

Halton Hills Tourism Strategy



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Tourism Strategy

Prepared by:

Kathleen Dills, Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce

Danielle Edwards, Town of Halton Hills

Doug Penrice, Town of Halton Hills

Laurent Thibault, Chair Halton Hills Cultural Roundtable & Tourism Committee Member

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Background

For many years, Halton Hills paid very little attention to tourism either in terms of Town policy or by the citizens themselves. Essentially, the approach consisted of the Town allocating about \$30,000 to the Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce (Chamber) to print and distribute a Visitor's Guide, and maintain an information function at the Chamber office. Electronic Information that might have been of interest to potential visitors was contained within the main Chamber web site. There was no committee or other organization focused on tourism, and virtually no businesses in the community thought of themselves as in the tourism business.

In 2009 at the bequest of Council the Halton Hills Tourism Committee was formed to provide support and volunteers to assist the Chamber in tourism related objectives. Administration and oversight of the Chamber and its tourism role was transferred to the Economic Development Officer. The Committee has been meeting regularly and while some new initiatives have been launched the overall success has been limited.

The committee now believes it is time to develop a more comprehensive and strategic approach to tourism. This is timely since several major Town planning initiatives have all touched on tourism and provide a lot of information that can be the basis of a tourism strategy. These are:

- The Integrated Community Sustainability Strategy (**ICSS**),
<http://www.haltonhills.ca/initiatives/Sustainability-Strategy.php>
- The Halton Hills Strategic Plan – 2031
<http://www.haltonhills.ca/initiatives/strat-plan.php>
- The Economic Strategy Action Plan (**ESAP**),
<http://www.haltonhills.ca/initiatives/EconomicDevelopmentMP.php>
- The Cultural Master Plan (**CMP**)
http://www.haltonhills.ca/initiatives/pdf/masterplans/CMP/HaltonHills_Cultural_Master_Plan_FINAL.pdf
- The development of a Community Brand (**CB**)
<http://www.haltonhills.ca/initiatives/TownBranding.php>

The following sections review these and other key documents in order to extract some guidance for a tourism strategy.

The Halton Hills Strategic Plan – 2031 (HHSP)

This document provides comprehensive direction for virtually all Town activities, and so it is useful to review what it says about Tourism. Moreover, it provides a good terms of reference to ensure that that any tourism promotion material is authentic in how it speaks about Halton Hills.

The Town’s community vision is:

Halton Hills is a vibrant and distinctive small Town in the Greater Golden Horseshoe

- characterized by its spectacular countryside, natural heritage system and cultural heritage;
- enriched by its unique blend of urban and rural interconnected communities and neighbourhoods; and
- supported by its prosperous employment areas.

The corporate mission includes nine Strategic Directions:

- A. Foster a Healthy Community
- B. Preserve, Protect and Enhance Our Environment
- C. Foster a Prosperous Economy
- D. Preserve, Protect and Promote Our Distinctive History
- E. Preserve, Protect and Enhance Our Countryside
- F. Protect and Enhance Our Agriculture
- G. Achieve Sustainable Growth
- H. Provide Sustainable Infrastructure & Services
- I. Provide Responsive, Effective Municipal Government

Under mission component “C”, one finds eleven objectives, one of which is:

C.10 - To promote opportunities for tourism that are linked to the Town’s natural and cultural heritage and countryside character. The following two “actions” are listed under this objective:

- C10 (a) Work with the Chamber of Commerce, BIAs and the Region to promote tourism that leverages agri-tourism, eco-tourism, heritage and countryside opportunities.
- C10 (b) Develop a phased implementation strategy, inclusive of financing and priorities.

Under “D”, one finds 5 objectives, one of which is:

D.4 - To use the conservation of built heritage and cultural heritage landscape resources to enhance the character and vitality of neighbourhoods, and provide opportunities for economic development and tourism.

The following four “actions” are listed under this objective:

- D.4.(a) Work with the Chamber of Commerce, BIA's and the Region to promote tourism that leverages agri-tourism, eco-tourism, heritage and countryside opportunities.
- D.5.(a) Working with local historical organizations, prepare interpretive materials that demonstrate how the community's built heritage and cultural heritage landscapes functioned over time, as part of the preparation of a Arts, Culture and Heritage Strategic Action Plan.
- D.5.(b) Showcase opportunities to educate residents and visitors on the Town's built heritage and cultural heritage landscapes
- D.5.(c) Explore a signage program for historical rural communities.

[The Economic Pillar of the Integrated Community Sustainability Strategy \(ICSS - 2013\)](#)

The committee that deliberated at great length the underlying basis of a sustainable economy for Halton Hills arrived at a number of conclusions that relate to tourism, including:

- *One of Halton Hills' unique assets is that the great majority of its land area is either protected by the Greenbelt and Niagara Escarpment Plan and/or classified as prime agricultural lands. This sets our community apart from others that are already heavily urbanized to the South and east.*

The economic pillar section of the ICSS sets out 9 themes, and in each theme outlines the hopes & dreams; where we are now; and goals. One of the themes was Tourism, in which the report states:

“In 2060, Halton Hills will have a robust and viable tourism sector based on the Town's unique natural countryside, agricultural sector, and recreation opportunities. Halton Hills is now recognizing the growing importance of visitors/tourists as an important component of its economy. The Town is developing a branding strategy to help identify the assets it has to offer to its target audiences in the GTA, and to expand the contribution of tourism to the local economy.”

The four stated goals are:

- Develop tourism opportunities that capitalize on the natural and cultural resources of Halton Hills, while minimizing environmental impacts to biodiversity, natural heritage and habitats.
- Develop historic downtown areas so that they have a diversified offering of boutique, retail and other services and can host social activities such as farmers markets, festivals and other events.
- Develop partnerships with bordering municipalities (e.g. Caledon, Milton, and Wellington) that share similar tourism assets.
- Effectively promote and communicate tourism opportunities in Halton Hills.

The Economic Strategic Action Plan (ESAP)

This strategy document, completed in 2012, looked at a number of sectors/opportunities that could enhance the economic prosperity of the Town. With respect to tourism, the report’s introduction said:

*“**Tourism** bears closer examination. Halton Hills is attractive for hikers (geocaching and the Bruce Trail), cyclists, equestrians and day trippers from the GTA, however there are very few commercial services catering to visitors. As a result it is under-developed as an economic generator. For example there is only one “flagged” hotel/motel providing a total of 64 guest rooms in the Town. Several observers remarked on the potential for hotel development adjacent to the Toronto Premium Outlet Mall which is under construction at Trafalgar and Steeles in the 401 Corridor. The Mall is expected to attract as many as 2 million shopping trips per year and that level of activity, combined with the number of commercial travelers expected to be calling on the businesses and industries in the 401 corridor, could represent a sufficient volume to warrant an investment in a new hotel facility in the vicinity. Another challenge identified is devising a way to link the Mall to downtown Georgetown and Acton and draw shoppers north to the urban areas to sample the rest of the community.”*

The Action Plan has seven goals. The elements of some of those that relate directly to tourism are reproduced below. Note that Goal 7 relates entirely to tourism.

Goal # 4 – Establish Halton Hills as a competitive location for new business investment.

Action 4.8 Study the feasibility for the development of a Hotel Conference/Entertainment complex at the Hwy 401 Corridor.

Goal # 6 Create a healthy, vibrant, connected community

Action 6.2 Provide free WiFi services in public meeting spaces (Civic Centre, Library and Recreations Centres). Encourage owners of cafes and restaurants to offer free WiFi and create “3rd place” for people to meet

Action 6.3 Work with Calloway REIT & Simon Properties (developer of Toronto Premium Outlet) to link the centre with Halton Hills area attractions and businesses.

Action 6.5 Continue the development of walking and cycling infrastructure in Halton Hills.

Action 6.7 Engage OMAFRA and the BIAs to conduct a retail gap analysis & identify opportunities for independent retail operations and services in Acton & Georgetown

Action 6.8 Continue the development of the natural/cultural features and related commercial opportunities in the Glen Williams area.

Action 6.9 Implement and promote the Community Improvement Plan to encourage further commercial/retail development in downtown Georgetown, Guelph Street and Acton

Goal 7: Develop the tourism infrastructure in Halton Hills

Future Vision : Halton Hills is a favourite location for day trippers, hikers, cyclists, geocachers and equestrians attracted to the natural features and rolling hills of the Niagara Escarpment, the Credit River Valley, Conservation Areas and the rural countryside.

The Town’s arenas, ball fields and recreation centre attract tournaments and league play building a base for “sports tourism”.

There is a wide range of entrepreneurial businesses including gift shops, antique stores, cafes, and restaurants, B&Bs, equipment rentals and other services catering to residents and visitors alike.

A variety of comfortable accommodations are available to serve the needs of tourists and commercial travelers.

The communities’ two downtowns are celebrated for their authentic small town experiences. BIA members work to provide an attractive alternative to the big box experience. The downtown farmers markets in Georgetown and Acton are a source of fresh produce and unique artisan products appealing to visitors and residents alike.

Objective: Invest in programs/infrastructure to attract visitors and support entrepreneurial ventures to capture tourism expenditures.

Performance Measures:

Measurement Data

1. Number of visitors to Conservation Areas & public parks & attendance at select events and festivals
2. Progress on Hotel Feasibility Study
3. Number of new businesses established in “Accommodation & Food” and “Arts, Entertainments and Recreation” sectors

Action 7.1 Form a Steering Committee to conduct an overall review of tourism promotion in Halton Hills and the current Tourism Agreement with the Chamber

Action 7.2 Undertake a feasibility study for the development of a Hotel at the Hwy 401 Corridor. (same as Action 4.8)

Action 7.3 Work with the Halton Region Tourism Coordinator to promote Halton Hills for culinary tourism, Agri-tourism, cycling and other initiatives

Action 7.4 Incorporate new brand, logo, tag lines or community messaging that will be developed by the Branding Project in tourism promotional material

Action 7.5 Provide the Halton Hills Tourism Committee a working budget for event and location promotion

Action 7.6 Provide a business perspective to the discussion regarding a Halton Hills Cultural Master Plan

Action 7.7 Expand the sports tourism initiative that is working with Recreation and Parks to connect with event organizers.

Action 7.8 Explore “co-op media” promotional opportunities with private sector operators and the Chamber

In the concluding paragraph, the report states:

*The **Culture** industry is not a feature in Halton Hills’ economy in the same sense of as it is in Toronto, Stratford or Niagara on the Lake. However local artists and crafts-persons are very important to the quality of life in the community. In the hamlet of Glen Williams, an arts and crafts studio and gallery has been created which has the potential to draw tourists to the area. **The Halton Hills Cultural Roundtable in partnership with the Town is in the process of developing a Cultural Master Plan. Results of this study may be incorporated into a further Action Items related to economic development.***

The Cultural Master Plan (CMP)

The Town's Cultural Master Plan was a joint project with the HH Cultural Roundtable (**HHCR**), under the leadership of Beatrice Sharkey, and was completed in July 2013. Since the cultural dimension of Halton Hills is recognized as an important asset that attracts visitors, understanding the key findings and recommendations is very relevant to the development of a tourism strategy.

Attracting tourists is all about being unique and different. In its consultations throughout HH, the CMP consultants heard the following definitions of "Culture". These make it clear that the culture needs to be at the heart of a tourism strategy.

- Culture is what sets our Town apart from other places
- Culture is the look feel and vibe of a community
- Culture is the differentiator
- Culture is architectural distinctiveness
- Culture is the heart and soul of the community
- Culture is a way of life
- Culture is an exhibition of engagement by citizens, residents and visitors to a community identity
- Culture is entertainment for eyes ears, body and mind
- Culture is the face of the community
- Culture is a distraction from the ordinary and tedium of life
- Culture is the extra beyond basic living that adds the spice to life
- Culture is music that creates a mood
- Culture is dance, the act of moving that is uplifting
- Culture is theatre that grabs the imagination
- Culture is art of many types that makes your everyday life have beauty
- Culture is a reflection of the past and a look into the future
- Culture is an economic driver

Through the use of "location quotient" analysis, the report establishes that the economic output of the "Creative Sector" (ie: Arts, Entertainment & Recreation combined with the Information and Cultural Industries) in HH amounts to \$38 million.

The report notes: *"All the hype about culture and heritage tourism tells communities they need culture, entertainment and heritage destinations, as well as food, shopping, festivals and fairs. When they have all that, the tourists should flock in. It's not a bad message and it does have validity – there is a certain amount of build-it-and-they-will come, particularly for communities and regions organizing around themes like wine in Niagara, the beach in Cobourg or theatre in Niagara-on-the-Lake."*

The key challenges:

The report summarizes the essential challenge for tourism in HH as follows:

“The variety, quality and number of cultural resources in Halton Hills position the community to attract culture and heritage travellers. Yet, Halton Hills competes with a variety of communities looking to bring in cultural and heritage tourists and has several obstacles to attracting them including a lack of accommodations, dispersed community hubs and lack of signature public space.”

Moreover, *“Another significant issue Halton Hills must overcome is a lack of “cross-pollination” between potential destinations. Currently local destinations can’t or won’t work together and they are unaware of one another’s offerings. There is an apparent disconnect between the broader RTO 3 Tourism goals and those of Halton Hills as well as the geographic challenges of being at the very south end of the “Hills of Head waters” catchment area. Packaging of destinations and education about what is available in Halton Hills as a whole is crucial to coordinating an experience that culture and heritage tourists will seek”*

The report defined culture very broadly, and provides three areas of recommendations including:

- Physical Design Potentials Plan,
- Sector Management Recommendations and
- Project-Specific Recommendations

These are supported by a wide variety of actions ranging from policies, organizational enhancements and new partnerships through to practical initiatives to increase the economic benefit from cultural tourism.

Of the five main themes of the CMP, three in particular are directly relevant to tourism:

- a) Upgrade the physical design aspects of our community to better promote local unique features and our heritage
- b) Ensure that our community’s volunteers are strongly supported as they are contributing a lot to our overall quality of life
- c) Increase information access and sharing both within the cultural sectors and across our community

The report notes that:

“With a variety of unique cultural assets, Halton Hills has great potential to leverage its quality of place among its west GTA neighbours.”

It also notes:

“Analysis of the workforce sectors shows that Halton Hills is strong enough to establish itself as a destination for arts, entertainment and recreation.”

The report also identified many “character areas” that can be promoted to attract visitors.

One outcome of great value to a tourism strategy in the comprehensive data base of some 684 cultural resources, including community cultural organizations, creative cultural industries, cultural heritage, natural heritage, spaces and facilities, and festivals and events.

These are all classified by categories and tagged with coordinates capable of being displayed on Google Maps. The CMP report recommends that the Town: “Develop an interactive cultural assets function for residents and tourists using the cultural database information collected during the Cultural Master Plan exercise.”

The CMP has several recommendations with respect to attracting visitors to the TPO Mall such as:

- A greater presence at the TPO (eg: artists)
- Attracting a hotel adjacent to the TPO

There are also additional more general recommendations, including:

- Support cultural entrepreneurs and promote local business investment in culture.
- Invest in cultural development to attract creative industries and cultural tourism
- Facilitate increased communication, partnerships and networks between culture sector individuals and organizations and businesses.
- Inform new and existing residents of the wide array of cultural opportunities in Halton Hills.
- Enhance the identity and sense of pride in Halton Hills by increasing access to and visibility of the wealth of cultural resources available.
- Provide and coordinate community-wide cultural events and programs that promote local interaction.
- Developing interpretive features across Halton Hills to celebrate its unique history/heritage
- Developing a circulation system that establishes a clear and understandable hierarchy of routes, links cultural features and destinations together, and creates a “scenic” journey through the community
- Feature the Town’s natural heritage in tourism planning ie: Willow Park; Niagara Escarpment; Bruce Trail; Credit River

Overall, the CMP makes a strong case that HH tourism should have a strong cultural tourism component.

The Community Brand

One of the significant challenges in developing a tourism strategy for any community is coming up with a brand. A brand is not a logo or a tag line. In essence a brand is: what thoughts come to mind when people think of you; what you are known for; what makes you unique.

Fortunately, the recently completed HH community brand project already provides:

- a clear articulation of the values held by HH residents (connected; committed; respectful; resourceful);
- a rallying point that enables our communities to find common feeling and purpose;
- and identifies the distinctive character of our community,

The community brand has its roots in the major documents that have already been reviewed in previous sections above (particularly the vision articulated in the ICSS and the CMP).

The HH brand assets have been identified as Community; Character; Countryside, which together provide a very high quality of life. It is expressed by symbols that build upon the words “halton hills”, and its abbreviation “hh”, including an amusing “smiling face” in the appropriate context. are presented in warm brown, distinctive clean topography; orange, brown, yellow and grey colours. The tag line is “The Small Town Way”.

The HH character is: Real; Friendly; Lively, and our “voice” is an expression of our character. Our voice should always be:

- Real: Natural, Straightforward and Authentic
- Friendly: Approachable, Neighbourly and Down-to-earth
- Lively: Energetic, Engaging and Active

The Positioning is “Living at its best”, which rests on a combination of Urban + Rural; Town + Country, in a community that is friendly and safe, and has a vibrant offering of culture, nature, heritage and recreation.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats Analysis (SWOT)

In order to develop a workable long term plan it is advisable to determine through a SWOT analysis, data which will be required in developing such a plan and further to know what resources will be needed to implement the plan and to foster its growth.

Strengths

- Proximity to the GTA;
- Excellent road connections to the GTA;
- Unspoiled rural areas, 87% of Halton Hills is open space, agricultural land, Greenbelt or the Niagara Escarpment;
- The Bruce Trail crosses Halton Hills on the west side of the municipality; this part of the trail is the closest to Toronto;
- Many agri-tourism operators including pick your own farms, horse operations and others;
- Extensive rural roadways suitable for cycling (Halton Hills has developed a Cycling Master Plan);
- Municipal trail system;
- Many active cultural organizations including Globe Theatre, Georgetown Little Theatre, Acton Dinner Theatre and over 25 other cultural organizations;
- Historic and active downtowns;
- Many fine and casual dining establishments;
- Well established and active sports organizations hosting tournaments;
- Halton Hills is committed to promoting tourism;
- Good working relationships between the Town and volunteer organizations;
- Over 400 yearly successful community events such as Acton and Georgetown Fall Fairs, Highland Games, Classic Car Shows
- Good working relationship with Halton Region and other municipalities;
- Growing population base
- Helson Gallery and proposed Red Door Gallery provide greater opportunities in Downtown Georgetown

Weaknesses

- Lack of overnight accommodation;
- No common marketing plan;
- No specific marketing aimed at cyclist, sports organizations or equestrians sports;
- Fractured tourism areas each promoting their own identifies;
- Neighbouring areas more advanced in tourism promotion;
- Very limited financial resources;
- Over reliance on volunteers for all events and projects;
- Many businesses don't recognize the value of tourists;
- Sports organizations don't involve other groups in planning events;
- Little networking with adjacent areas; tourists don't recognize boundaries;

Opportunities

- Aging boomer population will want to enjoy attractions close to home, stay vacations;
- Agri-tourism operations are growing;
- Shop local and eat local promotions will attract consumers to small communities;
- Partnership between the Tourism Committee, the Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce and the Halton Hills Cultural Roundtable will enhance tourism activities.

Threats

- RTO # 3 may focus more attention on south Halton and Hamilton, impeding the efforts of Halton Hills;
- Hamlets and other areas of Halton Hills will continue to promote their own identities;
- Local businesses won't 'buy-in' to local and regional promotions;
- Lack of funding for a comprehensive marketing plan;
- Other area municipalities that are close to Halton Hills develop plans which could dilute Halton Hills message in the marketplace.

Elements of a Tourism Strategy

The purpose of having a strategy is to stimulate tourism as one component of the HH economy that has the potential to bring income into the town and create local jobs.

- 1) The tourism assets of HH
 - The Greenbelt
 - The escarpment & Bruce Trail
 - The Parks, conservation areas,
 - The TPO as a major attraction
 - The cultural facilities, galleries, theatres

Recommendations

Organization

- Since tourism in this strategy is primarily seen as one aspect of economic development, it is appropriate that the leadership for tourism rest with the Economic Development Officer (EDO), reporting to the Town's Economic Development Committee (EDC)
- The Halton Hills Tourism Committee (HHTC) should continue to function in an advisory capacity to the EDO and the EDC

- That the current Tourism Service Agreement with the Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce be extended for a period of three years

Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce

The Chamber provides tourism services for the community the Town funds these activities with an annual \$30,000.00 grant. Concerns have been expressed about the effectiveness of the partnership and the agreement has been renewed on a yearly basis pending further study and review. It is recommended that the agreement be extended for a period of three years with amendments to the current agreement.

Promotional activities have changed substantially in the last few years as the influence of print media has declined and the internet has become the main source of information for tourists, businesses and residents. The Chamber will need to address this in a number of ways that will be reflected in the agreement.

A dedicated part time staff member will need to be engaged to keep data current on multiple web sites. The Town's Web Master will provide assistance to the Chamber in setting up the most efficient process. Currently there are a number of data bases in use in the community that have been coordinated in regards to data entry.

Community outreach at tourism related events has proven to be effective and the Chamber will coordinate the staffing and brochure distribution at these events. This will be undertaken by the part time tourism coordinator, the events will be selected by the Chamber and the Tourism Committee.

The Visitor Guide should continue to be produced in partnership with The Independent & Free Press, and distributed through the Chamber distribution channels. Editorial content will be provided by the Chamber and the HHTC.

While the importance of printed material is in decline many of our local attractions are still producing printed materials. The Chamber will continue to maintain information boxes in selected locations in the community.

The Chamber will maintain a data base of tourist operators and tourists these lists will allow the Chamber to continue to send quarterly newsletters.

Halton Hills Tourism Committee

The Committee to be chaired by a member of Council appointed by the Mayor, members will include the General Manager of the Chamber, Managers of the Acton and Georgetown BIA (or designate), the EDO and members of the business community with an emphasis on tourism. (Terms of reference are attached as Appendix "B").

Web Site

Currently there is no web site devoted to tourism in Halton Hills with the exception of a mobile site www.tourismhaltonhills.ca that was developed by the Town's web master. The Chamber maintains the data base for this site.

The HHCR in partnership with the Town and others developed a web site www.myhaltonhills.ca which can best be described as a community site and may not be fully suitable for a tourism dedicated site.

It is recommended that a dedicated tourism web site be developed that mirrors what is generally found in the industry. The site would provide information on attractions, where to shop, stay and eat and be fully compatible with the current mobile site. Further the site would provide seamless links to community and business web sites. It would be designed to house videos of area attractions and have a high content of images. Once developed the Chamber would continue to import that data. The site would host ads for businesses that are **tourism related only** this would allow the site to be self-financing. It is recommended that that Town's webmaster develop the site, funding in the amount of \$7,500.00 is available for this project from the capital account that was established to develop the Economic Development Strategy.

Partnerships

There are a number of local organizations including the HHCR, Halton Federation of Agriculture, Chamber of Commerce, Norval Community Association, Williams Mill and the various departments from the Town including, Economic Development, Recreation and Parks, Libraries and HH Cultural Centre that interact on tourism related initiatives (this is a partial list). With the large number of partners it is difficult to determine what each group is doing and this could lead to a duplication of effort. There are in many cases cross representation of members which provide continuity. It is recommended that an information sharing exchange program be implemented whereby newsletters and communications are shared freely with all groups.

Outside Partners.

The "Hills of the Headwaters" organization, is a tourism marketing organization for tourism destinations primarily in Caledon, Dufferin and York Region has a philosophy and focus which is very similar to the approach of HH. Accordingly, HH should develop a closer relationship with Headwaters and explore joint marketing initiatives.

HH is within the boundaries of the provincial Regional Tourism Organization number three (RTO #3) tourism marketing organization. While the primary focus of RTO #3 is on the larger urban areas in the south, HH needs to maintain a close relationship with it and position itself to take advantage of programs and initiatives that could benefit HH. The responsibility for maintaining the relationship with RTO #3 should rest with the Chamber.

In 2012 the Region of Halton embarked on a tourism strategy which included the hiring of Tourism Co-ordinator and developed programs related to agri-tourism and culinary tourism. The Chamber and the EDO are the primary point of contact with the Region and the Tourism Co-coordinator serves on the HHTC. It is recommended to continue to engage fully with the Region and the other area municipalities on joint promotions and marketing. One pressing matter is the development of tourism map of the Region similar to the Eat Local map produced by the Region.

Focus on the distinct towns/hamlets

- One of the key findings about HH, going back to even the 1998 economic development strategy report, is that while there is considerable awareness of Georgetown, Acton, and Glen Williams, potential visitors have no “mental picture” of the location of Halton Hills. The recent CB project confirmed that residents of HH have a strong allegiance to, and “sense of place” with respect to, their small town or hamlet within HH. The implication for a tourism strategy is clearly that it would be tough going to market the amorphous geographic entity called HH, and it would be much more effective to promote each distinct town or hamlet within it tying the areas together under the Community Brand
- Integrate cultural and tourism considerations into the 1,000 Acre Secondary Plan ie: Vision Georgetown project

Toronto Premium Outlets (TPO)

The TPO opened in August 2013 and has been an overwhelming success for the operators. While the Town has benefited from the jobs created and the property taxes there are other opportunities that have not been fully exploited. The Town has set aside funds to initiate actions that will result in increased community benefits, while it is not contingent on the TPO partnering with the Town for maximum result all efforts will be taken to partner with the TPO.

The following actions are recommended:

- Install Town of Halton directional signs at the exists (BIAs, parks, trails and other attractions)
- Install in partnership with the TPO electronic way finding signs in the customer service areas (large touch screens)
- Request an area where local artists can display
- Apply for a Tourism Oriented Directional Sign (TODS) to direct traffic to Downtown Acton and Georgetown
- Continue to supply lure brochures for the Customer Service Area
- Encourage Halton Hills Days, historical displays, local entertainment

- Organize a familiarization tour for TPO staff
- Partner with TPO on group travel marketing

Sports Tourism

The Town has invested in sports facilities to accommodate the growing needs of the community. The sports organisations continue to use most of the peak hours for direct community use or to host tournaments. In consultation with the Director of Recreation and Parks, he has advised that it would not be feasible to attract other events as this would compromise the current users in their own operations.

However a more comprehensive plan to engage with the organizers would have merit. Measures would include a direct liaison with tournament organizers, a welcome package for participants and access to the Tourism web site.

Agri-Tourism and Culinary Tourism

The Region of Halton has designated both Agri-Tourism and Culinary Tourism as priorities. Policies and Action Plans have been developed and implementation is ongoing. Recent initiatives have included the Pumpkin Trial, Harvest Halton Dinner and eat local programs aimed at farmers and restaurants. The Town will continue to work with the Region on these programs to aid our local agriculture industry.

Equine Industry

Halton Region has a large number of equine operations with a significant number located in Halton Hills. The Hills of the Headwaters and King Township are working in partnership to promote the industry and it is recommended that Halton Hills and Halton Region investigate joining this partnership.

Long Term Stable Funding

The need to provide long term stable funding is a pre-requisite for a successful strategy. It is recommended that the Town continue to provide funding in the amount of \$30,000.00 per year to the Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce for tourism services.

Considerable resources from the office of the EDO are already allocated to tourism, for administration to assist the Chamber and the HHTC and advertising support. The indirect costs for time and resources are conservatively estimated at \$25,000.00 per

year. Advertising support for the lure brochure and Visitor Guide is estimated to cost approximately \$6,000.00 per year.

In addition the Town's web master continues to provide technical support to the Chamber and the HHTC for web site, newsletter and other functions. The Recreation and Parks Department provides a direct subsidy to tourism events through off-setting of costs for facilities and equipment.

The Town has allocated for 2014, \$5,000.00 to be used by the HHTC as it relates to tourism events.

Conclusion

Without a major attraction in Halton Hills a Tourism Strategy needs to focus on assisting events that are already established. The calendar of events that occur in Halton Hills most of which are organized by volunteers is extensive and we should resist the urge to add new events as they tend to overwhelm a small but dedicated core of community volunteers. The Town has an important role to play in community events, as many are held in Town facilities and use Town owned equipment, this can be considered as an indirect investment in local tourism.

The Return on Investment (ROI) is difficult to measure however it has been determined that events, festivals and culture add to the overall quality of life and vibrancy of the Town.

Appendix "A"

Develop the tourism infrastructure in Halton Hills			
Objective:	Invest in programs/infrastructure to attract visitors and support entrepreneurial ventures to capture tourism expenditures.		
Actions	Lead & Support Agencies	Time Frame	Budget
1.1 The Chamber of Commerce has developed in cooperation with the Town to amend the existing agreement to be more proactive. Plan attached	EDO, EDC,	2015	\$30,000/year
1.2 That the Halton Hills Tourism Committee continue in its current structure to provide support for the Chamber and other organizations.	EDO, Halton Region, Potential Private Partners	2014	\$5,000/year
1.3 Continue to work with the Halton Region Tourism Coordinator to promote Halton Hills for culinary tourism, Agri-tourism, cycling and other initiatives	Ec. Dev., Halton Region Tourism and Chamber, the EA to be primary Town contact	Ongoing	N/A
1.4 Develop a professional tourism web site that directs people to; where to go, shop, eat, stay and do.	Web Master, EDO, Chamber, Tourism Committee	High priority	\$7,500 Funded from the EDS capital account
1.5 Engage with Toronto Premium Outlets on joint marketing. (see report for full marketing actions)	Mayor, EDO	2014	\$25,000 for 2014/15
1.6 Develop a comprehensive plan to work with sports organizations to inform them of visitor opportunities	EDO, Chamber, BIAs, Rec/Parks	On-going	N/A
1.7 Initiate discussions with the Hills of the Headwaters on forming a partnership to market similar products.	EDO, Chamber and Tourism Committee member	High priority	N/A
1.7 Explore the potential of forming an equine industry partnership with Halton Region, Hills of the Headwaters and King Township	Region, EDO, Equine Industry representatives	2014	N/A

Halton Hills Tourism Committee Terms of Reference

Mission Statement and Goals

The Committee is an ongoing advisory and working body with the following goal:

"To be a centralized focal point for effectively building tourism as a key economic driver within the Halton Hills community"

To this end the roles of the Committee are:

- ✓ Identifying and analyzing tourism trends, needs and opportunities within the Halton Hills community and with this analysis setting yearly priorities and/or projects for the committee's work
- ✓ Acting as a catalyst for tourism growth within our community
- ✓ Providing information and support for municipal and community-based tourism decision-makers, planners and service providers
- ✓ Building a network of tourism-related community individuals, groups and businesses to increase the effectiveness of tourism activities & services
- ✓ Ensuring that tourism is considered within broader community planning initiatives
- ✓ To strengthen to working relationship with the Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce whose mandate from the Town of Halton Hills is to provide tourism services in the community

Formation Details

The Halton Hills Tourism Committee was formed in March 2009 by Town of Halton Hills Councillor John Duncan and Economic Development Officer Doug Penrice. Over the course of its first six months the Committee has undertaken the following activities:

- Establishment of a broad membership base based on tourism or community experience
- Review of the 2009 Halton Hills Tourism Guide
- Presentation and discussion of the need for a community branding exercise
- Presence at larger community events under the Ambassador Program to both share tourism information with event attendees and survey those attendees as to their profile and knowledge of local events and attractions

As of the Fall of 2009 the committee is now ready to move to its next phase of development including enhancing its organization, setting priorities for the

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coming year, and identifying both committee leads for these projects and other community members who could also act as resources.

Draft 2009/10 Objectives

Based on committee discussions and already identified tourism needs the following priorities are being recommended for the 2009/2010 term:

1. Develop a comprehensive 3-year Community Tourism Plan within available resources including: delineating our community essence and context, engaging broad community input, analyzing available data, identifying current issues and strengths, assessing current and potential direct and related tourism providers and resources, identifying available sources of funding, and setting realistic plans and priorities for the coming 3 years of the committee's work.
2. Undertake a Community Branding exercise in conjunction with community partners to provide a basis from which to develop marketing tools and communicate what is unique about our community to potential tourism markets.
3. Increase the quality and availability of tourism information by reviewing and updating the 2010 Halton Hills Tourism Guide and supporting the development of the Community-Wide Website Portal's tourism component.
4. Continue to develop the Ambassador Program including recruiting more volunteers, developing a year-round plan which targets tourist-rich events, and using these opportunities for ongoing research.
5. Build a more extensive community and surrounding community network including investigating the usefulness of a tourism database and forming more established links to areas like Escarpment Country and Headwaters.
6. Enhance Committee organization including confirming/extending existing membership, setting a yearly meeting schedule, formalizing committee reporting to Council/Standing Committee, identifying leads and potential resources for initiatives.

Resources and Budget

Current funding is provided through the Economic Development Office

Governance

Decision-making will be done through a consensus process by the Committee, or by majority vote (50% +1) when required, and it is assumed that members of the Committee will report regularly to the appropriate governing bodies of their host organizations (i.e. Board of Directors). The committee shall not be a formal

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committee of Council but rather serve as an advisory body to the EDO and the Chamber of Commerce in all matters relating to tourism.

Communications

Meetings will be held at the call of the Chair, with the goal of meeting once every month unless smaller group work would be more efficient for that particular month. Committee communications, including the distribution of minutes between meetings, will be done electronically. The Committee will keep minutes of its meetings including recording all actions taken.