



Committee of the Whole

Meeting Date: April 28, 2015
Submitted by: Aileen Murray Ec.D. (F), Manager of Economic Development
Subject: Tourism Update

BACKGROUND:

Tourism Middlesex, the non-profit organization that had operated as the Destination Management Organization (DMO) for Middlesex County, closed its office in December 2014.

Middlesex County Council approved a new budget item of \$50,000 for tourism development and promotion as part of the Economic Development budget at the March 24, 2015 meeting. This report provides an update on the transition and the County's preparations for the upcoming tourism season.

ANALYSIS:

During the economic development strategy consultation process, we heard about the confusion in the market regarding Tourism Middlesex, (the non-profit organization) and Middlesex Tourism, (operated by the CFDC). The tourism stakeholders we polled recommended a fresh start for the County's initiative and endorsed the name Visit Middlesex. Visit Middlesex uses the existing Middlesex County logo and colours to reinforce the County's leadership of this activity.

Tourism stakeholders were advised of the County's new role as the official DMO for the County through a variety of methods:

- An E-blast was issued on April 1, 2015 to all tourism related businesses and organizations in the economic development database. The notice was also shared with Middlesex County Council members, municipal Council members and municipal CAOs.
- A post on the County's economic development website www.investinmiddlesex.ca

- The economic development social media channels: Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn
- We have renamed and become administrators for the Tourism Middlesex social media channels (Twitter, Facebook and Hootsuite) and advised followers of the change
- Tourism Middlesex committed to sharing the information with their networks
- An article in the [Invest in Middlesex E-newsletter](#) on April 15, 2015
- A post on the new [Visit Middlesex](#) website
- A post on the Tourism Middlesex website

Tourism Middlesex provided access to their website and social media channels to assist with the transition. We established a new URL www.visitmiddlesex.ca. The County's IT department has "re-skinned" the Tourism Middlesex site incorporating the Middlesex logo and colours. This is a temporary fix before a complete rework of the investinmiddlesex.ca site is completed which will incorporate tourism. Beginning on April 15, visitors to the old Tourism Middlesex website are automatically redirected to the County managed site. All links from the County, library and economic development websites now point to the Visit Middlesex site.

We have also asked the Tourism Middlesex board to provide copies of any photography and videos and other files that may assist the County in making the transition as smooth as possible.

The Southwest Ontario Tourism Corporation (SWOTC) has been very helpful with the change. SWOTC and Visit Middlesex are co-hosting a [tourism workshop](#) on April 23. This meeting will provide an opportunity to meet with tourism stakeholders and address any questions they have directly.

The Strathroy and District Chamber has successfully applied for funding to hire a summer student for a visitor centre in the former Tourism Middlesex space to help promote Middlesex destinations. SWOTC may also be able to provide an additional part-time student. We have allocated \$2,000 of the County's Economic Development/ Tourism budget to support the Visitor Centre operation. The Visitor Centre is expected to operate in June, July and August.

We are currently preparing a tourism map for distribution through the Visitor Centre and other tourist destinations in the County. We intend to have the map completed in time for the opening of the Visitor Centre.