



A community that grows together

Report To: Warden Horner and Members of County Council

Meeting Date: May 8, 2025

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**Subject: Explore Dufferin Investors' Tour**

**From: Rajbir Sian, Director of Community Development and Tourism**

### **Recommendation**

**THAT the report from the Director of Community Development and Tourism, Report #Planning and Development-2025-035, "Explore Dufferin Investors' Tour", dated May 8, 2025, be received.**

### **Executive Summary**

- The Explore Dufferin Investors' Tour was hosted on Wednesday, April 23, 2025 with the goal of familiarizing tourism investors with Dufferin County.
- The event included two main components: a Networking Breakfast and a bus tour.
- 38 attendees were recorded for the Networking Breakfast, while the bus tour included 20 participants.
- The Tour presented an opportunity to strengthen connections among local businesses and current investors.

### **Background & Discussion**

Investment attraction remains a key component of economic development efforts across small and large municipalities. For many communities, attracting outside investments is a necessary ingredient for stimulating local growth, diversifying the economy, and creating jobs. These efforts are especially important in times of economic uncertainty as it can spur short and long-term resiliency. The Explore Dufferin Investors' Tour (EDIT) was a pilot initiative that sought to explore tourism investment attraction.

This pilot initiative was hosted by the Economic Development division on Wednesday, April 23, 2025, with the goal of familiarizing prospective tourism investors with Dufferin County's tourism landscape. The event was separated into two main components: the morning networking breakfast, and the bus tour. The networking breakfast, which was held at Hockley Valley Resort, consisted of scheduled programming of presentations and speeches from dignitaries and County staff, with intervals that allowed for attendees to engage in conversations and network. A documentary-style tourism promotional video was also premiered at the networking breakfast to serve as a digital prelude to the experiential bus tour. The bus tour involved a curated tour of some of Dufferin's most popular tourism assets and businesses, including the Museum of Dufferin, Maple Grove Farm, Mansfield Outdoor Centre, the Athlete Institute, Adamo Estate Winery, and Downtown Orangeville. The networking breakfast recorded 38 attendees, while the bus tour included 20 participants. Several additional participants did not join the entire bus tour but joined at various stops on the tour.

In the months leading up to the event, Economic Development staff explored a variety of avenues to recruit prospective investors. This included participation in the *Meet the Tourism Investment Dragons Event*, which took place in November 2024 in Toronto. All the participating investors at this event were presented with invitations to EDIT. Multiple follow up emails and phone calls were made to these individuals and several expressed initial interest. There were additional efforts to reach other investors through professional connections and paid social media ads. Despite these efforts, registration from prospective investors remained low for both the networking breakfast and bus tour. Several prospective investors sent regrets in the days leading up to the event, while others sent regrets on the day of the event.

There are several possible reasons why EDIT faced these challenges. However, the leading diagnosis is the narrow focus of outreach efforts. Most of the outreach efforts focused on short-term accommodation providers such as hoteliers and developers of boutique-style accommodations. This is a niche sub-group of tourism investors who seem to be generally familiar with the Dufferin market through their own internal research, and perhaps did not find value in a familiarization tour of the County. This decision to pursue this sub-group of prospective investors stemmed from the draft Tourism Strategy Addendum, which identified the lack of short-term accommodations as a major barrier to the growth of Dufferin's visitor economy.

Another possible reason for the low response from prospective investors is the uncertainty of the current economic climate. To better prepare Dufferin County with economic initiatives to deal with economic volatility efforts such as the primary data collection and development of an investment attraction strategy are being undertaken.

These steps will provide a detailed framework on how to strategically pursue investments while navigating current and future economic uncertainties.

Most of the bus tour participants were existing Dufferin investors and local business owners. This presented an opportunity to further build local connections in a unique setting. Participants were exposed to areas and businesses they were not familiar with, creating opportunities to shore up supply chains and fostering a sense of regional community. The conversations among participants also centered on the existing networks of supportive businesses and how these networks can be nurtured to spur local investments and business expansions, and ultimately keep disposable spending on leisure in Dufferin County.

Overall, this pilot initiative provided invaluable insights on hosting familiarization tours and the challenges that Dufferin faces in attracting specific types of investments. The event also opened opportunities for the County to organize more events that facilitate connections between business owners. A stronger ecosystem of local businesses that are supportive of each other will make Dufferin an attractive destination for investments, strengthening the County's efforts.

### **Financial, Staffing, Legal, or IT Considerations**

The Explore Dufferin Investors' Tour was fully funded through the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness' (OMAFRA) Rural Economic Development (RED) program. The cost of the tourism video, which was premiered at the Morning Breakfast as an additional offering, was covered within the 2025 budget as a separate budget line item as it is intended to serve a broader tourism promotional purpose.

### **In Support of Strategic Plan Priorities and Objectives**

***Economy*** - advance County-wide economic development workforce development

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Respectfully Submitted By:

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