THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF GRAVENHURST

To: Committee of the Whole
From: Scott Lucas, Director of Development Services
Date: March 20, 2018
Subject: Community Ambassador Program Launch and Gravenhurst365 Update Report No. DEV 2018-25

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Director of Development Services recommends:

THAT Report No. DEV 2018-25 re: Community Ambassador Program Launch and Gravenhurst365 Update be received for information.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Report is to provide Committee with an overview of the Community Ambassador Program, in addition to information regarding the current federally funded resident attraction program referred to as Gravenhurst365.

BACKGROUND

In 2015, the Economic Development Division was successful in receiving a grant for approximately $100,000 through FedNor to develop a resident attraction program. This three year program provided marketing dollars to attract two different demographics to the area: those that grew up in Gravenhurst and had left, and those that were living in the city and looking for a change of pace.

The first two years of the program focused on a mix of digital and classic marketing focused on each of the two demographics. Development of the Gravenhurst365.ca website was the key point for all of the marketing to lead back too. Three different streams of content were developed through this process: success stories, social media/blog posts, and Prezi content. Through development of this content, the Gravenhurst365 website and social media channels have seen a continued growth in analytics. Two years of content development, mixed with programmatic and social media created a number of marketing campaigns that can be reused in a cyclical period. During this time the Town of Gravenhurst won two awards from the Economic Development Council of Ontario for the Gravenhurst 365 program. During the transition of the Economic Development functions to the Development Services Department,
this program continued to use existing marketing, while Administration re-evaluated the program’s success and re-focused on next steps to maximize impact. This final year of the program will see new content development (summarized below), that will sustain the marketing efforts beyond the end of the funding, which formally ends on December 31, 2018.

ANALYSIS

The final year of the program will see the following new content be developed and implemented throughout this year:

**Community Ambassador – “Be Part of the Bigger Picture”**

This is an innovative way to increase the number of leads both for resident attraction and business/development attraction. This program will use USB cards that contain three items of information: a video, a letter of invitation and an abridged version of our community profile. Each USB card is printed with a piece of a much larger mural, with the contained attraction material encouraging them to come to Gravenhurst and return their “piece of the bigger picture”. During this visit, the Economic Development Division will provide a familiarization tour that will include local business owners and residents as well as local opportunities tailored specifically to the visitors experiences and investment profile. Distribution of these cards will occur through a number of ways: direct mail out, trade shows, and through our community ambassadors. The development of this Community Ambassador Program is intended to leverage our local talent and reach to attract more people to town. A call for community ambassadors will go out shortly. Each ambassador will be asked to sign a Code of Conduct, participate in training and be required to report back where the cards have been distributed. This unique program is intended engage the community in economic development initiatives, and more logistically will be able to be continued as a program in future years, with the cards being re-usable for future years.

**Specific Property Marketing**

The Gravenhurst 365 program has been a success in terms of getting people from outside the area to recognize our name; however what has been missing in Administration’s opinion, is the marketing of specific opportunities (i.e. what next?). Starting at the end of 2017, the Economic Development Division has been identifying long term vacant, high impact buildings and marketing them through a variety of channels. In order to take part in this program, the building owners are required to sign a Memorandum of Understanding stating that they are willing to either lease or sell the building (or both). This is important to ensure that there is a willing landlord or seller before marketing is started. Currently, the second property is being marketed as the first was leased and is no longer on the market.
Welcome to Town Information

Development of a cross-departmental information package for new businesses and new residents has been undertaken. This booklet will be included in a package of information for new people to the area that includes information on municipal services, facilities and other information from our community organizations and The District of Muskoka. These packages are intended to be kept by businesses and residents and referred to throughout their time here as they get a feel for the community. In addition to the distribution of the resident package through finance, and the business package through economic development, a partnership with the newly formed Welcome Wagon is in the development stages with the Economic Development Division. This information will be available both on the website and in hardcopy.

Day in the Life Videos

Content development has been done in the past two years specifically around work life balance, commuting and working in Gravenhurst. Recent studies in resident attraction show that people are looking to live in a place where they can both enjoy a full social life and find a job. Gravenhurst continues to have a good variety of positions available in our existing business complement, however there continues to be a perception that socially, there is nothing to do. An environmental scan of municipalities shows that success stories focused on work and business opportunities continue to be popular but to make Gravenhurst stand above the rest. The Day In The Life Videos will follow a local citizen around for a day from wake up to the end of the night. Five documentary style videos will be filmed targeting specific demographics and feature social and recreational opportunities that fit into their lifestyle or family dynamics.

CONSULTATION

The following individuals / community groups were consulted:

- Gravenhurst Property Owners
- Gravenhurst Chamber of Commerce
- Gravenhurst Business Improvement Area
- Senior Management

CORPORATE FINANCIAL IMPACT

Projects mentioned above were approved through the 2018 operating budget and as part of the FedNor funding program

COMMUNICATIONS
Each project has an independent communications plan intended to target its specific demographic audience.

CONCLUSIONS

Administration concludes that the money received through FedNor for resident attraction has been crucial for the development of the above programs and will provide legacy material to be used in future years. All of the information and data collected from the programs listed above help inform future work planning and investment attraction efforts.

RELATION TO STRATEGIC PLAN

This Report advances and supports the following elements of the Town of Gravenhurst Strategic Plan by:

**Goal 1: Build Economic & Employment Opportunities**

1A: A more diverse economy with more year-round employment opportunities

Continuing to support the development of a Welcoming Strategy in conjunction with community partners.

1B: More Effective Marketing

Opportunities to increase the Town's profile and visibility so the Gravenhurst is known as a Muskoka Destination.

**Goal 3: Build our Partnerships, Connections & Connectivity**

3A: A More Connected Community – A Vibrant Town Supported by solid and active partnerships

Not only does this help develop Community Pride but always will help develop and strengthen community relationships.

RELATION TO OTHER MUNICIPAL REPORTS, PLANS OR APPLICABLE LEGISLATION

This Report related to other municipal reports, plans or applicable legislation including:

1. Economic Development Strategic Plan
2. Town of Gravenhurst Strategic Plan 2015-2019
ATTACHMENTS

1. Attachment A – Community Ambassador Introduction Video

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED BY:

Author: Jeff Loney, Manager of Economic Development
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Approved by: Glen Davies, Chief Administrative Officer