

**MEMORANDUM**

**ED 8 -2021**

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

**Date:** April 14, 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**

Economic Development currently has two positions posted. Our Manager, Trade and Investment, Tim Reynolds, is retiring and his last day was on March 31<sup>st</sup>. His position has been posted and we hope to have someone in place by the beginning of May. The Economic Development Officer position left vacant when Kelly Provost was appointed Director, Economic Development in Sarnia has also been posted. Linda Sicoli is currently backfilling the position on a one year contract. It is expected that position will be filled by the end of March.

***Marketing Support to Businesses***

Ongoing projects include Buy Local Area Municipality support, COVID-19 Business Support page updates, coordination of business resiliency stories. Preparation has commenced for the release of Niagara Business Directory to help mitigate the effects of COVID-19, and promote a Niagara supply chain. Niagara Economic Development has also been critical in supporting GNCC's International Women's Day event as well as a number of upcoming events throughout our business community.

| <b>Website Analytics:</b> | <b>Last 30 days:</b> | <b>Vs. Same time last year:</b> |
|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Visits                    | 3,409                | +629                            |
| Page views:               | 6,382                | +536                            |
| Unique Visitors:          | 2,808                | +578                            |
| Returning Visitors:       | 159                  | -15                             |

| <b>Most popular Pages:</b> | <b>Number of Views:</b> |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Tourism                    | 444                     |
| Our Team                   | 260                     |
| Niagara Foreign Trade Zone | 248                     |
| Regional Quick Facts       | 172                     |

### *Business Updates/Economic Recovery Plan*

#### Tourism Adaption and Recovery Funding

The successful uptake of this funding by tourism-dependent businesses has resulted in the full amount of funding being allocated. At the time of writing this report, businesses are being set up in our financial system so that 80% of their project funding can be transferred to support projects when the money is received from the funder. In total, 168 businesses received funding of between \$4,000 and \$20,000.

#### ERRT Biweekly Update Calls

Calls continue every two weeks to a large group of stakeholders who provide support to businesses including chambers, BIAs, industry associations, economic development offices and destination marketing organizations. At our meeting on March 10<sup>th</sup>, Dr. Hirji attended to answer questions directly from businesses.

### *Business and Economic Research and Analysis*

Ongoing projects include: Niagara Active Economy research project with the Niagara Community Observatory; ICT Policy Brief, 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 (currently in progress); Niagara Economic Update (April 2021), and FDI program research and analysis looking at Niagara's position in FDI and trade from a data perspective (April 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); and, updated Niagara Tourism Profile.

### *Business Development*

As part of the on-going Grants and Incentives Review, Manager of Business Development in collaboration KPMG, has completed a review of the Region's current incentive programs and their alignment with our target incentive areas. This will be used to help inform the decision making process going forward.

Niagara Economic Development also received one Industrial Development Charge Grant application. This will result in the immediate retention of 90 existing jobs and the creation of 15 new jobs in the Niagara region.

### *Trade and Investment*

Foreign Direct Investment (*FDI*) meetings are ongoing virtually, focused on the U.S. and EU markets. The U.K. lead generation contract, initiated a year ago, has been terminated due to the impact of both COVID-19 and Brexit. Three different lead generation consulting companies are working at the moment, one in the EU Market, and two in the U.S. Market, in an effort to provide pre-qualified leads. The work in the EU (expected to finish in the month of March) and the U.S. is going extremely well, with the exception of a contract the Hamilton-Niagara Partnership has for 15 leads in the State of Florida, where little progress has been made. Notably, we continue to find strong leads in the EU at the moment, with all 10 contracted lead meetings expected to be

completed by the end of March. The current status of Niagara Economic Development's (NED) lead generation work has the following outstanding qualified leads due: the U.S. with 48; and, the EU with 0. 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 still anticipated in March. Concurrently, the NED *FDi* team are continuing to work 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, 4 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.

As a part of the ERRT Economic Recovery Plan, the DISCORD App (first mentioned in the February report to PEDC), utilizing the Niagara Industrial Association as the platform host, has been launched to address the supply chain issues of Niagara's 650 manufacturers. It is anticipated this App will enhance our themes of "localization" and "connectivity" among Niagara's manufacturers, with this virtual drop-in centre.

The Niagara Foreign Trade Zone Point continued to be active in March, with 5 inquiries from exporters and 3 meetings with CanadaBW utilized as a valuable expert resource, to address queries about bonded warehousing from foreign companies.

*Sector Support and Economic Development Support to Local Area Municipalities without Economic Development resources*

- General LAM advisory support for businesses and development initiatives;
- Project management support and business/EDO/FedDev engagement & response for Tourism Adaptation Recovery Fund;
- Presentation to West Lincoln Chamber on Economic Development activities in the municipality;
- Business Advisory Task Force for Niagara-on-the-Lake;
- Greater Niagara Circle Route Committee liaison to engage Economic Development for support of tourism enhancement elements;
- EDO collaboration in preparation for West Niagara Town Hall;
- Engagement with wineries stakeholders to determine opportunities for collaboration/support;
- ConnectON meetings;
- Airport Business scenarios meeting;
- Local Food conference sessions (every Wednesday in March through OMAFRA).

## **Operational Outlook**

### 1 month

- Initial grant payments made to Tourism Adaption and Recovery Fund applicants. Project reporting ongoing.
- 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*