just sell that abroad, but we need to let the people of Dufferin County know what tremendous creative assets they have here," Nairn said.

Participants had suggestions from weddings, day trips, craft beer tours, changing the name of the county and cohesively branding the different municipalities and townships.

?I don't think that tourism in Dufferin needs to be one thing but what it does need to be is have a brand that when people think about tourism in Dufferin, they think about what it means to them,? said Karisa Downey, Economic Development Officer at Dufferin County.

If there is anything that became apparent in the meeting was the drive for ?experiences? in the county as a tourist attraction.

The next step in the tourism plan will be a stakeholder's survey the week on Aug. 24.