

MEMORANDUM

ED 14-2020

Subject: COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Economic Development

Date: November 9, 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. As previously reported, Economic Development's work is focused on leading planning for business recovery, through the Economic Rapid Response Team (ERRT) and the implementation of the Economic Recovery Plan.

Economic Development actively participates in the REOC and is collaborating with the Internal Organizational Recovery table as well as the Community Recovery Planning table to ensure that there is coordination and communication between the three recovery planning groups. We are providing input into the discussion about the economic indicators that will be used to monitor recovery.

Service/Operational Changes

Our work concentrates on the many projects that are included in the Economic Recovery Plan, to support businesses. This work is carried out in collaboration with our economic development colleagues and regional stakeholders. In addition, we are also continuing to move projects forward in our core function areas. In order to do this, we have had to adapt to virtual meetings, not only internally with our local stakeholders but also with potential investors. Virtual meetings and working from home bring efficiencies in time and result in high productivity from team members. We communicate frequently through regular team meetings as well as impromptu Skype and Zoom chats, throughout the day. In-person meetings are limited.

Significant Initiatives or Actions Taken

A separate report ED 15-2020 Economic Recovery Plan Update has been included in this month's PEDC meeting agenda. It gives a progress report on the initiatives and projects that are included in the Plan. Biweekly reporting to our stakeholder groups continues with the ERRT Update calls every other Wednesday. The update calls are being used as a communication forum for all business support organizations who are advancing recovery and resilience for Niagara's economy.

Now that economic data has become available from regular sources e.g. Statistics Canada and the Conference Board of Canada, we are able to provide an update on Niagara's economy showing the initial effects of COVID-19. This report is ED 16-2020 Niagara Economic Update and is also provided to members of PEDC in this month's agenda. There is a presentation with this report to explain the analysis of the economic data.

All recovery projects as well as our foreign direct investment (FDi) and business development activities are supported by strategic marketing activities. The total number of visits to www.niagaracanada.com are up by 1,242 (12,090 in total) from this time last year. A visit is defined as a series of page requests from the same uniquely identified visitor with a time of no more than 30 minutes between each page request. Page views are up by 2,790 (25,651 in total) in comparison to the same time last year. A page view is a count of how many times a page has been viewed on a website or the chosen group within the chosen period of time. All page views are counted no matter how many times a user has visited the website in the chosen period of time. The number of unique visitors is up by 1,570 (10,482 in total).

For the month of October there have been 7 FDi meetings, organized by a contracted lead generation consultant with companies from the U.S. In addition there have been 12 FDi-related follow up meetings. We also participated in a webinar hosted by the World Trade Centre Leeuwarden, The Netherlands, in partnership with the World Trade Centre Buffalo Niagara, to discuss investment opportunities and the economic strengths of the Niagara region with a group of Dutch companies.

This month the Niagara Region approved a Gateway CIP application for an existing business that is expanding in the City of Niagara Falls. The business will be trebling their physical footprint in the city, creating twenty new jobs within the first year of completion, and will result in the retention of 15 existing jobs. It is expected that this investment will result in \$2.5 m in new building construction. A second Gateway CIP

application was approved for a company bringing their business to the City of Welland. It is expected that the investment will result in \$2.5 m in new construction and the creation of 19 new jobs in the city.

Advisory support continues to the Local Area Municipalities (LAMs) that 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. Our Economic Development Officer has assisted Niagara-on-the-Lake to evaluate applications from tourism dependent businesses to their Fed Dev tourism recovery funding of \$500,000. Applications to Niagara Economic Development's LAM Fund, which was extended this year to include recovery related initiatives, are being processed. To date, three applications have been approved and four are pending.

Operational Outlook

1 month

- Economic Recovery Plan implementation with stakeholders continues as a priority.
- Economic Development will continue to participate in the REOC meetings and collaborate with the Internal Organizational Recovery table as well as the Community Recovery Planning table to develop metrics to measure recovery.
- Development of a third Business Impact Survey to be circulated to businesses.
- Virtual FDI meetings with potential investors in the U.S. are completed, meetings in the U.K. will begin.
- Niagara Foreign Trade Zone webinar to be held on November 5th aims to prepare businesses to participate successfully in virtual trade shows.

3 months

- Implementation of the Economic Recovery Plan completed.
- 'Open in Niagara' website expanded into a permanent regional business directory.
- Review work practices depending on Niagara Region recommendations and Public Health advice.

6 months

- Longer term strategic economic development planning started.
- 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.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

Valerie Kuhns
Acting Director, Economic Development