

Type of Decision									
Meeting Date	Friday, May 15, 2009				Report Date	Monday, May 11, 2009			
Decision Required	X	Yes		No	Priority	X	High		Low
Direction Only		Information Only			Type of Meeting	X	Open		Closed
REPORT TITLE									
Economic Development and Visitor Centre Agreement Renewal 15/05/09/002									

**SUBJECT:**

1. The existing agreement with Natural Resources Canada and the group of municipalities for the operation of the Forest Visitor Centre expires May 31, 2009. The Economic Development Committee wishes to renew with the same terms as the last agreement.
2. The issue of Swisha being included in and benefiting from the efforts of the Joint Economic Development Committee but not contributing financially.
3. A Municipal growth plan, municipal marketing, marketing tools and a business directory.

Recommendation: As we have already passed the budget providing for the payment of this item and there is a benefit to continuing with the Economic Development Committee and the Visitor's Centre, it is recommended that the Reeve sign the agreement for a further 5 years.

1. Renewing the Visitor's Centre Operation Agreement

**WHEREAS** our 2009 budget provides for this municipality's portion of the Joint Economic Development Committee costs and the operation of the Visitor's Centre;

**AND WHEREAS** any decision to withdraw from either undertaking should be made after a full analysis of benefits vs. costs;

**AND WHEREAS** time is of the essence;

**AND WHEREAS** our municipality has a vehicle for promoting our businesses which is not being utilized to its full potential;

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Council of the United Townships of Head, Clara & Maria do hereby agree to renew its commitment to the Visitor's Centre for a further 5 year period;

**AND FURTHER THAT** more emphasis be placed on preparing and utilizing an economic development plan or strategy specific to our municipality.

2. Swisha and funding for the Joint Economic Development Committee. That this issue be discussed to provide further direction to staff.
3. Municipal growth plan, zones, business directory. That this issue be discussed to provide further direction to staff.
4. That a business directory be created for the municipality to be available for distribution at the visitor's centre and other OVTA locations. Direction to staff.

**Background/Executive Summary:**

Although I support the continuation of partnership in the Joint Economic Development Committee and the Visitor's Centre, I believe that there is much more that our municipality could be doing to support itself. Although some will not agree, the future of a small municipality such as ours requires growth; the attraction and retention of new residents and businesses. HCM has a vast untapped potential for recreation and tourism businesses. We have large amounts of privately

held land that could be made available for development. Our location along the Ottawa and bordering the Northern tip of Algonquin Park is truly phenomenal. We should actively promote it.

It is my recommendation that economic development become a part of this Council's focus for the future. A review of the zoning by-law should occur in respect to defining what types of commercial/industrial growth Council is willing to encourage and where. Currently, should anyone come to staff for information, we tell them that all of our property is "zoned to use." That means, you can do whatever you want and we will zone your property later. Should someone wish to develop something controversial next door to any of you (including a pig farm, an airport or a factory), there is not much we could do to prevent them from proceeding (assuming they comply with environmental and other provincial regulations). We have not specified residential, commercial or industrial zones. Attempting to control unwanted growth after the fact is not the best strategy.

Council's decision to stop Air Swisha could have turned out significantly different, especially since the municipality has no strategic plan or defined zones. In this instance, Council (and residents) were lucky. The decision that was made by Council could have been appealed to the OMB and a different decision forced upon us. Had Air Swisha fought Council through the proper channels, (OMB) there may have been an altogether different outcome. Although that could still happen (depending on the circumstances), having a more clearly defined strategy, clearly defined zones and a growth plan for the future of the community will provide the municipality with some support should a similar situation occur.

This municipality has managed to evolve into a number of satisfactory communities without many rules or guidelines and until recently, did so with few problems. In the 4 years I have been here, we have had a number of challenges with enforcing building permits; many requests for severance applications; a subdivision request; road width problems; 2 formal zoning by-law exemptions; one OMB hearing and the Air Swisha issue. Clearly, there is development occurring or wanting to occur and Council needs to set some parameters in order to promote and control it.

The zoning by-law has been updated to solve a number of these issues, roads policies have been created to deal with private roads and residences, but much more is still required.

On another note, in reviewing the terms of reference of the Economic Development Committee it states that its purpose is to help municipalities to... "coordinate their economic development plans to develop a stronger overall community." We do not have an economic development plan of our own or even a strategic plan that outlines a course for the future. It is not John Walden's job to provide our plan for us; his is to assist in coordinating our plan with those of all of the other members. The creation of our own plan requires attention.

We need to acknowledge that our population is aging and more and more people will relocate closer to medical facilities. Encouraging controlled growth according to a well defined plan for the future may help ensure that this remains a viable community.

#### Options/Discussion/Policy Considerations:

- Visitor's Centre – renew or not.
- Zoning and Planning
  - Review zoning by-law, defining and declaring residential zones and boundaries in current built-up areas eliminating the possibility of commercial or industrial use in these areas in the future.
  - Create a plan specifying the types and location of growth Council wishes to promote considering the Official Plan and the Provincial Policy Plan with which we are legislated to comply.
- Marketing
  - Create a plan to encourage development and to support our current businesses.

- Actively promote our municipality as a tourist destination. A large percentage of the people in Deep River alone don't know where we are.
- Plan for an increased economic development budget for 2010 to self-promote.
- Modify the website to create an economic development page specific to our municipality.
- Take more to and bring more back from the Joint Economic Development Committee meetings.

Financial Considerations/Budget Impact:

- Signing the current Visitor's Centre agreement will commit us to at least \$1,000 per year for the next 5 years.
- Could be a significant time impact revamping the zoning by-law and creating a plan.
- Would include County fees as their planning department would prepare and review the final documents.

Policy Impact: Will hopefully create required policy and direction and modify some already established policies and by-laws.

Approved and Recommended by the Clerk

Melinda Reith,  
Municipal Clerk

*Melinda Reith*