



Administrative Report

To: Warden MacDonald and Members of Essex County Council

From: Sandra Zwiers, MAcc, CPA, CA
Chief Administrative Officer

Date: Wednesday, July 17, 2024

Subject: Discretionary Regional Shared Services – Survey Results

Report #: 2024-0717-CAO-R10-SZ

Purpose

To provide County Council with the results of consultation with Local Municipal Partners relating to regional participation in certain discretionary services, namely tourism and economic development.

Background

Following the 2024 Budget deliberations, County Council approved the following motion:

051-2024

Moved By Dennis Rogers

Seconded By Sherry Bondy

That Essex County Council give Administration direction to consult with local municipalities to investigate their satisfaction with the services provided by any discretionary external commitments and to invite these organizations to present to County Council and the local municipalities to demonstrate the benefit they are providing to municipalities and the value for money invested by the County and that a report come back to County Council prior to the 2025 budget deliberations.

The County supports two primary discretionary service agencies: Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island and Invest WindsorEssex.

Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island (TWEPI)

TWEPI is the official destination marketing organization for the regional tourism industry. As a not-for-profit organization, TWEPI is dedicated to

promoting and selling Windsor, Essex County and Pelee Island as a remarkable destination for tourists, convention goers and business travelers. TWEPI's vision is to put the region top of mind as a regional tourism destination in Ontario, offering authentic and diverse visitor experiences. TWEPI's mission is to be the leading tourism industry collaborative, committed to enhancing the region's economy and quality of life through: supporting industry development and individual operators, actively facilitating partner engagements and effectively marketing our destination to a provincial, national and international audience.

Invest WindsorEssex (IWE)

IWE is a not-for-profit organization supported by the City of Windsor and the County of Essex that is responsible for advancing economic development to grow and sustain prosperity in the region.

As the lead economic development organization in the region, IWE provides confidential and expert assistance to companies and entrepreneurs in all sectors. IWE's focus is to develop and execute strategies to retain, expand, attract and help start up new businesses in the Windsor-Essex region.

Discussion

A survey was created by Administration and sent electronically to County Council, CAOs and tourism and economic development staff of all seven LMPs. The survey intended to gauge awareness and satisfaction with the services provided by the partner agency and allowed for open text feedback to ensure participants had the opportunity to add more detail at their own discretion. LMPs were also invited to book an in-person meeting with the County CAO to engage in further discussions if desired.

The aggregate results of the survey are attached as **Appendix A** (TWEPI) and **Appendix B** (IWE).

TWEPI Results

Nearly 100% of survey participants indicated awareness of TWEPI's strategic mandate and County funding level. When asked if TWEPI duplicated services provided by their municipality, 76% of respondents said "No." From a service perspective, 88% of respondents believe TWEPI's services complement and/or augment services provided at the local level.

LMPs report a high level of engagement, noting 88% of respondents engage directly with TWEPI staff. In terms of support for County funding, 96% of respondents believe County levy dollars should support TWEPI and if County

dollars weren't directed to TWEPI, 44% of LMPs would support increasing their local levy to maintain TWEPI services.

In terms of satisfaction, 96% of respondents report being either satisfied or very satisfied with TWEPI products/services. From a reputational standpoint, 91% of respondents rated their impression of TWEPI as good to excellent.

The vast majority of respondents (91%) feel their municipality is receiving good value for money from TWEPI.

IWE Results

Nearly 100% of survey participants indicated awareness of IWE's strategic mandate and County funding level. When asked if IWE duplicated services provided by their municipality, 56% of respondents said "No." From a service perspective, 67% of respondents believe IWE's services complement and/or augment services provided at the local level.

LMPs report a high level of engagement, noting 80% of respondents engage directly with IWE staff. In terms of support for County funding, 68% of respondents believe County levy dollars should support IWE and if County dollars weren't directed to IWE, only 26% of LMPs would support increasing their local levy to maintain IWE services.

In terms of satisfaction, 53% of respondents report being either satisfied or very satisfied with IWE products/services. From a reputational standpoint, 52% of respondents rated their impression of IWE as good to excellent.

A minority of respondents (43%) feel their municipality is receiving good value for money from IWE.

Regional Service Approach – Benefits and Challenges

When it comes to considering the value each local municipality receives from TWEPI or IWE, it's important to recognize both organizations are regional entities, inclusive of the City of Windsor, built to promote and advance the interests of the region. Proponents of this regional approach maintain a rising tide lifts all ships and that, by promoting the region and enticing investors to spend money here, both agencies are working to create a prosperous environment where the initiatives of local municipalities can flourish.

When considering tourism services, advocates of a regional approach believe TWEPI has significantly more reach than our Local Municipal Partners when it comes to delivering one coordinated message to a large number of potential visitors: "Visit Essex County and Windsor." Through social media and by way of traditional marketing campaigns, a regional body can carry that message

to a far greater number of potential visitors outside of the region and country than can LMPs. Local municipalities can then draw to their own attractions from a greater number of visitors to the region.

A critic of this regional approach could highlight a perceived duplication of services or argue that Windsor, as our region's urban centre, with a Casino, Art Gallery and significant number of hotels, benefits disproportionately from this arrangement.

A survey of Councillors and LMPs counters the first argument, with 76 per cent asserting there is no duplication of services and 88 per cent believing the services are complementary to one another. The second point underestimates the increasing tourism draw of the County, which is blessed with historic sites and an increasing number of wineries, distilleries, bicycle trails and overnight accommodations, including traditional hotels.

When considering economic development services, advocates of this regional approach maintain that any new development benefits all, no matter where it is located, because jobs and spinoff economic benefits do not observe municipal borders. People would drive from their homes in LaSalle or Amherstburg to a factory in Windsor or Tecumseh, for example, and entrepreneurs might set up a complementary factory producing parts in Lakeshore or Essex, again creating jobs benefiting residents from Kingsville, Leamington or other municipalities.

Some question, however, whether the County of Essex gets adequate bang for its buck since the bulk of new investments, and the property tax revenue they generate, tend to be located within the City of Windsor. This line of reasoning also holds that some LMPs benefit more than others depending on where new investments are located. A majority of survey respondents indicated LMPs were not receiving good value for their money from Invest WindsorEssex and further indicated they would not support funding it with local dollars.

The question, then, hinges on whether one sees value in proactively promoting our region as an attractive place to invest and whether or not LMPs working in isolation have the same sort of national and global reach a regional body has to highlight shared strengths like a skilled workforce and proximity to the Canada-U.S. border.

The County's Strategic Plan calls for "Building a Regional Powerhouse" by helping to create an environment conducive to "public and private investment attraction." County Council must consider whether the economic development arms of each of the LMPs can accomplish that goal, with the success of one municipality benefitting the others through job creation and economic momentum. Or does the diminished reach of each, and the risk of

duplication and potentially working at cross-purposes, highlight the need for a more coordinated regional effort, delivered by Invest WindsorEssex or some other vehicle?

Feedback from TWEPI and IWE

Aggregate survey results, as referenced in **Appendices A** and **B**, were provided to Gordon Orr, CEO, TWEPI and Joe Goncalves, Interim CEO, IWE, for their review and comment. Both organizations remain committed to delivering quality products and services and aim to achieve a high level of satisfaction from the County of Essex. **Appendices C** and **D** contain feedback from TWEPI and IWE respectively.

Financial Implications

The 2024 Budget approved the following funding:

TWEPI	\$782,700
IWE	\$1,122,060

Both organizations leverage municipal funding to access grant programs at the provincial and federal level which has the effect of amplifying the value of each municipal tax dollar contributed by the County of Essex.

Consultations

Local Municipal Partners

Strategic Plan Alignment

Working as Team Essex County	Growing as Leaders in Public Service Excellence	Building a Regional Powerhouse
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Scaling Sustainable Services through Innovation <input type="checkbox"/> Focusing "Team Essex County" for Results <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Advocating for Essex County's Fair Share 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Being an Employer with Impact <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A Government Working for the People <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Promoting Transparency and Awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Providing Reliable Infrastructure for Partners <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporting Dynamic and Thriving Communities Across the County <input type="checkbox"/> Harmonizing Action for Growth <input type="checkbox"/> Advancing Truth and Reconciliation

Recommendation

That Essex County Council receive report number 2024-0717-CAO-R10-SZ, Discretionary Regional Shared Services – Survey Results as information.

Approvals

Respectfully Submitted,

Sandra Zwiers

Sandra Zwiers, MAcc, CPA, CA, Chief Administrative Officer

Appendix	Title
A	TWEPI Survey Results Summary
B	IWE Survey Results Summary
C	TWEPI Feedback Letter – Gordon Orr, CEO
D	IWE Feedback Letter – Joe Goncalves, Interim CEO
