

- ADDENDUM -

- Community & Social Services Committee -

- February 12, 2013, 5:00 p.m. -

CSS-2013.3 Guelph Tourism Services Update

Delegation:

- Sonya Poweska, Executive Director, Guelph Arts Council

Correspondence:

- Sally Wismer
- Claire Tacon

January 11, 2013

Dear Mayor Farbridge and Guelph City Councillors

Please find below and attached a letter that I just dispatched to Culture and Tourism Manager Colleen Clack. For those of you who don't know me, I have lived in Gueph since 1964. I have been actively involved in the community ever since, especially in the arts, culture and heritage sector, first as a volunteer, then for close to 25 years as a staff member of Guelph Arts Council, and, since June 2010, once again as a volunteer. In addition to my involvement in various Tourism activities over many years (as described in the letter), I also played a lead in establishing Doors Open Guelph in 2002. Among my current involvements, I am a member of the City of Guelph Cultural Advisory Committee and Public Art Committee (sub-committee of the CAC).

I'd be happy to communicate further with any of you who might have any questions, particularly about the historical background.

Sincerely

Sally Wismer

January 8, 2013

Hello Colleen

I am responding to your Tourism Services update email of December 14, when you announced that City Council had "directed staff to issue a request for proposals to determine if a community partner could deliver services in the Guelph area."

To say that this news shocks, disappoints, upsets me is an understatement – for several reasons, not the least of which relates to the historical background of how the City came to be involved in tourism.

First, as you are likely aware, back in the late 1980s and 1990s, in my then capacity as Executive Director of Guelph Arts Council, I and others in the cultural community played a lead role in working to establish a creditable tourism service for Guelph. Our efforts were in response to the fact that the only so-called tourism service at that time was provided by the Chamber of Commerce at its Woodlawn Road location, and that service amounted only to stocking a few tourism brochures. There was *no support at all for the cultural community* and its many offerings which are integral to Guelph's identity and reputation as a vibrant centre of arts, culture and heritage.

Initially, our group established a not-for-profit group called Guelph Tourism Connection, establishing a tourism centre in donated space in the then downtown Guelph Eaton Centre. We worked hard to connect with all local tourism providers (businesses and organizations alike), and to make links with other regional and provincial tourism

organizations. We produced Guelph's first genuine Visitor Guide, and other smaller publications promoting all that Guelph businesses and organizations had to offer. The City did provide some initial very modest funding to support a very basic operation (one staff member plus summer students for which grants were obtained).

It very quickly became obvious to those of us in Guelph Tourism Connection that, as a small not-for-profit, we simply did not have the resources or the clout to champion the City in the way that we knew it should be championed. After canvassing other tourism providers in southern Ontario and working with the then regional Festival Country organization, we realized that the best end result would be for the City of Guelph to take over the lead responsibility for tourism. We worked very hard to make that happen, and it did, effective January 1, 1996.

We have watched Tourism Services grow considerably, and have applauded the way that it has championed and promoted the cultural sector and the City of Guelph generally in such positive ways. That it recently shared the 2012 Culinary Tourism Leadership Award with five other County organizations is one such example. Also, in 2012, Tourism Services, managed actually match marketing revenues to expenses, a significant achievement. To even consider pulling the rug out from under this successful evolution is truly disappointing, and it in effect brings tourism efforts in Guelph to a standstill for the better part of the next year.

Apart from this historical background, I feel that the City's decision to put out this request for proposals is short-sighted for many other reasons. Among these is the fact that, as you know, responsibility for tourism has shifted back and forth among City departments over the years. The most recent transfer has been to Community and Social Services, and it seems inconceivable to me that the City would not allow you and the Culture and Tourism Department the opportunity to work out a new *modus operandi* under a new management structure.

Similarly, I know that Tourism Services has been denied the opportunity for an internal service review that would have produced some measure as to how effectively the service was operating. One was scheduled for 2010, but that was postponed until 2014, so there exists no services/programs base to which to compare what might potentially be proposed by an outside organization (in response to the RFP).

Likewise, I know that Tourism Services has been awaiting development of a tourism strategy ever since the Prosperity 2020 strategic plan. Tourism was also supposed to get its own marketing strategy as part of the 2011 Economic Development strategy before it was transferred to Community and Social Services. A new brand did come out of this report but the marketing strategy behind it was deferred until the 2013 budget – meaning that any such strategy is now dead in its tracks.

It almost feels as if Tourism Services has been set up to “fail” – or at least to make it easier to outsource it. It does not feel as if it has been given a chance to move forward positively in the last two to three years. And there has been absolutely no public

consultation on a move of this nature. In fact, the decision was taken secretly during an in camera meeting of Council followed some days later by a low-key announcement just before the holiday period when most people had turned their minds to seasonal preparations. Granted a Tourism Partners consultation is in the planning stages, but that is really too little too late. The door has already been closed, so to speak.

Moreover, after reading comments from some members of City Council, as quoted in an article in the Guelph Mercury (December 19, 2012), it would appear that some of the justification for Council's decision to consider outsourcing tourism is based on incorrect information. For example, if you review Schedule 1 of the City's policy for Comparator municipalities (December 7, 2009) and look at each of the *single-tier municipalities* (Brantford, Chatham-Kent, Thunder Bay, Guelph, Kingston, Barrie, London, Hamilton, Toronto) in three comparator categories (i.e. Cities of 100,000 – 150,000 Population; Single-Tier Municipalities within 100 km Radius; and Cities with Expenditures between \$300M \$400M), *all of them have tourism services delivered by their municipalities*. Therefore, the comment that "Guelph is one of the few remaining municipalities still doing tourism services in-house" is simply incorrect.

My last and most heartfelt reason for being upset by the City's decision is based on the fact that tourism is much more than the individual businesses and organizations that provide tourism services. Guelph Tourism Services has certainly promoted its individual partners, but, more importantly, it has brought all together to sell and champion Guelph as a whole – as a City with a unique identity including a strong arts, culture and heritage character. It is very hard to conceive of a 3rd-party organization with vested business interests being able to stand back and be as objective as a municipally-run tourism body can be. On this score, there are some very real concerns within the arts, culture and heritage community, all the more so for those of us who were involved in and understand why tourism services were assumed by the City in the first place some seventeen years ago.

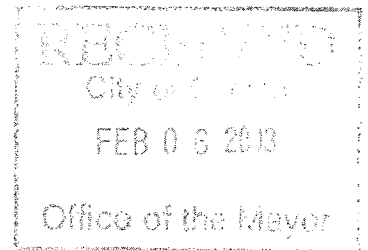
At this stage, I can only hope that the City will proceed slowly and thoughtfully as it moves forward in the RFP process; that it will listen to the concerns being expressed in the community; and that it will not lose sight of the fact that tourism is of benefit to the entire community, promoting Guelph as a unique destination with a very real sense of place.

Thanks for listening, Colleen. Please accept these comments in the spirit in which they are intended and not as any personal reflection on you personally or the efforts of your department.

Sincerely

Sally Wismer

City Hall
1 Carden Street
Guelph, ON N1H 3A1



January 15, 2013

Dear Mayor Farbridge and Guelph City Councillors,

As a Guelph Arts Council board member, I was troubled to learn of the proposed changes to Tourism Services. While more could be done to promote Guelph externally, I believe it is important that Tourism Services remains city-run.

Over the past several years, Tourism Services has been a strong advocate for Guelph's arts and culture. We are lucky to live in a city with an embarrassment of cultural riches—it's a big part of what makes us unique for a city of our size. It's also one of our best draws for tourism. I am concerned that if Tourism Services moves away from the municipality, various cultural and heritage organizations will be negatively affected. Most third-party options, including the Chamber of Commerce, have closer ties to and vested interests in business. It is hard to believe that they would be as effective as Tourism Services has been at promoting all of Guelph's various sectors.

A municipally-run tourism board is the norm in many Ontario cities of our size. Before considering external delivery models, perhaps the city could invest more planning resources in the existing infrastructure. I understand that Tourism Services has not had the opportunity for an internal service review, nor has it received its own marketing and development strategy. Without these tools, it seems impossible for the city to conduct a balanced evaluation of Tourism Services' value.

Thank you for listening to my concerns.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Claire Tacon".

Claire Tacon