

Promoting Culinary Experiences in Scarborough

Date: November 19, 2019

To: Economic and Community Development Committee

From: General Manager, Economic Development and Culture

Wards: 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide information on the efforts taken by the City of Toronto to promote Scarborough restaurants through Toronto's culinary programs.

Toronto started the successful Winterlicious and Summerlicious programs in 2003 to encourage residents and visitors to experience the city's fine dining restaurants at compelling price points during normally slow business times of the year, and to generate positive economic activity in the industry. In 2014, the City launched the Cultural Hotspot program to shine a spotlight on neighbourhoods beyond the core. One part of the Cultural Hotspot program is HOT Eats, which promotes local food-related businesses. Scarborough was the first Cultural Hotspot in 2014, and the program returned to the area in 2018. Scarborough also has several popular food-related festivals that promote local eating establishments and recently several local Councillors have spearheaded specific projects. This report summarizes all this activity.

Staff from the Economic Development and Culture Division are currently undertaking a review of the City's Winterlicious and Summerlicious programs to identify whether adjustments to design are required in response to changes to the market and industry since the program's inception.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager of Economic Development and Culture recommends that:

1. The Economic and Community Development Committee receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact associated with this report.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on October 16, 2019, the Economic and Community Development Committee (ECDC) requested the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture report to the December 4, 2019 ECDC meeting on participation of Scarborough restaurants in Toronto's Winterlicious and Summerlicious program.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.EC8.17>

COMMENTS

Toronto's Winterlicious and Summerlicious Programs

The City launched the Winterlicious and Summerlicious programs in 2003 to highlight the city's fine dining restaurants through a prix fixe menu at compelling price points during off-peak periods for the industry. Winterlicious takes place over 14 days between January and February, and Summerlicious occurs over 17 days in July. These two seasonal culinary promotions met the needs of the provincial government's Culinary Tourism strategy and the recommendations outlined in the Council approved Tourism Action Plan at the time. From 2003 to 2008, prospective participants were determined using third-party critic and consumer reviews and rating publications to define 'fine'. In 2009, the City of Toronto implemented a new application process where all restaurants citywide could apply to participate, increasing the range of value-driven dining experiences included in the programs. In most cases, the consumer attraction was to be able to enjoy meals at a favourable price point over the normal offering of the restaurant.

The City of Toronto, Economic Development and Culture (EDC) Division manages and administers the Winterlicious and Summerlicious programs. Funding for the Winterlicious and Summerlicious programs comes from a \$1,300+HST fee (2019 rate) that restaurants pay each time they participate. The fees collected fully fund and support the program's marketing campaign and initiatives. Corporate sponsorship partners increase the marketing reach and range of culinary experiences of the program.

Information on how restaurants can participate in the Winterlicious and Summerlicious programs is available year-round on the City of Toronto's website. The City's website provides an overview, eligibility criteria, application submission process with deadlines, and offers a staff email and telephone number to answer additional inquiries about the

program. The EDC Division also works with the City's Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) to share information about the Winterlicious and Summerlicious program with restaurant members in their area. Restaurants apply to be part of the program through a two-step process that includes submitting an application form, which determines eligibility, and registration by eligible restaurants to secure a spot in each session. The program eligibility requirements are that eating establishments be an existing full-service restaurant located in Toronto, have a current Dine Safe Green Pass issued by Toronto Public Health, and demonstrate the average three-course meal from their regular menu meets the minimum price requirements to offer a value-driven menu at the programs' prix fixe menu price point categories. Eligible restaurants retain their eligibility for a three-year period, during which they continue to receive program and registration information directly.

The programs started with 36 restaurants in the first year and have grown to more than 200 restaurants participating in each Winterlicious and Summerlicious. Since its inception, the Winterlicious and Summerlicious programs have promoted Toronto's unique hospitality industry and diverse cuisines, generated more than \$342 million in economic activity for the Toronto restaurant industry, and served more than 7.7 million meals. Over the years, many cities across Canada have replicated the successful Toronto Winterlicious and Summerlicious programs.

In the last five years, on average, two restaurants from Scarborough participated in the Winterlicious and Summerlicious program in each session. During the 2019 Summerlicious program three restaurants from Scarborough participated: Aiolio (Ward 20), Arkadia House (Ward 20), and Moxie's Bar & Grill (Ward 21). Based on participation from 2017 to 2019, the geographic distribution of restaurants participating by area are Scarborough at 1%, Etobicoke York at 3%, North York at 11%, and Toronto and East York at 85%. Obviously, the Winterlicious and Summerlicious programs have been utilized in the core much more than in other areas of Toronto.

Scarborough has a vibrant culinary scene. The Winterlicious and Summerlicious format, which focuses on a three-course prix fixe menu, may not reflect the wide range of culinary and communal dining experiences represented throughout Scarborough. The participation fee of \$1,300+HST per session may be a barrier for some eating establishments, and a lack of BIAs in the Scarborough area may also contribute to the smaller number of restaurants participating in the program. Since pricepoint is a key feature of the Winterlicious and Summerlicious programs and since there are target prices set, it is also likely that given the nature of the culinary experiences and the cost structures, these price points are too high outside the core to be attractive to most non-core restaurants. In addition, there are a number of other City- and community-led initiatives underway to promote Scarborough's vibrant culinary scene, described in the section below.

Promoting Scarborough Restaurants

Efforts to expand participation of Scarborough restaurants in City programs have successfully occurred through the Cultural Hotspot's HOT Eats program, and annual food-related events initiated by community organizers.

Cultural Hotspot — HOT Eats Program

The Cultural Hotspot is a rotating annual initiative that shines a spotlight on arts, culture and community in neighbourhoods beyond the city's core between May 1 and October 31. South Scarborough was a Cultural Hotspot in 2014 and centre/north Scarborough was a Cultural Hotspot in 2018. Lawrence Avenue was the northern border in 2014 and southern border in 2018.

The EDC Division launched the Cultural Hotspot HOT Eats program in 2014. Local businesses, specifically restaurants and cafés, are a part of the fabric of neighbourhoods, and food is a key part of what makes a neighbourhood distinct. HOT Eats highlights restaurants, cafés and bakeries in the Cultural Hotspot. The benefit to eating establishments that participate in the HOT Eats program is increased awareness and marketing of their business. The Cultural Hotspot marketing campaign includes the creation of a self-guided tour booklet called the "Cultural Loops Guide", which features local restaurants, history, art, architecture, and greenspaces. The City prints 10,000 copies of the guide and distributes them through libraries, community centres, BIAs and Toronto's INFOTOGO booths. Restaurants are also promoted through a social media campaign and advertisements in Star Metroland Media.

In 2014, the Cultural Hotspot HOT Eats program featured restaurants located in south Scarborough through listing them in the Cultural Loops Guide. That year, 68 local restaurants were listed. In 2018, the Cultural Hotspot team reached out to local restaurants in centre/north Scarborough through mail, followed by in-person visits to businesses and phone calls. In areas where there are BIAs, the Cultural Hotspot engaged the BIA staff in reaching out to eating establishments. The Scarborough Mirror provided editorial coverage of the opportunity for restaurants to be part of the centre/north Scarborough Cultural Hotspot HOT Eats program. On average, 23% of the eateries contacted participated in the program. In 2018, 55 eateries participated in the HOT Eats program. The 2018 program included a partnership with Star Metroland Media, enhancing visibility of the local culinary scene. Participating restaurants provided a gift certificate of \$25 or \$50 that was then given away through Star Metroland Media. More than 10,650 people entered the contest for a chance to win a gift certificate to an eatery in the HOT Eats program.

Scarborough's Food-Related Festivals

Taste of Lawrence is a three-day food and cultural festival that takes place in the Wexford Heights BIA. As Scarborough's largest street festival it boasts the most enticing flavours from every cultural community in the GTA. Locals and tourists alike come to the festival to experience and celebrate their cultures, and learn about the rich heritage of others. Councillor Michael Thompson (Ward 21) and a group of community members founded the festival 17 years ago to attract visitors to the vibrant community on Lawrence Avenue, an area now known as the Wexford Heights BIA. According to the Wexford Heights BIA, the most recent Taste of Lawrence festival on July 5 to 7, 2019, included 47 food vendors and 83 non-food related vendors.

Inspired by Summerlicious and Winterlicious, the Federation of Asian Canadians Toronto (FACT), in cooperation with Councillor Cynthia Lai (Ward 23), presented the

first annual Toronto Asialicious Carnival this year. The three-day Asian-themed food, entertainment and shopping carnival took place at the Woodside Mall from August 23 to 25, 2019. It featured approximately 25 food vendors from businesses located within the community and thousands of people attended over the weekend. The organizer's intention is to grow the event in the local area, while engaging other communities across the city.

In September 2019, Councillor Jennifer McKelvie (Ward 25) convened a meeting to discuss the current City culinary programs and impacts in Scarborough. Senior leaders from University Toronto Scarborough Campus (Culinaria Institute), Centennial College, United Way GTA, The Fresh Group, Scarborough Arts, Toronto.com, Scarborough Mirror, Scarborough Community Renewal Association, and staff from Economic Development and Culture who manage the Winterlicious and Summerlicious programs and the Cultural Hotspot HOT Eats programs attended the meeting.

The objective of this meeting was for City staff to provide an overview of current programs. The consensus in the room was that the Winterlicious and Summerlicious format, which is primarily a full service fine dining promotion with set price points (prix fixe), did not blend well with the wide range of culinary and communal dining options throughout Scarborough. All Scarborough leaders who attended the meeting concluded that the Winterlicious and Summerlicious programs were not the right fit for highlighting Scarborough's food culture and are working to create something that more appropriately highlights dining in Scarborough.

Review of the Winterlicious and Summerlicious Programs

EDC staff are currently undertaking a review of the Winterlicious and Summerlicious programs to ensure that they continue to deliver the greatest benefit to both participating restaurants and consumers. As part of the review, staff are consulting with current and past participants to identify trends in Toronto's out-of-home dining market and the restaurant industry, and areas for improvement or updating of the program design. This review is expected to be complete in 2020.

CONTACT

Marguerite Pigott, Film Commissioner and Director, Entertainment Industries, Economic Development and Culture, marguerite.pigott@toronto.ca, 416-392-3376

SIGNATURE

Mike Williams
General Manager, Economic Development and Culture