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Town of Aurora
Committee of the Whole Report
No. PDS25-109

Subject: 2026-2030 Town of Aurora Visitor Growth Plan

Prepared by: Angela Haynes, Senior Economic Development Officer

Department: Planning and Development Services

Date: November 11, 2025

Recommendation

1. That Report No. PDS25-109 be received; and
2. That the 2026-2030 Town of Aurora Visitor Growth Plan be adopted; and
3. That staff proceed with the development of a wayfinding strategy, in accordance with the Town-wide Parking strategy and downtown redevelopment priorities, and report back to Council.

Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the development and key recommendations of the Town's new 2026 – 2030 Visitor Growth Plan. With the AEDC Board's continued support, this document was developed as a direct extension of the Economic Development Action Plan. It focuses on leveraging the pillars of Innovation, Local Business Support, Downtown Revitalization, and Storytelling to increase visitation, enhance visitor experience and highlight Aurora as a premier destination. The plan's recommendations are the result of a rigorous, four-month collaboration with a public consultation group and Central Counties Tourism, ensuring a strategic and community-driven approach to boosting the local visitor economy.

- The Visitor Growth Plan develops and supports initiatives to promote the Town of Aurora as a year-round destination.
- The Visitor Growth Plan was informed through detailed research.
- That the Economic Development office be designated as the coordinating body to implement the 2026 -2030 Visitor Growth Plan and its related Pillars.

- The Visitor Growth Plan's Objectives and Goals will establish the Town of Aurora as a premier destination for visitors.

Background

As a key component of the Town's broader Economic Development Action Plan, which is built upon the four pillars of Innovation, Local Business Support, Downtown Revitalization, and Storytelling, a comprehensive Visitor Growth Plan has been developed. This initiative was undertaken to strategically advance the goals of the Action Plan, particularly those related to visitation and downtown revitalization. The plan's development was the result of an intensive, four-month collaborative process with a public consultation group. The group was comprised of representatives from the Town's Business Support Services, Chamber of Commerce, Aurora Cultural Centre, local hotels and, residents to name a few. The draft Plan was completed in a partnership with Central Counties Tourism. This concerted effort has resulted in a strategic framework designed to enhance the Town's appeal and increase its visitor economy.

Analysis

The Visitor Growth Plan develops and supports initiatives to promote the Town of Aurora as a premier destination.

By strategically leveraging its core assets and attractions, this Plan positions Aurora as the premier destination of choice. The strategy is designed to drive robust economic growth, cultivate deep community pride, and significantly improve both the visitor experience and the environment for local businesses.

The 2026 – 2030 Town of Aurora's Visitor Growth Plan was informed through detailed research.

The Visitor Growth Plan was informed by both qualitative and quantitative research methods, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the Town's current visitor landscape and potential. The plan was developed over four months through a collaborative process facilitated by Central Counties Tourism. This process involved a working group of local stakeholders representing key sectors that influence local visitation, including arts and culture, hospitality, sports, retail, and Town departments.

That the Economic Development office be designated as the coordinating body to implement the Visitor Growth Plan and its related Pillars.

As the designate, the Economic Development office would perform as the coordinating body for the Visitor Growth Plan. This centralized role ensures efficient resource leverage and cohesive action across divisions. By actively engaging partners and external stakeholders, the Economic Development office will drive successful outcomes that meet the Plan's objectives, goals and related action items as outlined under the five (5) Plan Pillars i.e. Champion, Connect, Collaborate, Create, and Communicate. Each Pillar serves as the roadmap for the Visitor Growth Plan.

Research

i. Visitor Data and Trends

The visitor economy stimulates local economic growth. In fact, research shows that over 319,000 visitors to Aurora's retail hubs and sports complexes from more than 40 km away generated approximately \$36.3 million in spending.

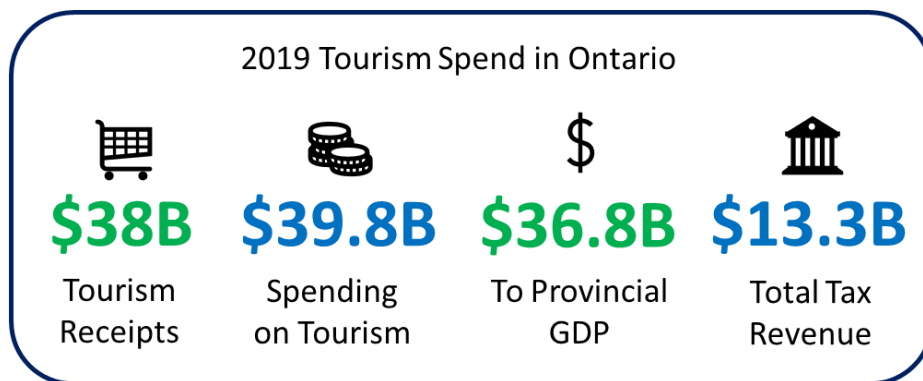
From geo-fencing research of several sport and retail locations, including Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex, Stronach Fields, Lambert Wilson Park, Aurora Community Centre, and Sheppard's Bush fields, as well as St. Andrews Shopping Centre, Yonge Street shops, and Town Square, it was found that there were over 4.4 million visits in 2023.

This demonstrates that the town's strong restaurants, shopping and sports facilities have made it a destination for visitors, which is a unique and unexpected strength for the municipality.

ii. Economic Impact of Visitation Visitation in Ontario

In 2019, before the pandemic, Ontario's visitor attraction industry was a major economic driver. It generated over \$38 billion in revenue, an 11.4% increase from 2018, and accounted for 4.3% of the province's GDP.

This sector also created \$13.3 billion in tax revenues and provided jobs for over 396,000 people across more than 200,000 businesses. Notably, the visitor attraction sector is a significant employer for young people in Ontario, with 23% of all jobs for those aged 15–24 being in this industry. It also provides year-round employment opportunities in communities across the province.



Visitation in Central Counties and York Region

In 2022, Central Counties (RTO6) recorded 13 million domestic overnight visits from travelers located more than 60 kilometers away. Of these visits, 10 million were from within Ontario, and the remaining 3 million were from other parts of Canada. These travelers spent an estimated \$3 billion in the region. The Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO) and Global Payments Canada published a Travel and Destination Analytics Report in October 2019, which highlighted trends in visitor spending in Ontario for 2018:

- Toronto, Niagara, and Central Counties accounted for 78.9 percent of inbound spending in Ontario.
- Inbound spend made up 2.3% versus domestic spend at 97.7%. For Central Counties region, this inbound spend came primarily from the United States [U.S.] (49.5%) and China (36.4%).

iii. Untapped Potential

There are more than 150 individual assets were identified in Aurora including attractions, eateries, restaurants, sports facilities, festivals & events, and Arts & Culture. The breadth and depth of assets under each of the categories means that there is a critical mass of things to for visitors of all types.

iv. Community Engagement

- Insights were gathered from local businesses, cultural institutions, residents, and Town staff through four interactive planning sessions.
- Stakeholders showed strong interest in coordinated action to improve visitor experiences, multi-sector engagement and deepening community pride.

Advisory Committee Review

N/A

Legal Considerations

None

Financial Implications

There are no immediate financial implications resulting from this report and respective plan. Where impact to future budget is identified, it will be brought forward for consideration as part of the annual budget process.

Communications Considerations

Corporate Communications will support the Visitor Growth Plan through targeted strategies that promote key initiatives, engage stakeholders, and build awareness of Aurora as a year-round destination. Working with Economic Development, Communications will use a coordinated mix of digital, print, and in-person tactics to ensure consistent messaging and strong visibility across all audiences.

Climate Change Considerations

N/A

Link to Strategic Plan

Economy

Objective 1: Promoting economic opportunities that facilitate the growth of Aurora as a desirable place to do business

- Actively promote and support the plan to revitalize the downtown.

Objective 2: Supporting small business and encouraging a more sustainable business environment

- Investigate opportunities to encourage the creation and mobilization of knowledge in the local economy.

Alternative(s) to the Recommendation

N/A

Conclusion

This report solidifies the Town of Aurora's commitment to developing a strong visitor economy. Three major actions will immediately set the Visitor Growth Plan in motion: formally adopting the Plan, assigning the Economic Development office to lead coordination, and fast-tracking the development of the wayfinding strategy. These steps would instantly create the vital structure needed for success, transforming the Plan's robust five-pillar framework (Champion, Connect, Collaborate, Create, and Communicate) into a focused, accountable, and sustained program. By immediately prioritizing clear leadership and a key infrastructure improvement (wayfinding), the Town can secure the necessary momentum to realize the Plan's ultimate benefit: leveraging the existing \$36.3 million visitor economy to establish Aurora as a top, year-round destination, which in turn generates sustainable economic growth and enriches the quality of life for the entire community.

Attachment

Attachment No. 1: 2026 – 2030 Town of Aurora Visitor Growth Plan

Previous Reports

N/A

Pre-submission Review

Agenda Management Team review on October 23, 2025

Approvals

Approved by Marco Ramunno, Director, Planning and Development Services

Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer