
MEMORANDUM

ED 1-2021

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

Date: January 13, 2021

To: Planning and Economic Development Committee

From: George Spezza, 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. During the last month we have had some staff changes, noted below, but otherwise operationally, the balance between recovery planning and business continuity, remains unchanged.

The Division'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. We respond as necessary to new directions and protocols from Public Health to ensure that our businesses have the most current information.

Service/Operational Changes

At the end of November, George Spezza started as Director, Economic Development. Val Kuhns who had been in the Acting position for 2 years, moved back to her role as Manager, Strategic Initiatives. Kelly Provost, who had been the Acting Manager, Strategic Initiatives has accepted a new position as Director, Economic Development for Sarnia and left Niagara Region at the beginning of December. As of January 4, the Division's Administrative Assistant, Monica Nieuwland will be returning from maternity leave. At this point, Economic Development will be fully staffed with a team of nine people.

Significant Initiatives and Actions Taken

Campaign to Support Local Businesses

Responding to a motion from Regional Council a 'Buy Local' campaign has been developed and executed. Using a three-tiered approach, Niagara Region's Economic Development team has amplified, supported and complimented local municipal campaigns during the holiday season. In addition, we ran a complimentary Niagara-wide campaign to advocate for local business, and connect residents with existing 'Buy Local' initiatives in their community.

The campaign has three pillars: Amplify; Support and Develop. It amplified the outreach of planned and existing 'Buy Local' campaigns by municipalities. It supported those municipalities who do not have a fulsome 'Buy Local' campaign by creating customized collaborative campaigns. It developed a Niagara-wide multi-channel awareness campaign on the benefits of buying local.

There is a full list of 'Buy Local' campaigns on the www.niagaracanada.com website. Regional Councillors have been sent a toolkit for them to use and share with their networks.

Marketing Support to Businesses

Website Analytics:	Last 30 days:	Vs. Same time last year:
Visits	10, 848	(+1,242)
Page views:	22,861	(+2,790)
Unique Visitors:	8,912	(+1,570)
Returning Visitors:	256	(-15)
Most popular Pages:		Number of Views:
Niagara PPE Provider Directory		6,550
COVID-19 Business Support		2,433
COVID-19 News		1, 056

Additionally as part of the recovery efforts we have relaunched our COVID-19 Business Support page with additional resources and a user-friendly layout

<https://niagaracanada.com/covid-19-2>

Business Updates

The biweekly calls to our EDO colleagues, BIAs, Chambers and industry associations are being used as a communications channel, working with Public Health to get information out to the business community through their networks. Most recently to discuss the visit by Provincial Offences Officers to hundreds of local businesses, to provide guidance on how to operate safely and comply with COVID-19 prevention requirements outlined in the *Reopening Ontario Act*. These visits took place between December 14th and 16th. Businesses were identified using intelligence from Business Licensing as well as patterns identified in Public Health's contact tracing. This campaign supported the current efforts by our police, municipal by-law officers and public health inspectors.

The bi-weekly calls also provide our extended stakeholder group with an update on the ongoing progress of the Economic Recovery Plan.

Tourism Adaption and Recovery Funding

At the time of writing this report, an application submitted to Fed Dev Ontario for funding to support our local tourism-dependent businesses, has been approved. It is anticipated that there will be a formal announcement by the Minister on or around January 4th. The application was submitted on behalf of the Economic Rapid Response Team (ERRT) by Niagara Economic Development (NED). The Economic Development Offices will collaborate on the adjudication of the applications and the administration will be done by NED. The project will run from January 2021 to December 2021. Funding will be available for the costs of equipping businesses to meet Public Health guidelines and protocols including: purchase of PPE, cleaning supplies etc. for workers; accommodating social distancing (expansion of restaurant patio space, pick up windows or curbside pick-ups for retailers, secondary entry/exit to allow physical distancing, equipment to extend the outdoor dining season e.g. purchase of patio heaters); implementation of technology, digital tools etc. for tourism operators to enable e.g. virtual queue, timed entry ticketing and marketing to promote the business that are open.

Business and Economic Research and Analysis

Ongoing projects include: Niagara Active Economy research project with the Niagara Community Observatory; ICT Policy Brief (February 2021), Niagara Community Observatory; Scenario Planning Prioritization Committee, Niagara Workforce Planning Board (drafting a report on Niagara for the Province that looks at potential scenarios and possible outcomes over the next 2 years); ERRT COVID-19 Business Impact Survey – Part 3 (deferred until January 2021); Niagara Economic Update (February 2021) and Equifax data purchase and report (January/February 2021).

Other projects include: Niagara Region COVID-19 Recovery Measurement Indicators (providing advice and information); Airport Economic Impact Assessment Project (providing advice and assistance) and Students going digital - the economic impact on Niagara (providing advice and assistance to Niagara Workforce Planning Board).

Business Development

Niagara Economic Development has been actively involved in two site selection exercises with the Province of Ontario. This has resulted in a number of sites from across the region being put forward for consideration. In addition, the Niagara Region has processed and approved two Industrial Development Charge grants worth a total of \$173,970.50. We also received one Gateway CIP application that is currently under review for the expansion of a new industrial property.

Trade and Investment

FDi meetings are ongoing virtually, focused on the U.S. and U.K. markets, working with lead generation consultants for each target market area to provide pre-qualified leads. In the U.S. 5 more meetings were completed in the last 30 days, with follow up. In the U.K. 1 more meeting was held, with follow-up. There are 5 more meetings scheduled, with a target of 60 in 2020. The work has continued to be hindered by COVID-19. It is anticipated fully half of the 60 lead meetings in the U.S. and 15 meetings in the U.K., will run into 2021.

FDi work to hold 15 virtual qualified lead meetings with the Hamilton Niagara Partnership in the State of Florida has also been delayed until January 2021. Huge COVID-19 spikes in Florida, in combination with the distractions of the U.S. election has made the securing of qualified leads difficult there at this time.

A successful kick-off virtual round table to address the Supply Chains/Import Replacement portion of the ERRT Economic Recovery Plan was convened with 10 Niagara Manufacturers. The majority are in favour of a robust initiative to feature

“localization” and link what Niagara manufacturers make with what Niagara manufacturers need via a monthly virtual drop-in centre. The exact nature of this platform is being explored now and it will involve all 12 Niagara municipalities.

The Coordinator for the Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ) has continued to link Niagara’s trade community to current federal government Covid-19 trade resources including: a particular focus the CanExport grant (in the last month the coordinator has worked with 7 SMEs in the region in support of their grant applications); Connected Niagara’s PPE suppliers to the Canadian COVID-19 Capabilities Directory with 2 applications completed and several in process; 17 client inquiries and meetings to leverage the benefits of Niagara’s FTZ designation and to better inform and keep Niagara’s trade community connected to relevant trade news, acting as an outlet to help resolve trade concerns, and provide opportunities to positively benefit Niagara’s trade community, the FTZ coordinator created the Monthly “Regional Trade Report.”

Support for Local Area Municipalities without Economic Development resources
Support provided to the Local Area Municipalities (LAMs) without an Economic Development Officer included: engaging and connecting them to secure marketing support for buy local initiatives; supported Niagara-on-the-Lake business directory planning and SME mental health resources; total of 7 LAM Fund applications approved including new applications from Lincoln and Fort Erie, applications are pending from West Lincoln and Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Operational Outlook

1 month

- Marketing of Fed Dev Ontario, Tourism Adaption and Recovery Funding ongoing, application process in place and applications reviewed.
- COVID-19 third Business Impact Survey released.
- ‘Open in Niagara’ website expanded into permanent regional business directory.

3 month

- Implementation of Economic Recovery Plan completed.
- 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 be best utilized to maximize ongoing economic development programming.

- First round of Fed Dev Ontario funding paid to tourism-dependent businesses.

6 month

- Longer term strategic economic development planning started (depending on COVID-19).
- Review work practices depending on Niagara Region recommendations and Public Health Advice.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

George Spezza
Director, Economic Development