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## MEMORANDUM

**ED 10-2020**

**Subject:** COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Economic Development  
**Date:** September 9, 2020  
**To:** Planning and Economic Development Committee  
**From:** Valerie Kuhns, Acting Director, Economic Development

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### *Economic Development*

#### **Current Status of Operations**

This memo is the economic development division's monthly update on our response to COVID-19 and business continuity. Due to the cancellation of PEDC in July, it covers activities since the previous meeting in June. Niagara Economic Development (NED) continues to focus its work on supporting local businesses through initiatives developed, in collaboration with the other Economic Development offices in the region, as the Economic Rapid Response Team (ERRT). In addition, our core economic development activities are adapting to virtual meetings and using different technologies.

While some of the team members do come into the office, the majority remain working from home and are expecting to do so on a longer term basis. We hold regular team meetings through Zoom to provide more formal updates and are in constant contact through video conferencing, email and cell phone calls. The level of productivity remains high and it is impressive that the team has been able to adapt to the change in work focus and working environment.

#### **Service/Operational Changes**

As Niagara is now in stage 3 of phase 2, many of our businesses have re-opened and have accommodated the new guidelines and restrictions, adapting their way of doing business as necessary. Alongside this, announcements from the provincial and federal governments are less frequent and so many of our regular communications, through the ERRT website and video conferencing are also less frequent e.g. the business re-opening calls are now biweekly rather than weekly. This allows us to get back to work

on core economic development activities while still maintaining a focus on recovery planning.

### **Significant Initiatives or Actions Taken**

The Economic Recovery Plan has been finalized in consultation with the ERRT members and other stakeholders. Implementation is now underway and a report on its progress, ED 11-2020 Economic Recovery Plan Update is provided to PEDC, for information, in this meeting's agenda package. Funding within the NED's approved budget for 2020 has been re-allocated to support some of the recovery initiatives.

NED continues to partner with Emergency Management and Public Health to facilitate calls with business membership organizations from across the region. The calls focus on relevant safety guidelines and documents to assist businesses in safely reopening. The attendees provide a channel to inform their members on critical topics such as the use of PPE, safe patio expansion, return to work guidelines etc. The calls are now being held biweekly.

The ERRT website continues to provide a resource to businesses looking for information on government funding and Public Health guidelines. Website traffic for July/August totalled 4,459 unique website visits, with 3,759 unique visitors. These numbers are up significantly since last year. The most visited page was the Niagara PPE Directory.

The PPE Directory was launched on July 15, 2020 and now has 60 Niagara companies registered. These companies supply all forms of PPE. In July/August the Directory received 2,297 views on the ERRT website. When launched, the Directory was promoted through a media release and social media.

On July 29, 2020, the Niagara Foreign Trade Zone, in partnership with Export Development Canada, Canada Border Services Agency and the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency, presented a webinar to Niagara businesses to provide practical information on how to export goods into the U.S. The webinar had a good attendance with 54 participants.

Despite COVID-19 and travel restrictions, the number of unsolicited foreign direct investment (FDI) leads have increased since March 2020, in comparison to the same period last year. All lead generation meetings are now virtual, the majority are on Zoom. A professional backdrop has been developed for the meetings. It features a map

showing Niagara's proximity to markets in the U.S. To date 9 virtual meetings have been held and activity will increase going into the fall as virtual meetings are arranged with U.S. and then U.K. companies. These meetings are organized by lead generation companies who were contracted before COVID-19 hit in March.

To provide our team with a more robust CRM system, NED has been working with the designers of the system to improve its capabilities as a more effective FDI lead management tool to ensure ongoing follow up with leads and enable more effective reporting.

The ERRT has begun outreach to businesses that identified supply chain gaps as a result of COVID-19, in the second Business Impact survey. The information collected from the businesses will be used to identify potential action areas for shortening and localizing supply chains to increase the profitability and sustainability of Niagara's businesses.

NED continues to provide extensive research support to other departments of the Region, as well as the Local Area Municipalities and other stakeholders, both COVID-19 related, as well as business and economic data and analysis. In partnership with the Niagara Community Observatory, a Transportation and Logistics policy brief was released in July. In partnership with Transport Canada, NED is supporting an Agriculture Processing Trucking and Logistics Study.

Support continues to municipalities without economic development resources. In July a presentation was made to Niagara-on-the-Lake Council to provide information on ERRT activities and COVID-19 recovery.

NED has a fund which provides matching grants to Local Area Municipalities to support economic development initiatives. This funding has been increased for 2020, by re-allocating existing funding, to support municipal recovery related activities.

## **Operational Outlook**

### **1 month**

- Continue to implement the Economic Recovery Plan, completion of some immediate and mid-term actions.
- Continue support to local businesses through ERRT initiatives.
- Report on the impact on investment and development in Niagara by COVID-19.

- Virtual FDI meetings with U.S. companies using Zoom.
- Explore new technology to conduct economic development activities virtually.
- Most team members continue to work remotely.

3 months

- Economic Recovery Plan implementation focused on long-term actions.
- Development of a 10 year Economic Development Strategy begins.
- Virtual FDI meetings continue with U.S. companies and start with U.K. companies.
- Monitor economic indicators and develop an update report on Niagara's economy and the effects of COVID-19.
- Consider budget allocations for 2021 to continue to support business.

6 months

- Implementation of the Economic Recovery Plan completed.
- 10 Year Economic Development Strategy development in progress.
- Continue to monitor economic indicators to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on the local economy compared to previous years and determine where resources could best be utilized to maximize ongoing economic development programming.
- Review work practices depending on Niagara Region recommendations and Public Health
- Development of an economic emergency communications plan to address possible future emergencies that may impact the regional economy.
- Development of a third Business Impact survey to be released in March 2021.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

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Valerie Kuhns  
Acting Director, Economic Development