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**MEMORANDUM**

**ED 6-2021**

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

**Date:** March 10, 2021

**To:** Planning and Economic Development Committee

**From:** George Spezza, 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. We continue to lead the implementation of the Economic Recovery Plan in collaboration with the Economic Rapid Response Team (ERRT). However, in developing operational work plans for 2021 we are working on planning priority activities in preparation to return to our core mandate.

**Service/Operational Changes**

The Economic Development Officer responsible for coordinating the activities of the Foreign Trade Zone and supporting the Foreign Direct Investment program, has been redeployed to a Regional long term care home for 2 months. He is expected to return to the division in mid-April.

**Significant Initiatives and Actions Taken**

***COVID-19: Business Support***

With constant updates related to the COVID-19 pandemic, keeping on top of all the information available can be overwhelming, especially for those who are trying to run a business. Niagara Region's Economic Development team has been combing through the information available online and has curated some resources we think will be most useful for small business owners on [NiagaraCanada.ca](https://NiagaraCanada.ca).

We will continue to update these resources with new information as it becomes available.

<b>Website Analytics:</b>	<b>Last 30 days:</b>	<b>Vs. Same time last year:</b>
Visits	4,197	(+1,267)
Page views:	7,114	(+1,362)
Unique Visitors:	3,407	(+921)
Returning Visitors:	144	(+11)

<b>Most popular Pages:</b>	<b>Number of Views:</b>
Tourism Adaptation and Recovery Fund Grant Program	1,735
COVID-19 Business Support	978
COVID-19 News	789

### *Business Updates*

Biweekly calls continue to the ERRT Taskforce which includes our Economic Development Officer colleagues, BIAs, Chambers and Industry Associations. These calls are used as a communications channel to disseminate information to our local businesses. The calls take place in partnership with Niagara Region Public Health and include the latest information on new government announcements and protocols. In the last month they have provided information on changes to the stages of the Provincial Opening Up plan in preparation for the 'Stay at Home' order expiring on February 16<sup>th</sup>. Information that is released between meetings is shared with the group by email. These calls are also an opportunity to provide an update on the progress of the Economic Recovery Plan.

### *Tourism Adaption and Recovery Funding*

The over-subscription of this fund in a very short period of time is the result of a tremendous effort by both the Regional team and our Economic Development colleagues in the municipalities. The application period closed on January 31<sup>st</sup> and an adjudication committee with representation from all the municipalities evaluated over 200 applications against the eligibility criteria of the funding.

At the time of writing this report, the applicants are being notified and funding agreements are being put in place, in order for Niagara Region to submit a claim to the funder by March 15<sup>th</sup>. We are still waiting for an official announcement from the Minister and so are unable to disclose the total amount of the funding.

### *Business and Economic Research and Analysis*

Ongoing projects include:

- Niagara COVID-19 Business Impact Survey (Part 3)
- Niagara Community Observatory, Regional Active Economy Policy Brief with Prof. Julie Stevens
- Niagara Community Observatory, Updated ICT Policy Brief with Prof. Charles Conteh
- Niagara Workforce Planning Board Scenario Planning Prioritization Committee (drafting a report on Niagara and southern Ontario for the Province that looks at potential scenarios and possible outcomes over the next 2 years)
- Niagara Workforce Planning Board: Students Going Digital: The Economic Impact on Niagara (research collaboration)
- Niagara Region COVID-19 Recovery Measurement Indicators (providing support on the economic recovery dashboard)
- Niagara Economic Update (April 2021)

### *Business Development*

Niagara Economic Development has been actively involved in two site selection exercises with the Province of Ontario. One request for existing shipping and logistics space and the second was related to aquaculture. This resulted in a number of sites from across the region being put forward for consideration. In addition, the Niagara Economic Development Department received a referral from the St. Lawrence Seaway Management Company for a potential land user.

The Manager of Business Development is working closely with the City of Port Colborne, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, and the Senior Investment officer in Switzerland on a potential investment by Jungbunzlauer at their citric acid manufacturing facility in Port Colborne. Jungbunzlauer is considering an expansion of its lactic acid manufacturing with a new facility in Port Colborne. If successful this investment would increase the company's workforce in Niagara and lay the foundation for future growth.

### *Trade and Investment*

Foreign Direct Investment (*FDi*) meetings are ongoing virtually, focused on the U.S. and U.K. markets as they have been; with the EU added in February. Three different lead generation consulting companies are working, one in each of the three target market areas to provide pre-qualified leads. The work has continued to be hindered by COVID-19, particularly in the U.S. and U.K., with the added aggravation of post-Brexit as a distraction in the U.K. Notably, however, we are finding very strong leads in the EU at the moment, with 3 meetings completed to date in February, and 3 more booked. The current status of Niagara Economic Development's (NED) lead generation work has the following outstanding qualified leads due: the U.S. with 58; the U.K. with 10; and, the EU with 4. The *FDi* work which was placed on hold for 15 virtual qualified lead meetings with the Hamilton Niagara Partnership in the State of Florida for the December-January period, has now been relaunched, with meetings anticipated in March. Concurrently, the NED *FDi* team is working closely with two Ontario ministries [OMAFRA and MEDJC&T] and the applicable Niagara Local Area Municipality Economic Development Officer's in each case to nurture four very strong leads, 3 from the U.S. and one from the EU, to facilitate their respective goals to locate in the Niagara Region – challenging work during our current COVID-19 lockdown.

A second virtual round table to address the Supply Chains/Import Replacement portion of the ERRT Economic Recovery Plan was convened with 10 Niagara Manufacturers. A decision was made to adopt the DISCORD App, utilizing the Niagara Industrial Association as the platform host. It is anticipated this App will enhance our themes of "localization" and "connectivity" among Niagara's 650 manufacturers, with this virtual drop-in centre. The initiative is being presented to TEAM Niagara on February 18<sup>th</sup> to gain their support via grass-roots promotional networks.

### *Niagara Foreign Trade Zone Point*

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 on the CanExport grant; connected Niagara's PPE suppliers to the Canadian COVID-19 Capabilities Directory with several in process; and, 5 new client inquires regarding the benefits of Niagara's FTZ designation. A meeting was held with the WTC-Toronto and WTC-Buffalo to discuss the strategy for the next TAP seminar in April or May. Several Niagara businesses have been identified, to be targeted as soon as the program details are set and the speakers have been established. The NFTZ Coordinator plans to host a webinar in late April, subject matter to be determined.

### *LAM and Sector Support*

Ongoing support is provided to the municipalities that do not have Economic Development resources: Niagara-on-the-Lake; Pelham; Wainfleet and West Lincoln. Support is also provided to the tourism and agribusiness sectors.

In the past month applications for the Tourism Adaption and Recovery Fund from the four municipalities have been evaluated. There has been ongoing support for broadband infrastructure expansion projects, Buy Local campaigns, preparation for the Agriculture Policy Advisory Committee (APAC) as well as the ERRT biweekly update calls and tourism sector workforce engagement.

### **Operational Outlook**

#### 1 month

- Initial grant payments made to Tourism Adaption and Recovery Fund applicants. Project reporting underway.
- COVID-19 third Business Impact Survey released.
- Online regional Business Directory is 'live' and being promoted to businesses and organizations.
- Implementation of Economic Recovery Plan on-going.
- Review work practices depending on Niagara Region recommendations and Public Health advice.

#### 3 months

- Implementation of Economic Recovery Plan completed.
- Initial work started on development of a 10 year Economic Development Strategy.
- 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.

6 months

- Longer term strategic economic development planning underway.
- Review work practices depending on Niagara Region recommendations and Public Health advice.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

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George Spezza, Ec.D., CEcD  
Director, Economic Development