

Request for Decision

P6M Initiative - Whitefish (Beaver Lake) Welcome Centre

Presented To: Finance and
Administration
Committee

Presented: Tuesday, Nov 17, 2015

Report Date Wednesday, Oct 07,
2015

Type: Referred & Deferred
Matters

Recommendation

THAT the City of Greater Sudbury closes the Whitefish Welcome Centre as recommended in the Report from the General Manager, Citizen and Leisure Services, dated September 1, 2015.

Finance Implications

If approved, the savings will be reflected in the 2016 budget.

Background

The Whitefish Welcome Centre is an unstaffed building that is used primarily as a rest stop. The small building contains a washroom and shares the property with the Beaver Lake Fire Station.

As was explained to Council in March 2013 when the Highway 69 Welcome Centre was closed, our Municipality among others have been closing their Welcome Centre's and Rest Stops:

For nearly 30 years, the Sudbury Welcome Centre has operated as a visitor information centre and rest stop, providing highway travellers with access to picnic and washroom facilities along with information on Sudbury and Northern Ontario.

It is not clear, however, that highway interception of visitors is an effective method of changing visitor intentions and drawing tourism into the city. To illustrate, out of 235 visitor surveys conducted from July 7 to August 13, 2011:

- When asked "duration of visit":
 - o 54% responded that they were "passing through"
 - o 31% were staying one or more nights
 - o 10% were on a "daytrip", a segment that includes provincial park visitors
- When asked their "purpose of visit" to the Welcome Centre:

Signed By

Report Prepared By

Ron Henderson
General Manager of Citizen and
Leisure Services
Digitally Signed Oct 7, 15

Recommended by the Department

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Recommended by the C.A.O.

Kevin Fowke
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- o 43% indicated “rest stop”
- o 37% were seeking “visitor info on Sudbury”
- o 14% requested “visitor info on northern Ontario”

These numbers are an indication that in-market visitors have already made their travel decisions, and are often en route to a different destination.

Tourism experience in Greater Sudbury can attest to this statement. In 2005 and 2006, Sudbury Tourism piloted the Découvrir Sudbury Discoveries project, developing a “menu” of tourism experiences, events and attractions to encourage visitors to stay longer in the community. As part of the initiative, a Discoveries kiosk was set up in the foyer at Science North with the purpose of intercepting science centre guests by promoting unique outdoor “day adventures” such as paddling experiences and aerial sight-seeing tours. Feedback indicated that the curiosity of visitors was piqued; however, the majority of passers-by were headed elsewhere, with little time in their already-planned itineraries to add activities. Although print and radio advertising was implemented, at the time, the project had no online presence, and visitors were not being addressed prior to their departure, during the crucial planning stage – one that is overwhelmingly reliant on the Internet.

Sector-wide industry research also suggests that increasing use of the web for trip planning has added to declining traffic and low conversion rates at visitor information centres. In 2012, reflecting these changes and facing increased budget stringency, the Ontario government closed highway visitor facilities in Fort Frances, Rainy River, Kenora, Fort Erie, Hill Island, Prescott, and Cornwall.

The closure of the Highway 69 Welcome Centre resulted in very little disruption and no negative public feedback as travellers have access to other, primarily electronic, resources to plan their vacations. Therefore it is recommended that the Whitefish Welcome Centre also be closed. The estimated savings is \$15,000.

It is further recommended that the building be declared surplus and that any decision regarding demolition or use by Emergency Services be determined at a future date.