

# Huntsville Municipal Accommodation Tax Association

## MINUTES

Virtual Meeting held on **Wednesday September 9, 2020 @ 2:00 pm**

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**Present:** Jesse Hamilton, Christine Kropp, Scott Doughty, Matthew Phillips, Kaushal Gandhi, Karin Terziano, Jeff Suddaby  
**Staff:** Kelly Haywood, Bill Farnsworth, Torin Suddaby, Morgan Richter  
**Guests:** Lesli Martin, Vice-President, Pollara Inc.  
Dan Watson, Executive Director, Huntsville Festival of the Arts

### 1. Welcome

Approve Agenda as presented

**Be it resolved that the agenda be accepted as presented**

**Moved by:** Jeff Suddaby

**Seconded by:** Matthew Phillips

**CARRIED**

### 2. Declaration of Conflict of Interest

No conflicts were brought forward.

### 3. Approval of Minutes

**Be it resolved that the minutes from the August 19, 2020 meeting be accepted as presented.**

**Moved by:** Jeff Suddaby

**Seconded by:** Scott Doughty

**CARRIED**

### 4. Presentation by Lesli Martin of Pollara Inc.

Lesli Martin presented the summary report of Pollara's findings and data of the two surveys undertaken, the Ontario General Population Survey and the Huntsville Previous Traveller Survey. The General Population survey had 900 respondents and the Traveller Survey had 800 respondents. There were both positive findings and some less positive areas identified that need to be addresses. See appendix 1 to these minutes for a listing of the major insights of the survey results. Kelly Haywood asked if Pollara was happy with the sample size of the survey and Lesli responded that they were "very happy" with both sample sizes. See Appendix 1 at the end of these minutes for a list of the significant survey findings.

### 5. Presentation by Dan Watson of the Huntsville Festival of the Arts

Dan Watson presented the Board with the Festival's proposed line-up of events for October to December 2020. Understanding the changes to his plan due to COVID-19, Dan was requesting that the Board approve the \$19,166 from the Festival's previously approved Partnership Agreement to be used toward this new plan. The new plan is divided by months. For October the Festival will host Muskoka Home Grown events at the Morgan House B&B with outdoor

activities, live local artists and food provided by the Muskoka North Good Food Co-op. Four outdoor concerts are planned to take place at the Huntsville Fairgrounds. In November the Festival would display the Group of Seven Anniversary painted canoes in the event space at Canvas Brewery, paired with live music and workshops and activities run by local artists. In December the Festival will be featuring a live outdoor performance of "The Snow Queen," taking place in various outdoor sites in Downtown Huntsville. The performance will be led by local artists and involve youth ages 7-12.

Matthew Phillips asked how many room nights these events are expected to generate. Dan responded that the goal is to create 80-100 room nights. Scott Doughty asked what groups the Festival would be marketing to. Dan replied that the December shows will be marketed to families with young children, November's activities will be aimed at empty nesters and the October events including concerts will be marketed toward a younger demographic.

Dan left the call and discussion ensued about potential benefits of the program vs. the costs and how many out of town visitors would be attracted. The Board also expressed interest in being presented with a more detailed marketing plan for the proposed programs. A motion was made to approve the granting of \$12,500 to the Festival for these programs.

**Be it resolved to provide the Huntsville Festival of the Arts with \$12,500.00 to be used for their Fall/Winter 2020 programming.**

**Moved by:** Christine Kropp

**Seconded by:** Matthew Phillips

**Motion Approved**

## **6. Staff Reports**

Bill Farnsworth provided the Board with a financial update. HMATA currently has \$446,613.00 in the bank with pending receivables of \$69,851.00, for a total of \$516,464.00. Bill reported that the actual income received so far for July and August was significantly lower than projections. After discussion it was agreed that there is outstanding MAT tax that has not yet been reported by accommodators and that previous projection figures should still be used.

Torin Suddaby gave an update about the Fall Into Huntsville program. With the RTO-12's Sweater Weather campaign running from September 14 to October 29, Torin requested direction on when the Fall Into Huntsville campaign should be launched to avoid overlap and confusion between programs. After discussion it was decided that the program should be ready to launch October 1, with mid-week bookings made between October 1-31 for stays from November 1 – December 17.

## **7. Discussion of Winter Marketing/Programming**

Jesse Hamilton discussed with the Board the potential to create a winter light installation similar to the "Blumination" installation hosted by Blue Mountain. The idea would be to hire an outside company to create a Downtown Huntsville light installation/experience, which would likely be held in River Mill Park and the surrounding area. The goal would be to create something unique and large enough to attract visitors to the Town to experience the installation. Torin Suddaby

said he had been in initial talks with one potential company about contracts and pricing. The Huntsville BIA is also considering adding lights to Huntsville's Main Street this winter. Karin Terziano suggested that HMATA work with the BIA to complete a delegation to Town Council that incorporates both lighting ideas.

Next Steps: The Chamber will put together quote(s) from companies to produce the light installation and work with the Huntsville BIA to produce a winter lighting proposal for council.

## **8. Adjournment**

**Be it resolved to adjourn meeting at 4:10 pm**

**Moved by:** Jeff Suddaby

**Seconded by:** Scott Doughty

Next meeting date to be held virtually on Wednesday September 23 at 3:00pm.

## **Appendix #1 – Pollara Survey Insights**

### **Strengths and Opportunities**

1. Most Ontarians have cancelled their out of province and out of country travel plans, stating that they will be travelling inside the Province instead during the summer. However, when those who said they were cancelling out of Province plans were asked about fall and winter travel, 39% of Ontarians said they will be staying home vs. traveling while many others say they will be waiting to see what happens with COVID-19 and if travel is advisable. Huntsville has the opportunity to increase fall and winter visits from the group who would otherwise be travelling elsewhere, but it will take marketing effort and some innovative strategies to convince travellers Huntsville is a safe and desirable fall and winter destination.
2. Scenery and tranquility are most important to travellers to Huntsville. The top 5 activities they are interested in are:
  - Quiet locations with scenic views
  - Areas where you can spend alone time with family
  - Swimming
  - Hiking, biking or Nordic skiing trails
  - Non-motorized boating options – canoe, kayak, paddleboard
3. The current marketing strategy of positioning Huntsville as an outdoor adventure destination is working, as Ontarians are most interested in the Town's outdoor recreation opportunities.
4. Previous visitors to Huntsville were overwhelmingly positive about their experience and extremely willing to return. 92% of respondents said they were satisfied with their last trip to Huntsville. By capturing new visitors to the region we can also greatly increase overall travel through these repeat visits.
5. Huntsville does not need to fight against any negative impressions among Ontario travellers. It is a popular area of Muskoka and would be a travel consideration compared to most other areas of Ontario.
6. Muskoka as a region is Ontario's most popular summer destination, with 28% of Ontarians planning to travel. Huntsville is the second most popular region in Muskoka as a summer and fall

destination, behind Algonquin Park. 91% of Ontarians have heard of Algonquin Park and 75% are somewhat or very interested in visiting the park. It is extremely important to continue marketing our proximity to the Park.

7. Safety is a major consideration for travellers and stressing safety measures and in-province travel as a safer alternative for holidays could alleviate some of the fears of travelling. Huntsville has an opportunity to promote our small town atmosphere as a safe travel destination.

### **Weaknesses and Challenges**

1. While over half of Ontarians have at least passed through Huntsville, 64% of the Province say they are unfamiliar with the Town, with 5% saying they have never even heard of Huntsville. This means that 1) Huntsville needs to educate the Province about the Town and what it has to offer and 2) we need to make sure that we are capturing travellers who are passing through Huntsville and convince them to stop and take part in activities and adventure instead of driving straight through.
2. Huntsville's cultural activities, shopping and dining are not well known compared to outdoor activities. By teaching Ontarians about these opportunities, the Town can increase visitors. Hearing about these Huntsville offerings, even in the confines of the survey, increased interest in visiting the area among the general population of Ontarians in all seasons, with the largest increase in the fall.
3. 42% of Ontarians have never heard of Downtown Huntsville shopping while 57% have never heard of the Algonquin Theatre. 73% have never heard of the Hunter's Bay Trail which is part of the Great/Trans-Canada Trail while 41% have never even heard of Arrowhead Park. These are major Huntsville attractions that Ontarians need to be made aware of to attract more visitors.
4. While Huntsville is a reasonably competitive destination versus other areas of the province, 42% say they are much more or somewhat more likely to travel to Niagara Falls, 40% to Prince Edward County, 38% to the Greater Ottawa region and 37% to Collingwood/Blue Mountain. An awareness and differentiation campaign could be developed that very clearly compares Huntsville's offerings with those of other regions.
5. The top 2 reasons given for being less likely to visit Huntsville are that they are not familiar with Huntsville (21%) or they feel other destinations offer activities that may be more interesting (20%). While it's the preferred destination for those who have previously stayed in Huntsville, the Town must work harder to educate Ontarians about our unique offerings to increase our reputation and visitor market share within the Province.
6. Huntsville is far less known as a winter destination, with only 9% of Ontarians considering the region for winter travel. Travellers this winter say they are much more likely to travel to city centres such as Toronto and Ottawa, as well as other tourism destinations such as Collingwood/Blue Mountain and the Niagara area over travel to Huntsville. As a Town, this means we must be extremely pro-active in making winter travellers aware of the many activities and attractions Huntsville has to offer and we should create new and unique programs to draw more visitors.
7. When asked about winter travel plans, Bracebridge is more popular than Huntsville. We should examine Bracebridge's winter activities such as the Fire and Ice Festival and Santa's Festival of Lights to create competing programs and/or events to differentiate Huntsville and attract a larger share of winter travellers.