



Economic Development Staff Report

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Report Title: Economic Development and Tourism Initiatives Update
Author: Jenna Deboer and Derek Hughes, Economic Development and Tourism Officers
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Final Review: Senior Management Team

Recommendation:

That the Council of the Township of Woolwich, considering Report A08-2024 respecting Economic Development and Tourism Initiatives Update:

1. Append the St. Jacobs Brand Audit and Directional Wayfinding Strategy to the Municipal Sign Policy to approve the Timber concept as approved signs for the St. Jacobs area;
2. Authorize the Mayor and Clerk to sign the grant funding agreement with RTO4; and
3. Approve a \$5,000 contribution from the Municipal Accommodation Tax Reserve Fund.

Background:

Economic Development and Tourism staff are excited to share a few recent updates on department initiatives.

Business Milestone Awards:

The Business Milestone Award is a new Economic Development initiative that aims to recognize long-standing businesses within Woolwich. Applicable businesses are honoured with a Business Milestone Award certificate, presented by the Mayor and Economic Development and Tourism staff.

Taste the Countryside EDAC Award:

Taste the Countryside is a culinary initiative across the four Townships of Waterloo Region that celebrates local food and agriculture. The initiative includes a 10-day promotional dining event, an industry networking event, and a Regional Food Map. Taste the Countryside recently won the Economic Development Association of Canada (EDAC) Marketing Award.

St. Jacobs Brand Audit and Wayfinding:

Staff, in collaboration with tourism stakeholders and regional partners, have been working to improve wayfinding and unified branding for the St. Jacobs area. In 2022, the Township secured a grant to undertake a Brand Audit and Wayfinding Sign Strategy, confirming that “St. Jacobs Country” remains the ideal brand to promote the St. Jacobs area. A new grant was recently secured to partially fund the implementation of the Directional Wayfinding Strategy in the area.

Comments:

Business Milestone Awards:

The Business Milestone Awards was established this year and is an award to recognize long-standing businesses within Woolwich who have reached 25, 50, 75, 100, and 150 years in business. The program honours businesses with a Business Milestone Award certificate, presented by the Mayor and Economic Development and Tourism staff. Outreach efforts to identify eligible businesses included word of mouth, social media, the Economic Development monthly newsletter, and support from other businesses and the BIAs.

This year, eight outstanding businesses received the award:

1. Magnolia’s of St. Jacobs – 25 years
2. Taylor’s Bridal Boutique – 25 years
3. Kitchen Kuttings – 36 years
4. Weber Fabricating Ltd. – 50 years
5. Woolwich Community Services – 50 years
6. R.W. Thur Real Estate Ltd. – 50 years
7. W.C. Brown & Sons Men’s Clothier – 102 years
8. Elmira Home Hardware – 145 years

Looking ahead, St. Jacobs Market will celebrate 50 years in business in 2024, and in 2026, the Home Hardware Head Office will mark an incredible 150 years of operation - a truly remarkable milestone.

Taste the Countryside Award:

The Township received the prestigious Marketing Canada Award (*Appendix A*) by the Economic Developers Association of Canada (EDAC). EDAC, Canada's national association for economic development professionals, represents nearly 1,000 members from every province and territory. Their Marketing Canada Awards recognizes outstanding marketing initiatives that promote economic growth and community identity across Canada. Taste the Countryside was selected among top submissions nationwide, recognizing the event's success in promoting local food, agriculture, and economic development in the Townships.

Taste the Countryside was initiated in 2020 as a business promotion program to encourage residents to continue supporting locals when indoor dining was restricted. It was a simple 10-day marketing campaign promoting coordinated menus across participating food establishments. Since then, the initiative has grown into a collaborative including all four Townships (Wellesley, Wilmot, Woolwich, North Dumfries), Explore Waterloo Region, and Wellington-Waterloo Community Futures. The purpose of Taste the Countryside is to connect residents and visitors with the area's agricultural heritage and culinary talents, promoting local food culture and supporting farm-to-table dining. By spotlighting local farmers and food producers, the event encourages sustainable food practices, supports the regional economy, and fosters community engagement around food and agriculture. It's an opportunity for participants to experience the flavours of Waterloo Region's Countryside while also learning about the importance of supporting local agriculture. The initiative now includes three key components:

1. Township Dining Trail: featuring a variety of prix-fixe menus offered by local restaurants over a 10-day promotional period, showcasing seasonal and locally sourced ingredients from the region's agricultural community;
2. Regional Food Map highlighting local growers and producers (*Appendix B*);
3. Harvest Dinner: networking event for local farmers, restaurateurs and partners.

St. Jacobs Brand Audit and Wayfinding:

Economic Development and Tourism staff have collaborated with Tourism stakeholders and regional partners to enhance unified branding and wayfinding signage for St. Jacobs as a Destination. A major challenge is that visitors often associate "St. Jacobs" solely with one place and not the other (i.e. Market vs. Village), and are unaware of other attractions in the area, leading to missed economic opportunities.

In 2022, the Township secured a grant funded by Regional Tourism Organization 4 (RTO4) to conduct a **Brand Audit and Directional Wayfinding Strategy** (*Appendix C*). This project facilitated an unbiased approach to develop a cohesive sense of place and directional signage for the area, improving navigation across key areas including Village, Farmers' Market District (Stockyard Area), and surrounding attractions like fruit farms, trails, and theaters.

The **Brand Audit** confirmed “St. Jacobs Country” as the most inclusive umbrella brand, effectively representing all tourism assets while maintaining individual identities (pg. 166, Appendix C). Directional wayfinding plays a vital role in connecting visitors to attractions, shopping, dining, and accommodations, driving economic activity and encouraging repeat visits. Wayfinding systems support a seamless and enjoyable travel journey, fostering confidence in exploring new areas, making it a key factor in repeat visits and longer stays.

As part of the Wayfinding design development, staff assembled an independent professional marketing committee to evaluate and approve one of the proposed sign concepts within the strategy. After thorough review, the committee selected **Concept One: “Timber”** as the preferred design (pg. 76, Appendix C). This concept was deemed the best representation of the St. Jacobs area due to its alignment with the region’s aesthetic and cultural identity, resonating strongly with the committee’s vision for a cohesive and welcoming wayfinding system.

Staff seek Council’s approval to integrate the new **St. Jacobs Country signage** (pg. 77-92, Appendix C) as a complimentary addition to the Township of Woolwich Municipal Signage Program. The Economic Development and Tourism Division recently secured an additional \$30,000 grant through RTO4 to partially fund the implementation of the new St. Jacobs Country Wayfinding Strategy. Authorizing the addition of the new St. Jacobs Country signage in the Township of Woolwich Municipal Signage Program will enable staff to collaborate further with the industry to execute the Wayfinding program.

Interdepartmental Impacts:

None.

Financial Impacts:

The Township’s matching contribution to the RTO4 grant (\$30,000) should be drawn from the 2024 Economic Development and Tourism budget with the remaining balance (\$5,000) coming from the Municipal Accommodation Tax Reserve Fund.

Staff intend to present a future report to Council outlining the detailed implementation phases for the project.

Community Strategic Plan Impacts:

- Cultivate long-term economic prosperity: *The inclusion of St. Jacobs Country Directional Wayfinding in the Municipal Signage Policy aligns with the Township’s goal to support sustainable economic growth by enhancing tourism infrastructure. Improved wayfinding will connect visitors to local businesses, attractions, and amenities, driving economic activity and increasing the visibility of local assets.*

- Empower communities to be adaptable and engaged: *The recognition of long-standing businesses through the Business Milestone Awards fosters community pride and engagement, strengthening ties between residents and local enterprises. Taste the Countryside, which highlights local food and agricultural heritage, connects the community through shared experiences. These align with the plan's call to leverage community events to build a stronger sense of belonging.*
- Provide effective and open leadership: *The initiatives shared within this report demonstrate collaboration with stakeholders on branding and wayfinding strategies, while securing partnerships (i.e. RTO4) to support economic and tourism goals.*

Conclusion:

Woolwich Township's Economic Development and Tourism initiatives strengthen community pride, promote local businesses, and enhance tourism. Staff seek Council approval to include St. Jacobs Country Wayfinding to the Woolwich Municipal Signage Policy and, further, approval for Mayor and Clerk to authorize a Memorandum of Understanding with Regional Tourism Organization 4, for grant funding to implement the first phase of the St. Jacob's Country sign strategy.

Attachments:

1. Appendix A – EDAC Marketing Canada Award
2. Appendix B - Taste the Countryside Regional Map
3. Appendix C – St. Jacobs Wayfinding Sign Strategy