

For Immediate Release

Tourism Kelowna Proposes New Visitor Centre Downtown

KELOWNA, March 24, 2016 – Tourism Kelowna will apply to the City of Kelowna for rezoning to build a new visitor centre downtown. The visitor centre would be located on what is now a small City-owned parking lot at Queensway and Mill Street, an area that is slated to be closed to vehicles as part of the new hotel project. The building will be set back approximately 50 feet from the waterfront on each side of the building. This will be a new public 'plaza-like' space and allows for the continuation of the waterfront walkway between Stuart Park and Kerry Park.

Kelowna City Council has made a new visitor centre a Council Priority. It is supporting Tourism Kelowna through a lease agreement for the land, contingent upon successful rezoning. The City would retain ownership of the land, preserving it as public land for public use as part of the Kerry Park redesign. Tourism Kelowna will hold open houses and collect feedback once the rezoning application has been submitted.

"Tourism Kelowna is responsible for raising or borrowing the entire \$3.5 million to build the new visitor centre. We are excited to be able to add another beautiful public building to downtown for use by visitors and residents. It will complement the new marina, yacht club, parks and other downtown improvements," says Tourism Kelowna Chair Daniel Bibby. "The location was Kelowna's original point of welcome as an historic ferry landing site and it will once again be used to welcome visitors and residents of Kelowna."

The new visitor centre would replace the current centre located on Harvey Avenue, which continues to see rapidly declining usage due to a shift in visitor behaviour seen across North America. Visitor centres are moving off highways and into busier pedestrian areas to provide better service to more visitors as the advent of GPS has made highway-based visitor centres obsolete.

"In comparably sized communities, 78 per cent of North American visitor centres have moved off highways and into high volume pedestrian areas and we are following that trend," says Tourism Kelowna CEO Nancy Cameron. "More than 440,000 people use the boardwalk in front of the proposed visitor centre annually while just 20,000 visit the Harvey Avenue visitor centre location. This is an increased business opportunity that will benefit Kelowna."

Visitor centres provide a human touch to travelers coming to a new place. By providing ideas for vacation activities and attractions, visitor centres increase enjoyment, encourage longer stays and return trips, and boost spending at local businesses. Over time, increased spending by visitors creates more jobs and higher tax revenues.

The proposed visitor centre's design utilizes world-wide best practices to create a concept that attracts people and communicates Kelowna's sense of place and heritage. The new visitor centre will have a modest 3,000 square foot footprint at ground level with a partial second floor of 2,000 square feet. Through extensive use of glass in its construction and increased open public space around the building, views will be respected.

For more information:

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About Tourism Kelowna

Tourism Kelowna is the official not-for-profit tourism marketing association for Kelowna and area. In partnership with over 300 businesses, Tourism Kelowna undertakes strategic sales, marketing, and visitor servicing to fulfill its mandate to generate overnight visitor demand to economically benefit Kelowna and its neighbouring communities.