



105B Walker St., Truro, B2N 4B1

July 18, 2023
Mayor Bill Mills and Council
695 Prince St., Truro, NS
B2N 5C5

RE: Visitor Information Services in Downtown Truro

Dear Mayor Bill Mills and Council,

Tourism and hospitality play a significant role in creating vibrant communities to work and live in. Tourism is therefore not only a key economic driver as an industry, it is an indispensable component of broader economic development. There are more than 3,500 local jobs directly tied to the tourism industry in Truro and Colchester with hundreds more indirectly impacted.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the entire tourism industry from coast to coast suffered and this area was no exception. The Truro and Colchester Chamber of Commerce has diligently worked with municipalities, Millbrook First Nation and private business to support this industry during these difficult times. We are proud to share that the Explore Central NS brand has gained provincial recognition through investments in the past three years totalling more than \$300,000 which was further leveraged by members of the Chamber.

As part of its ongoing support for tourism, the Chamber partners with the Province of Nova Scotia to ensure frontline resources are available to tourists at Visitor Information Centre (VIC) in three counties; Cumberland, Colchester and East Hants.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly 40,000 people were welcomed through the doors of the 10 regional Visitor Information Centres. In 2018, the last year on record that the Town of Truro operated a VIC, more than 4,800 people were welcomed by your staff and directed to key locations in the downtown, as well as throughout the region.

We understand there have been challenges that have prevented use of the existing building at the Victoria Square site in downtown since this time. During the past two years there were further challenges placed upon the Town with COVID-19 restrictions impacting your ability to offer a seasonal welcome centre.

In 2022, the Chamber, in discussion with the Town and Downtown Truro Partnership, organized a temporary VIC on Prince Street to ensure that visitors in the downtown had an opportunity to learn about key tourism offerings without being sent several kilometers away to the nearest designated VIC site in Lower Truro.



This one-year project was to serve as a stop-gap measure to give the Town time to put a permanent solution in place in support of tourism to offer visitor servicing. While last season's effort was supported by the Town, which provided 36 hours of summer student support and the loan of two shelves, the Chamber stepped up to operate a quality VIC for 12 full weeks, Monday to Saturday, from July to mid-September. The Downtown Truro Partnership also provided 36 hours of student labour to this project.

The Chamber paid rent for the space, furnished it, enlisted the support of volunteers and paid summer students, retrieved materials to provide to visitors, offered WIFI and answered email and phone enquires from tourists.

During the season, despite a late start in opening, COVID-19 restrictions still in effect and lack of promotion about the change in location, nearly 1,000 people were greeted by staff or counseled by phone or email. Staff saw the greatest number of visitors toward the middle of August and into September. By having the Centre in operation, we were able to track where visitors were coming from around the globe, their key destinations, length of stay, etc. This information is invaluable on a local and provincial level when further investing in the tourism industry.

We also noted that many visitors were arriving in mid to late August and planned to remain in the area for additional weeks to assist with settling students at Dalhousie and NSCC. Having those two post-secondary facilities presents a great opportunity for this area to grow tourism.

The Chamber was very disappointed to learn that the Town of Truro would not be offering Visitor Information Services in any organized capacity in 2023. We appreciate the investments made to support the North American Indigenous Games and were so pleased to be included in the effort to welcome athletes and their families to the region. This service is vital to be continued for the entire summer season for all visitors.

The membership of the Truro and Colchester Chamber of Commerce, has identified support for tourism as a key advocacy item. On behalf of our more than 500 members we are asking the town to make visitor information servicing a priority during the summer season. The Chamber is willing to support the Town in exploring opportunities to ensure this vital service is available. Please reach out to our Executive Director Sherry Martell, via email at ed@tcchamber.ca or by calling 902-895-6328, if you would like to set up a meeting to further discuss this issue.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Tanton".

Eric Tanton
President
Truro & Colchester Chamber of Commerce

CC: Mike Dolter, CAO Town of Truro