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Upcoming Choose Local Program Information Report to Council

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In accordance with the Procedure By-law, any member of Council may make a request to the Town Clerk that this Report be placed on an upcoming Committee of the Whole agenda for discussion.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide Council an update on the upcoming Choose Local campaign.

Background

In 2020, in response to the significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on local businesses, the Town initiated a Choose Local holiday campaign and contest. The contest provided additional exposure for businesses and encouraged local residents to shop/dine/choose local businesses over the holiday shopping season. The campaign included the creation of a Choose Local business directory, a significant social media campaign, in business marketing and an Instagram/Twitter contest. The contest saw over 300 entries and 100 businesses participating. In 2021, the campaign grew, in partnership with the Newmarket Chamber of Commerce and included significant swag for businesses to drive campaign awareness, further updates to the Choose Local directory, radio broadcasting and a Choose Local magazine. This campaign resulted in over 600 entries, 150 participating businesses and over \$70,000 in local spending.

Following the Choose Local campaign in 2022, the Town also ran a Random Acts of Downtown Shopping (RADS) program encouraging residents to shop in the Main Street BIA district during a significant filming. This program provided vouchers to residents to shop locally and resulting in \$1.26 of spending for every \$1 investment. Both types of campaign received significant positive comments by residents and businesses and created excitement for shopping locally in the community.

Discussion

In preparation for the next Choose Local campaign, staff noted that again the economic environment has changed significantly. The campaign to support local businesses needs to adapt to the changing atmosphere. Presently, residents are more comfortable shopping in-person, visiting restaurants and coffee shops, but are also beginning to feel the economic impacts of a changing economy. Restaurants and retailers are seeing closer to normal shopping and dining during the holiday season. At the same time, the first quarter of the year continues to be a slower time for independent and small businesses.

Taking all of these factors into consideration, staff have developed an updated Choose Local program. Choose Local 2023 will maintain the excitement, vibe and creative branding of the previous Choose Local campaigns and build on the success of the RADS program. The new timing will shift the program from a period with significant spending at local businesses (over the holidays) to a time when businesses need additional support.

Upcoming Choose Local Program

The Town of Newmarket will run the next Choose Local campaign in the first quarter of 2023 to entice shoulder season spending and increase economic impact. Additionally, the campaign will shift from a social media based contest to a campaign that increases spending using a Visa Giftcard top up program. Staff are in the final stages of onboarding with Hello Network to provide visa gift voucher services that will be redeemable only at businesses participating in the Choose Local program in Newmarket. These Newmarket specific Visa Giftcards will allow residents to participate in the campaign in two ways:

- 1) By receiving a visa gift voucher via a random act of kindness from the Town. Similar to the RADS program, staff will distribute gift vouchers in the community with the ultimate goals of encouraging local spending and spreading joy!
- 2) By purchasing a visa gift voucher via the Hello Network. Residents will go online to the Town's Hello Network site and purchase a Visa Giftcard in the denomination they choose. When residents purchase a Choose Local Visa gift card, the Town will add a bonus of up to 25% to their card to increase their local spending power (up to a maximum of \$200 per purchaser). For example, if a resident purchases a \$100 Visa gift card, the Town via the Hello program provider will add an additional \$25 for the resident to spend – allowing them to increase their local spending by 25%. The Town covers all loading and visa fees (except those that businesses have already negotiated with their Point of Sale provider); the program does not add any additional cost to the participating business or the resident. This portion of the program is intended to invigorate spending by providing a top-up on their gift card for residents to spend when they purchase a Choose Local gift card. The Visa cards are redeemable at participating Newmarket businesses.

Business Onboarding and Participation

Any Newmarket-based brick and mortar business can register to participate. Staff will begin outreach to businesses immediately to ensure a broad range of choices for residents. Staff will use the existing Choose Local directory, social media outreach, partnership mailing lists and the existing economic development mailing list to connect with local businesses. Once businesses are registered, they simply process the Visa Giftcards as they would any similar card.

Similar programs in other regions

Staff investigated the Visa Gift card bonus program in other municipalities and have found that the programs (which primarily have run in Quebec) typically sell out incredibly quickly (some within one day).

Timing

Staff are already planning this program and will begin communicating the details with the community in early 2023. The tentative schedule is as follows:

- **December 2022** Business onboarding including marketing the program to businesses
- **Late January 2023**-Bonus Visa Cards available for purchase, businesses receive swag promoting their participation in the program, social media amplification of the program and Choose Local messaging begins
- **February 2023** – pre-loaded Visa cards distributed via random acts of kindness
- **February-March 2023** - ongoing messaging of “Choose Local” via social media and media partners to encourage residents to redeem their visa gift cards

Conclusion

Based on the knowledge gained from both the Choose Local and RADS programs, staff believe that this approach to the Choose Local program will further increase the economic impact of the program and bring the joy of the program to both residents and businesses early in 2023.

Business Plan and Strategic Plan Linkages

The program is supported by the Economic Development Strategy and has strong linkages to Economic Leadership and Job Creation.

Consultation

NA

Human Resource Considerations

NA

Budget Impact

All funds for this program will come from the Economic Development operating budget.

Attachments

None

Contact

For further information or questions regarding this report, please contact Elizabeth Hawkins, Business Development Specialist at ehawkins@newmarket.ca

Approval

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Wanda Bennett, Director, Corporate Communications
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