
HALDIMAND COUNTY

Report EDT-07-2020 Business Recovery Strategy

For Consideration by Council on June 30, 2020



OBJECTIVE:

The purpose of this memo is to provide Council with a brief update on Economic Development and Tourism's COVID-19 Business Recovery Strategy following a recent meeting with the Business Development and Planning Advisory Committee (BDAPAC).

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT Report EDT-07-2020 Business Recovery Strategy be received;
2. AND THAT funding in the amount of \$166,962.50 from the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario be received, and be allocated to the Economic Development and Tourism operating budget for the purpose of marketing and promotions to support the reopening of the tourism sector.

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Approved: Craig Manley, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Business Development and Planning Advisory Committee of Council (BDAPAC) has identified several key actions that will be implemented by Economic Development and Tourism staff to support businesses as they begin to reopen and recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, it was recently announced that Haldimand County was allocated \$166,962.50 in funding from the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario to provide support to our local tourism sector.

BACKGROUND:

On May 21, 2020, a video conference meeting was held with Mayor Hewitt, Councillor Shirton, the Business Development and Planning Advisory Committee of Council and staff. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the impact that COVID-19 has had on our local businesses and how the County might be able to provide support to assist our businesses as they begin to re-open.

ANALYSIS:

During the meeting, the BDAPAC committee shared insight into concerns businesses are currently facing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the forced temporary closure of many businesses. These concerns included:

- The introduction of additional health and safety measures in businesses to protect customers, employees and business owners, and the cost that is associated with the implementation of these measures;
- Reduced operations, lay-off and termination of employees, and concerns around if and when businesses will be able to bring staff back and resume normal levels of business operation;
- Financial uncertainty and if businesses will successfully rebound following the reopening of the economy;
- Concerns around public criticism via social media as a result of misinformation within the community i.e. essential businesses allowed to remain open or businesses trying to reopen with new physical distancing guidelines; and
- A lack of awareness of the governmental supports available.

Following a brainstorming session, the committee recommended a number of key priorities to support local businesses as they begin to reopen and emerge from the pandemic. As of June 8, 2020 staff have begun to implement these priorities and at this time wanted to provide Council with a brief update. The four priority areas are briefly described below and in Attachment 1.

1. Marketing/Advertising (Short/Medium Term Initiative)

The BDAPAC committee identified a need to promote our local businesses as the economy begins to reopen and recommended the following key action items:

- Establish a marketing committee that includes representatives from BIAs, Chambers, BDAPAC, Grand Erie Business Centre and Economic Development and Tourism (EDT) staff;
- Creation of a marketing strategy to support local business that will include:
 - Positive “open for business” messages/articles/blog posts;
 - Highlighting measures our businesses are taking to protect consumers and staff;
 - New ways businesses are now offering their services i.e. online, curbside pick-up etc.;
 - Creation and promotion of a buy/support local program;
 - Development of a collaborative marketing program with shared costs between the County, the Business and possibly other partners such as the Grand Erie Business Centre and the Southwest Ontario Tourism Corporation; and
 - The Development of a Haldimand Business Facebook page to promote local businesses more effectively.

Action taken to date:

- A request for individuals to sit on the Marketing/Advertising Committee was circulated to the local business organizations with interest being received from the following:
 - Cayuga Chamber of Commerce – Reesa Spitman
 - Caledonia BIA – Kathy Marshall
 - Caledonia Chamber of Commerce – Ken Parr
 - BDAPAC – John Edelman and Adam Peet
 - Grand Erie Business Centre – Tauri Caputo
- A kick-off meeting is to be scheduled next week to gather input and recommendations from the committee. Following the meeting with the Marketing/Advertising Committee, EDT will formalize the marketing strategy, seek feedback from the group, and upon agreement of the action plan and content, begin to implement. We will continue to circle back to the marketing committee for insight, direction on what is working, what requires tweaking, etc.

On May 31, 2020, the Honorable Melanie Joly, Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages announced that the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario would receive \$30 million in funding through FedDev Ontario, Regional Recovery Relief Fund (RRRF), to provide financial relief to destination marketing organizations (DMOS) across southern Ontario that have experienced significant revenue shortfalls. As the DMO for Tourism Haldimand, Economic Development and Tourism submitted an application for the funding and was successful. As a result, staff are pleased to advise Council that Haldimand County will be receiving \$166,962.50 to provide support to restarting and promoting the tourism sector in our area. This money will be primarily allocated towards the marketing and advertising priorities identified above to support the restarting of our local businesses.

Our marketing plan will follow the three phases of recovery that has been put forward by the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario and Destination Ontario which includes:

- i. Hyper-Local (shop, buy, eat and stay local—support food & drink, retail, artists, attractions, agri-tourism—get out and explore your own community);
- ii. Next - Explore Ontario (as Ontarians regain confidence and are willing to travel a little farther afield and explore the region of the one next door (think revisiting parks, trails and attractions)); and
- iii. Then - The Ontario Bucket List (what iconic site/taste/experience is on offer in your destination).

2. Resources and Information Provision to Local Businesses (Short Term Initiative)

BDAPAC identified that it would be beneficial to local businesses if they had easy access to key information including:

- How/where to source personal protective equipment (PPE);
- How to obtain contagion free certification;
- How to navigate/apply for grants, loans and other supports that might be applicable; and
- Development of a forum for business to discuss and share information and experiences that are working for them in terms of changes to operations, approaches to customer/staff safety, etc.

Actions taken to date:

- Staff have developed a business listing of locally available PPE including cleaning products, gloves, masks, plexi-glass barriers, etc. This document is being shared with businesses inquiring about access to PPE, and will be shared on social media and posted on our website;
- Staff also continue to provide clarity to businesses on available financial resources and support through other levels of government;
- Initial outreach to an Ontario business that offers contagion free certification has taken place with more research into the feasibility of such a program required; and
- The Business Haldimand website will be updated regularly to serve as information source and a go-to for businesses looking for information on how to open properly, the resources available to them and how they can reach out to Economic Development & Tourism Staff that can provide additional guidance and support.

3. Outreach to Local Businesses (Short/Medium Term Initiative)

As discussed during the BDAPAC meeting, a vital element to business recovery will be staff outreach to Haldimand County businesses. The BDAPAC committee highly recommended that EDT staff amplify our already existing Business Retention and Expansion Program with the intent to outreach (via phone) to as many businesses as possible to understand their current situation and what issues they are currently facing. This will provide an opportunity for staff to

connect with businesses; understand their concerns, connect them to the right resources and information and provide the support they may need under new operating guidelines. The key areas of focus for this priority include:

- Outreach to businesses to understand which businesses are not reopening or having challenges reopening;
- Determine what can be done by County staff and/or connect the business to required resources;
- Assist businesses in the adoption of new technology to help strengthen/protect their business from future disruption;
- Consider the possibility of creating a Haldimand Shopify Community for businesses to participate in; and
- Provide webinars/educational opportunity for local businesses.

Actions Take to Date:

- Staff have developed an extensive list of businesses that cover Retail/Downtown, Manufacturing, Tourism and Agricultural sectors that we plan to reach out to;
- A Business Retention and Expansion survey (Attachment 2) has been created and added to EDT's customer database to allow staff to input responses as they speak with businesses; and
- As of June 15, 2020, staff have begun calling businesses; asking for their participation in the survey and following up with the businesses to provide any additional resources they have requested. We expect these calls to take a few weeks to complete. Once calls have been completed, we plan to publically release the survey to ensure any other businesses that wish to complete the survey can do so online. The information collected will then be summarized into a findings report which will help continue to guide staff on how best to provide support to our businesses.

4. Regulation/Program Enhancements (Long Term Initiative)

As a result of COVID-19, many businesses have had to, or will have to, consider alternative business models and new ways of delivering their services or product. Some businesses will be required to upgrade infrastructure, introduce physical distance measures into their daily operations and increase signage. As a result BDAPAC recommended the following action items:

- Review of the existing Community Improvement Program (CIP) to investigate if funds can be reallocated to assist businesses with physical infrastructure improvements required as a result of COVID-19 safety protocols.

Actions taken to date:

- Staff have researched and created an outline of potential items that might be considered applicable under the Community Improvement Program (Attachment 3); and
- This outline has been forwarded to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) for input and comment as their approval will be required prior to moving forward. No response has been received to date from MMAH. The authority to implement changes to an existing CIP falls within the *Planning Act*. Recognizing that there will likely be a significant regulatory process involved with any proposed changes to the CIP, this is planned to be a longer term initiative. As more direction and guidance is received from MMAH, staff will then be in a better position to assess the opportunities that exist for Haldimand County's CIP. Any proposed changes will be brought forward to Council in the Fall of 2020.

Staff continue to find additional opportunities to support the reopening of businesses. Following the recent announcement advising that Haldimand County was moving into Stage 2 of reopening, staff began receiving calls from local businesses - specifically restaurants and similar establishments - about the possibility of establishing a temporary patio on their property. Doing so would allow these businesses to open their business for customers wishing to have a dine-in option (on the patio) as they are not currently permitted to open their dining areas. In response, staff implemented a simplified process to allow businesses to establish a temporary patio on their private property which typically requires the businesses to proceed through a planning application. Staff from Building & Municipal Enforcement Services, Emergency Management Services, Planning and Development and Economic Development and Tourism have developed a process to fast track these applications and have been able to approve all applications (four to date) within a twenty-four hour period. Additional applications are expected to be submitted by businesses that have already inquired.

In closing, as of June 22, 2020 the full EDT staff complement has returned to work. Moving forward - supporting the restarting of our local economy through focusing on the above priorities will remain our top focus. As an immediate priority, staff is focused on providing the resources businesses need in a single information point; providing information on where businesses can find PPE and addressing regulatory simplicity for outdoor eating. Following this in the short/medium term, the focus will be the implementation of a marketing program and outreach to businesses via the business retention and expansion program calls. The longer term priorities include potential reallocation of funding to the CIP to support businesses expenses related to physical infrastructure improvements as a result of COVID-19 and the establishment of an online shopping option for local businesses.

As staff work towards completion of the Business Recovery Strategy and the full reopening of our economy, we will then move into our planned 2020 work plan and key projects including the Signage Strategy and the Caledonia Employment Lands capital project.

FINANCIAL/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

As the DMO for Tourism Haldimand, Economic Development and Tourism submitted an application for the funding from Fed Dev Ontario and the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario and was successful. As a result, staff are pleased to advise Council that Haldimand County will be receiving \$166,962.50 to provide support to restarting and promoting the tourism sector in our area. This money will be primarily allocated towards the marketing and advertising priorities identified above to support the restarting of our local businesses.

Annually, Economic Development and Tourism receives an allocation of \$49,500 in the operating budget to direct towards the printing of maps and guides (\$23,300) and marketing and promotions (\$26,200). An addition of \$166,962.50 to Economic Development and Tourism's overall operating budget will provide a tremendous benefit to promote and support Haldimand County businesses and the tourism sector.

STAKEHOLDER IMPACTS:

These priorities as well as the funding received will provide direct support to our local businesses.

REPORT IMPACTS:

Agreement: Yes

By-law: No

Budget Amendment: Yes

Policy: No

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Business Development and Planning Advisory Committee of Council (BDAPAC) Business Recovery Priorities.
2. Business Retention Expansion Survey.
3. Community Improvement Program (CIP) Enhancements.