
MEMORANDUM

ED 12-2020

Subject: COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Economic Development
Date: October 14, 2020
To: Planning and Economic Development Committee
From: Valerie Kuhns, Acting Director, Economic Development

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. Niagara Economic Development's response to COVID-19 is focused on economic recovery efforts of the Economic Rapid Response Team (ERRT) and the implementation of the Economic Recovery Plan. However, we are also engaging new ways of doing our regular business virtually to ensure business continuity. All planning for 2021 is being started on the basis that we will not be holding in-person meetings or travelling any time soon and will continue to work virtually.

Service/Operational Changes

Niagara Economic Development is working in all of our core functional areas now but through the lens of the changes that COVID-19 has brought about and will continue to influence for months/years. All strategic planning work is concentrated on the implementation of the Economic Recovery Plan and so work on the creation of a 10 year Economic Development Strategy is on hold for the time being.

Significant Initiatives or Actions Taken

Economic Recovery Planning continues to be a main focus, centred on the implementation of the actions in the Economic Recovery Plan. Biweekly reporting to our stakeholder group is through ERRT update calls. Updates are provided for actions in all three pillars of the Plan, Research, Advocacy and Resilience. The update calls are being used as a communication forum for all support organizations who are

advancing recovery and resilience for Niagara's economy. An average of 30 stakeholders have been attending the calls.

There are ongoing discussions with ERRT members and other stakeholders to monitor and assess the relevance of the Economic Recovery Plan. Given the evolving nature of the pandemic, future adjustment might be required to ensure the action items remain relevant to support Niagara's economy.

Economic Recovery Planning is working in collaboration with the internal Organizational Recovery table as well as the Community Recovery Planning table to develop good communications and collaboration in our planning. We are providing input into the discussion about the economic indicators that will be used to monitor recovery.

Our marketing partnership with Venture Niagara has resulted in their Regional Recovery and Relief Fund being fully subscribed. Approximately 70 companies across Niagara accessed an interest-free loan of between \$4,000 and \$40,000.

Funding agreements with the two Small Business Enterprise Centres (SBEC) in Niagara Falls and St. Catharines have now been executed. This has enabled both SBECs to expand their services to all 12 municipalities by hiring two new advisors to facilitate this extended outreach.

For the last few months since March, we have relied on the information from our two Business Impact Surveys to understand how Niagara companies are being affected by COVID-19. Statistics Canada data and other data is now becoming available and so work has started on an Economic Update report which will be presented at PEDC in November. In September a report on 'COVID-19 Impact on Investment and Development in Niagara' was finalized and is included, with a presentation, in this month's agenda. This is in addition to ongoing research support which is provided to other Regional departments, Local Area Municipalities (LAMs) and other stakeholders.

All recovery efforts are supported by strategic marketing activities. Page views of www.niagaracanada.com are up from Q2 2020 at 21,080 with 247 returning visitors. The top pages viewed are the Niagara PPE Provider Directory (4,166 views), News, Tourism, Business Support and the Niagara Foreign Trade Zone. The Open in Niagara website which encourages our community to buy local by providing information on businesses that are open now has almost 400 businesses registered. We are exploring how this website may be expanded to be a permanent regional business directory.

The second Business Impact Survey identified supply chain gaps as a result of the pandemic. Outreach to companies uncovered a need to find opportunities for Niagara companies to purchase PPE supplies, such as masks, gloves and cleaning products, locally and the potential for reduced costs by bulk buying. It is anticipated that this project will also address other areas of the supply chain which will increase the competitiveness of Niagara companies and enable more secure supply chains. This will be particularly important if another wave of COVID-19 hits.

Applications to our LAM Fund, which was extended this year to include recovery related initiatives, are being processed. To date, two municipal applications have been approved and four are pending.

The Foreign Direct Investment (FDi) program is now conducting meetings virtually with potential investors, with the adoption of new technology and professional backdrops. This month 15 meetings were held with qualified leads in the U.S.

The Niagara Foreign Trade Zone received 14 specific inquiries, making a total of 28 for Q3. A webinar is being planned for later in the fall, to help Niagara businesses adapt to the conditions of COVID-19 and successfully participate in virtual trade shows and online business meetings.

Advisory support continues to Local Area Municipalities who do not have economic development offices and their businesses. These municipalities are Niagara-on-the-Lake, Pelham, Wainfleet and West Lincoln. Sector support to the agribusiness and tourism sectors is also ongoing.

Operational Outlook

1 month

- Economic Recovery Plan implementation with stakeholders continues.
- Virtual FDI meetings continue in the U.S. and start with companies in the U.K.
- Webinar organized to help businesses participate in virtual trade shows.
- Economic Update report will be developed and presented at PEDC in November.
- Development of a third Business Impact Survey to be circulated to businesses.

3 months

- Implementation of the Economic Recovery Plan is completed.

- Work on the development of a 10 Year Economic Development Strategy is started.
- Review work practices depending on Niagara Region recommendations and Public Health advice.

6 months

- 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 advice.
- Development of an economic emergency communications plan to address possible future emergencies that may impact the regional economy.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

Valerie Kuhns
Acting Director, Economic Development