



Destination Whitchurch- Stouffville

2014-2019 Tourism
Strategy



Destination Whitchurch-Stouffville 2014-2019 Tourism Action Plan

1.0 Introduction:

Tourism is an increasingly significant contributor to economic growth across Ontario. Whitchurch-Stouffville is home to a collection of assets, when clustered together, form a substantial tourism sector that can be leveraged and grown.

Tourism is the business of attracting and serving the needs of visitors (anyone travelling and staying outside of their home or community for business or pleasure), however, local tourism can be a significant driver as well. Tourism has many multiplier effects that have not been fully captured or explored by the Town to date. Allocating resources to the growth of the tourism sector is an opportunity for economic diversification, job creation, promotion of culture and heritage and the revitalization of Downtown Stouffville, among other benefits.

The purpose of this Tourism Strategy is to align Town resources across departments, to provide effective service to local tourism stakeholders, attract visitors to Whitchurch-Stouffville and raise the tourism profile of the community. This Strategy takes a short, medium and long-term view (3-5 years), setting measurable objectives and outlining the resources required to achieve success.

1.1 Tourism Today

Tourism in York Region is led primarily by two organizations. The first being Central Counties Tourism which covers the geographic areas of York Region, Durham Region and the communities within the Hills of Headwaters Tourism Association. Central Counties Tourism is a provincially funded Regional Tourism Organization (RTO6), and is responsible for the strategic development and marketing of the Central Counties Region as a visitor destination.

Central Counties Tourism has four strategic pillars including: Product Development, Investment Attraction, Workforce Development, and Strategic Marketing. Two additional areas of focus include, Partnership Funding and Governance & Industry. In regards to Partnership Funding, Central Counties Tourism has been administering a matching grant that Town Staff will receive to enhance events in 2014.

The destination marketing organization for York Region is YorkScene (online at www.yorkscene.ca, and through an annual print publication), which markets and promotes regional tourism opportunities in all 9 local municipalities. YorkScene is a collaborative initiative between the York Region Arts Council, the Regional Municipality of York Economic Strategy Branch and the York Region Media Group.

Town Staff liaise with these two regional organizations and have aligned activities to regional priorities to leverage existing resources. The Town will continue to drive tourism efforts locally by acting as a facilitator and resource to established and potential operators by providing logistical support for events, building stakeholder capacity through workshops and fostering networking opportunities.

To date, at the Town, tourism has been mainly focused on the following areas:

- **Agritourism:** Promotion of local farms and the regional Farm Fresh program to support local consumption and on-farm experiences.
- **Special Events:** Planning community events across Whitchurch-Stouffville (e.g.: Ribfest, Museum Classic Car Show, etc.).
- **Cultural Tourism:** Programming and promotion of two cultural facilities, the Lebovic Centre for Arts and Entertainment – Nineteen on the Park, and the Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum and Community Centre.
- **Tourism Attraction:** Data collection, marketing and policy development to enable the attraction of tourism assets to the community (i.e.: accommodation, secondary on-farm uses, rural commercial recreation uses, etc.).
- **Downtown Stouffville:** Attraction of patrons to the Downtown through special events (i.e.: Easter Hunt for Candy, Outdoor Movie Nights, Moonlight Madness, Sidewalk Sale and Classic Car Show and other street closure events).

At the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, tourism is primarily a shared responsibility between Economic Development (Office of the CAO) and Culture (Leisure and Community Services). Downtown Stouffville and Leisure and Community Services Staff are also involved in the planning and execution of special events across the community. The section below defines in further detail the lead responsibilities of Staff involved in tourism.

1.1.1 Culture – Leisure and Community Services:

Culture is primarily concerned with developing and promoting the cultural facilities and events in the Town, including the Lebovic Centre for Arts and Entertainment – Nineteen on the Park and the Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum and Community Centre. It is an

important part of the tourism product and is one of the factors that can improve the competitiveness of Whitchurch-Stouffville as a tourism destination. Culture has also taken on a significant role in the creation and promotion of Town events, both associated with cultural facilities and in general. Events such as Ribfest now fall within the purview of Culture staff.

Areas of focus include:

- Promotion of local and regional tourism to optimize the engagement of the community of cultural assets through the Town website, social media and regional organizations such as Central Counties and YorkScene.
- Collaborative promotion that embraces public and private initiatives.
- Engagement of a part-time, seasonal Events Coordinator who facilitates the coordination of Town events.
- Program development and events that will drive day-trip tourism opportunities and visitation to Whitchurch-Stouffville from across York Region and the GTA.

1.1.2 Economic Development and Downtown Stouffville – Office of the CAO:

Economic Development is primarily concerned with the attraction, retention and expansion of businesses, including tourism businesses. Tourism businesses in Whitchurch-Stouffville range from retail and personal service establishments to golf courses and farm-gates.

Areas of focus include:

- Tourism Policy: Including Planning and Land Use policy and the Retail Business Holidays Act, as well as other related legislation.
- Supporting business expansions and facilitating an 'economic ready' approach to tourism investment attraction.
- Liaising with Regional Partners (York Region, Central Counties, etc.) to implement regional tourism initiatives (e.g.: Farm Fresh).
- Creating content for the Town's "Explore" section of the website and coordinating associated social media content.
- Providing local businesses with opportunities to grow, network and learn the latest trends in the industry.
- Promotion of the community as a destination to invest in tourism infrastructure (such as hotel accommodations) and as a visitor destination to external markets through website content, social media and print campaigns.

Downtown Stouffville is a key component of the overall economic viability of Whitchurch-Stouffville. One of the strategies in the revitalization of the Downtown has been the attraction of visitors through events. To date, the Downtown Coordinator is working to implement this task through the following activities:

- Liaising with York-Durham Heritage Railway (YDHR), Golf Courses and other Tourism Stakeholders.
- Compiling and maintaining tourism stakeholder contact information.
- Developed the 2013 Downtown Stouffville Business Directory and Tourism Guide with the 2014 Visitor's Guide in progress.
- Overseeing several events, i.e. Outdoor Movie Nights, Jane's Walk, Rouge Days, Culture Days, Main Street Festivals, etc.
- Attending tourism-related meetings hosted by Central Counties, York Region, etc.
- Providing guidance to external event organizers i.e. Ribfest, Motorfest, Ballantrae Fall Fair, Hockey Night in Stouffville.

By identifying the existing roles of staff across departments, synergies were recognized, which include:

- Marketing and Promotion
- Event Co-ordination
- Local/Regional Partnerships

Moving forward, under Leisure and Community Services, Culture will oversee Town event coordination, and associated marketing and promotion. Culture will also be the point of contact for external stakeholders looking to plan an event in the community. This is in concert with the enhanced Special Event Policy currently being developed by Leisure Staff.

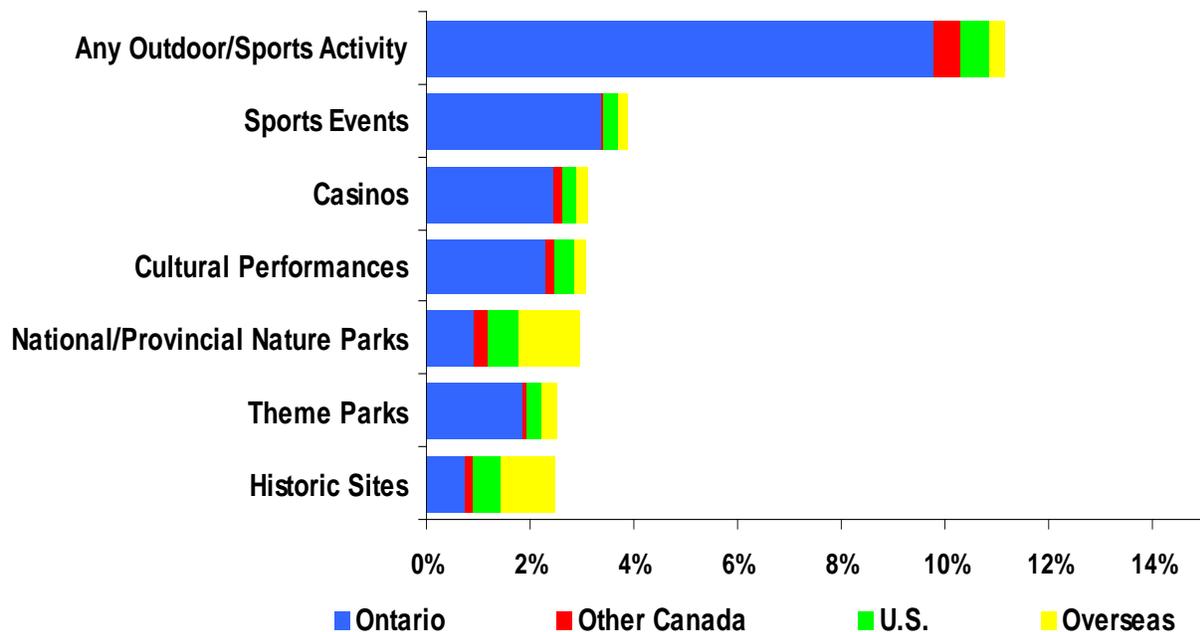
This Tourism Strategy aims to build upon existing tourism efforts today and to lay a foundation for a vibrant tourism sector into the future.

2.0 Tourism Sector Overview:

2.1 Regional Tourism Profile

Based on available data from Central Counties Tourism, the region received 7.6 million visits in 2010. The majority of the visits (71%) to the region were same day visits, compared to 59% for Ontario. Total visitor spending was \$596 million, resulting in 6,288 jobs across the region. Visitors to Central Counties spend an average of \$79 per trip, with the purpose of most trips being to visit friends and relatives (59%)¹. Other motivations to travel to Central Counties, broken down by activity, can be examined in Diagram 1, below:

Diagram 1: 2010 Tourism Visits to Central Counties



It can be seen that the top trip motivator for Ontario visitors to the Central Counties Region is “any outdoor/sports activity”, followed by “sports events”. This demonstrates segments of strength in the area of the outdoors and sports to build upon.

Data derived from the March 2013 Consumer Insights Report prepared for the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation (OTMPC) highlights perceptions of the Central Counties Region as a tourism destination. Some of the key findings include:

¹ Central Counties Tourism, 2014-2015 Business Plan, derived from Statistics Canada, Travel Survey of the Residents of Canada 2010, International Travel Survey 2010, Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

- The Central Counties Region is perceived as an easy destination to get to, offers great outdoor sport opportunities, has great food and restaurants, has popular attractions (man-made or natural) and is a great place to experience history and Canadian heritage;
- Some of the key issues facing the Central Counties Region is that the Region is ill-defined and poorly appreciated, additionally, the image profile is undifferentiated and lacks strong drivers and a presence of “major attractions”;
- Marketing efforts for Central Counties need to focus on brand building and differentiation, starting with nascent strengths in the areas of heritage, festivals, outdoor sports (including golf and equestrian), as well as, local arts, cuisines and bundling these strengths;
- Focus primarily on the domestic market where conversion of interest is easier to initiate in the Greater Toronto Area by emphasizing proximity and clusters of related activity.

Additionally, from an analysis of the key customer segments, five main priorities for Central Counties were identified:

1. Up and Coming Explorers: A youth-oriented group of travelers that are emerging into a new life-stage and have greater affluence and new opportunities. Travel experiences often start with what is nearby and typically with core tourist attractions.
2. Nature Lovers: This consumer group is attracted to outdoor experiences aligned to Ontario’s quintessential parks and lakes offerings. Key interests include: hiking, canoeing, fishing and more recreational aspects of being outdoors and not necessarily the extreme aspects of the outdoors (e.g.: avid angling/hunting).
3. Connected Explorers: This segment has a psychological need to take a break from the everyday and be exposed to new experiences and knowledge. This segment of tourist uses the internet and new technologies to facilitate travel research and planning before, during and after trips.
4. Pampered Relaxers: This segment is defined by an orientation toward pampering the resort life experiences. Vacations are a time to relax and re-energize often through high-end, sophisticated activities.
5. Sports Lovers: This group, skews more male and is driven by a love of sports, either watching or participating. This group is active, and more than likely participates more in organized team sports and golf than extreme sports.

This regional tourism information provides context for local initiatives and helps define priority markets to focus on. Continuing to collect data from regional organizations will assist Town Staff in moving forward with implementation of tourism actions.

2.2 Local Tourism Segments

This section provides a high level overview of tourism segments where current staff resources are allocated. Potential segments to explore are identified as future opportunities to build upon and assign resources to.

Cultural Tourism:

Cultural tourism is a major market and it covers all aspects of travel where visitors can learn about an area's history and way of life. Cultural factors in the context of tourism include entertainment, food, beverage and hospitality in addition to the visual and literary arts, the performing arts, heritage, structures, history, archaeological sites and landscapes. Cultural tourists are a growing demographic and represent a new type of tourist who seeks out meaningful travel/day-trip experiences.

The Town is well positioned to provide day-trippers with an excellent cultural tourism experience. The Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum and Community Centre preserves the history of place, and Nineteen on the Park offers high quality live performance and film while the Latham Gallery provides community engagement with fine and decorative arts.

Studies have shown that approximately 15% of travelers cite cultural experiences as their key reason for travel, almost 80% of other tourists either 'fall into' a cultural experience or participate in a cultural experience in addition to their larger vacation plans.

Cultural tourists:

- Are primarily middle aged and are primarily women
- Are well educated
- Prefer short trips or day trips
- Prefer convenient destinations
- Enjoy heritage, culture and nature experiences
- Expect good service
- Are environmentally sensitive and expect their experiences will be as well

Downtown/Main Street Tourism:

One of the key features of the Downtown Stouffville program is to attract visitation through community events. Both local and regional tourists have been attracted to

events in Downtown Stouffville such as Outdoor Movies and Street festivals. The type of tourist ranges by event, but has included young families and mature tourists. The majority of visitors are from within the community, however, a growing regional audience is present.

Agritourism:

Positioned on the Oak Ridges Moraine, agriculture is a key industry in Whitchurch-Stouffville and has evolved to include on-farm experiences and tourism opportunities. The rise of urbanization, coupled with an interest in local food systems has created opportunities for farmers to promote on-farm experiences for regional tourists. This segment specifically attracts those who are seeking unique agricultural experiences rooted in gaining knowledge about food systems and experiencing 'life on a farm'. Young families with children and young singles are particularly attracted to agritourism experiences such as Maple Syrup Festivals and Farm-Gates. These experiences are usually coupled with dining, shopping and other outdoor experiences.

2.2.1 Segments of Opportunity:

There are a number of other segments of opportunity, where Whitchurch-Stouffville has existing strengths that can be capitalized on, these include, but are not limited to:

Sport Tourism

According to Central Counties Tourism, sport tourism is the fastest growing sector of the tourism industry, experiencing 8.2% growth between 2008 and 2010². Sport tourism is resistant, and in fact, a stabilizer in the tourism industry during volatile economic times. Sport tourism is more than just competitions. Sport business, training and networking conferences can be bid on and/or created to impact tourism in a host community.

Whitchurch-Stouffville is home to award-winning and state-of-the-art facilities that have the capacity to host competitions and sporting events that draw visitors. In addition, businesses such as golf courses are major drivers of sport tourism. The Pan-Am Games in 2015 also provides a unique opportunity to capitalize on a huge event occurring in close proximity to the Town and the subsequent legacy events.

Culinary Tourism

A growing segment, culinary tourism offers both locals and tourists alike an authentic taste of place. It is the intersection between growers, chefs, dining establishments and consumers. It includes any tourism experience in which a person learns about,

² Canadian Sport Tourism Alliance

appreciates or consumes local cuisine. This segment ties in with culture and heritage-based tourism segments. Culinary tourism is not limited to gourmet food. It takes a focus on the uniqueness of place and what is produced. Recent studies have demonstrated a significant economic impact from leveraging culinary tourism, through taste trails and similar tourism programs. Culinary tourists vary in age, but all seek the same thing, a unique culinary experience.

Eco-Tourism/Outdoor Experiences

With the abundance of land, trails and parks in Whitchurch-Stouffville, eco-tourism can become a significant segment of growth. In a Greater Toronto Area context, this presents an opportunity to attract city-dwellers looking for green spaces and outdoor experiences such as hiking and cycling. Recent private sector investments into conservation areas such as the treetop trekking park at Bruce's Mill is a positive attraction that can be packaged with other experiences.

3.0 Strategic Directions:

The goal of this Strategy is to build Whitchurch-Stouffville as a tourism destination. To become a recognized location of choice for the diverse range of rural, natural and cultural experiences offered year-round, a number of objectives have been set:

3.1 Objectives:

- Develop and package experiences
- Attract and retain tourism investment
- Increase tourism visitation, including local, regional and beyond
- Increase repeat visitation, from local, regional and beyond
- Increase tourism spending
- Create employment related to year-round tourism

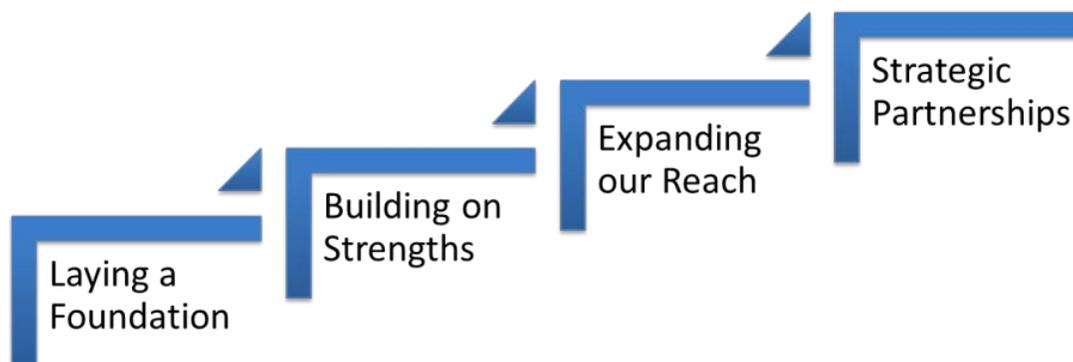
In order to achieve these objectives, in a measurable manner, actions have been organized by thematic areas, which include:

Laying a Foundation: Creating an enabling environment for the tourism sector to grow.

Building on Strengths: Product development based on existing segments of strength.

Expanding our Reach: Marketing and promotion to sell the message of “Destination Whitchurch-Stouffville”, as well as, attract new investment.

Strategic Partnerships: Continuing to build relationships with regional organizations and local stakeholders.



4.0 Action Plan:

The following Action Plan has been categorized by four strategic areas and has assigned short, medium and long-term timelines: Short-term being 1-2 years, medium term as 2-3 years and long-term 3-5 years out.

4.1 Laying a Foundation:

Actions	Timeline	Required Resources/Staff Lead
1. Tourism asset mapping: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To gain a detailed understanding on the tourism value chain by compiling data in the following categories: Tourism attractions, businesses, events, organizations, infrastructure and support activities. 	Short-Term	Economic Development
2. Tourism Data Collection: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Part 1: In order to understand trends at the local level, data on visitation and spending shall be collected from tourism operators and businesses. Part 2: Collect data from external resources and data banks (e.g.: Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership, Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, etc.) 	Short-Term, ongoing Medium-Term	Economic Development Economic Development
3. Tourism Infrastructure Development <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Support the Farm Fresh Signage Program Rebrand the Train Station as the key Visitor Information Centre: Currently not visitor friendly and promotes venues outside of the community. Attract private sector investment to support increased tourism spending and stays (i.e.: Accommodation – hotel, B&B, banquet & convention space, etc.) Broadband in facilities 	Long-Term Short-Term Ongoing Long-Term	Economic Development Culture Economic Development

4. Grant Writing <ul style="list-style-type: none">Require a coordinated effort to write grants.	As required	Cross-departmental
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4.2 Building on our Strengths – Product Development:

Actions	Timeline	Required Resources/Staff Lead
<p>5. Facilitate the creation of “Stay All Day” Packages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with tourism operators and businesses to facilitate packaging to maximize tourist visitation and spending. Examples include: Dinner/Theatre Package; Winery tour and theatre; Golf packages, wellness packages, York-Durham Heritage Railway packages, etc. 	<p>Immediate, Short-Term, ongoing</p>	<p>Cross-departmental</p>
<p>6. Outdoor Experiences & Sports Tourism</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Leverage the trail network and package this experience. Investigate the infrastructure and program development required to boost Sport Tourism opportunities. Build a business case to support the attraction of commercial recreation businesses and major sports events. 	<p>Short-Term</p> <p>Short/Medium-Term</p> <p>Long-Term</p>	<p>Economic Development/Leisure & Community Services</p>
<p>7. Culinary Taste Trail/Event</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building on existing events such as “Stouffvillicious, leverage the wineries, restaurants and farm-gates to create a culinary adventure across Whitchurch-Stouffville. 	<p>Medium-Term</p>	<p>Economic Development</p>
<p>8. Grow Community Events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft an enhanced Special Event Policy that creates criteria to evaluate special events. The policy would also set a process in motion where Leisure Staff act as a central ‘clearinghouse’ for events. As identified in the 5 year forecast in Leisure and Community Services, hire a Full-time Employee (FTE) dedicated to community events. <p>Roll of the FTE:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Promotion of events 	<p>Short-Term</p> <p>Medium-Term</p>	<p>Leisure & Community Services</p> <p>Culture/Leisure & Community Services</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> II. Coordinate cross-departmental efforts to organize events III. Sponsorship package/partnership package for events. IV. Attract additional events (i.e.: Kite Festival, Tough Mudder, Colour me Rad, etc.). V. Provide support to external stakeholders who are organizing community events. 		
<p>9. Continue Downtown Stouffville Events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easter Egg Hunt, Street Closure Events, Moonlight Madness, etc. 	Ongoing	Downtown Stouffville

4.3 Expanding our Reach - Marketing & Promotion:

Action	Timeline	Required Resources/Staff Lead
<p>10. Launch an Engaging Digital Strategy</p> <p>a. Town website: Continue to generate content for the website.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. Four Season Attractions/Opportunities II. Tourism business/operator profiles III. GIS map tours <p>b. Corresponding Social Media campaigns, push traffic to website.</p> <p>c. Develop engaging videos to promote the Town.</p> <p>d. Increase online advertising to enhance click-throughs to website.</p>	<p>Immediate/ Ongoing</p> <p>Immediate/ Ongoing</p> <p>Medium-Term</p> <p>Short/Medium Term</p>	<p>Economic Development/ Corporate Communications (support); External creative and design</p>
<p>11. Create an Online Photo Gallery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make an image bank available on the Town’s website to help businesses and operators promote the destination • Consider additional social media channels such as Tumblr or Instagram to promote photos. 	<p>Medium-Term</p> <p>Long-Term</p>	<p>Cross-departmental</p> <p>Economic Development/ Corporate Communications</p>
<p>12. Generate Print Collateral</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a collection of collateral (Visitor’s Guide, Postcards, etc.) with both general tourism messaging and niche segment messages. 	<p>Short/Medium Term</p>	<p>Economic Development/ Corporate Communications (support); External creative and design</p>
<p>13. Create a Media-Buying Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require an overall media-buying strategy to best advertise W-S as a destination and targeting for specific events. • Buying from traditional media sources and social media ad-buying (Facebook ads, etc.) 	<p>Short-Term</p>	<p>Economic Development/ Corporate Communications (support)</p>

4.4 Strategic Partnerships:

Action	Timeline	Required Resources/Staff Lead
14. Tourism Stakeholder Capacity Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with regional partners to offer industry-related workshops (e.g.: hospitality, marketing, product development, etc.). 	Short-Term, ongoing	Culture/Economic Development
15. Networking with Tourism Associations, attending industry events	Medium-Term	Culture
16. Liaise with Regional Tourism Organizations (Central Counties Tourism, York Region Arts Council) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilize YorkScene and Central Counties websites 	ongoing	Economic Development
17. Bringing Together Stakeholders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and engage local tourism stakeholders. Town to host Tourism Roundtable meetings with local stakeholders. 	Short-Term	Cross-departmental

5.0 Measuring Outcomes

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions contained in this Strategy, measurable outcomes have been developed. Table 1, below, provides a list of desired outcomes, with achievable metrics.

Table 1: Tourism Strategy Measurable Outcomes

Outcomes	Measure
1. Increased visitation and repeat visitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Record of visitors from tourism attractions, businesses and accommodations, etc.
2. Increased engagement of tourism stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance and tourism roundtable meetings
3. Increased spending by visitors year over year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dollars spent by tourists at attractions, businesses, accommodations, etc.
4. Increased profile of Whitchurch-Stouffville as a tourism destination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Circulation of print collateral Impressions from digital advertising Reach and engagement of social media campaigns Website visits/analytics
5. New tourism investment in Whitchurch-Stouffville	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of new investments Value of building permit/construction cost
6. Employment created related to year-round tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of new employees at tourism attractions, accommodations, businesses, etc.
7. Tourism business expansions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of expansions Value of building permit
8. Attendance at Community and Downtown Stouffville events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recorded attendance at events

In addition to these general outcomes and measures, at the outset of any activity, program or marketing campaign, a set of metrics will be developed and tracked over the duration of the project. These measures will be reported on annually to Town Council and to any funding agencies involved (e.g.: Central Counties Tourism, Province of Ontario, etc.). The measures will also be shared with tourism operators and businesses, to continually build the capacity of the sector. It will also be curated in marketing material to communicate key messages about the sector to internal and external markets.