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**Subject:** Economic Recovery Plan Update 4

**Report to:** Planning and Economic Development Committee

**Report date:** Wednesday, May 12, 2021

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## **Recommendations**

1. That Report ED 12-2021 **BE RECEIVED** for information.

## **Key Facts**

- The purpose of this report is to provide Planning and Economic Development Committee (PEDC) with an update on the progress of the implementation of the Economic Recovery Plan.
- Information on individual actions is included regularly in the monthly COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Economic Development reports to PEDC.
- This report provides an overview of the progress of the Plan using shading to visually represent the stages of the implementation.
- Niagara Economic Development project manages the implementation of the plan in collaboration with the Economic Rapid Response Team (ERRT).
- The action items within the Plan are owned by the ERRT and require support from these members and business stakeholders across the region to complete.

## **Financial Considerations**

All financial implications of implementing the Economic Recovery Plan are being funded by the operational budget of the Economic Development division or through applications to granting programs made available by the Provincial or Federal government.

## **Analysis**

The Economic Recovery Plan was developed in collaboration with the ERRT and external stakeholders across the region. Although, Niagara Economic Development is providing leadership for its implementation and project management, support is required from the ERRT and business stakeholders across the region to advance and complete.

The actions in the Plan are organized under three pillars: Research and Information; Advocacy and Resilience. Each pillar has Immediate, Mid-Term and Long-Term actions. This time-line is intended to progress in alignment with the Province's Framework for Business Re-opening.

The first actions to be initiated were the Immediate and Mid-Term. Some of these actions are now completed but the majority, once started, are ongoing to continue to support Niagara's businesses. The Long Term actions were intended to be initiated when the Province provided direction that we are entering Stage 3. In July 2020 we reached Stage 2 Phase 3 but for now the Province has halted re-opening to control the increasing COVID-19 numbers.

Actions	Status/Progress	Notes
Students Going Digital: The Economic Impact on Niagara.	Completed	Report developed by the Niagara Workforce Planning Board and presented to PEDC in April.
Training and education for businesses, hosting online webinars.	Completed	NED invested in the expansion of the Small Business Enterprise Centre services in Niagara. They provided outreach to businesses through one on one consultations as well as webinars on topics to support businesses. NED assisted in the marketing of the webinars. Final report has been received with metrics.
Third Business Impact Survey. Conduct significant engagement with stakeholders representing tourism, manufacturing	Completed	The survey closed on April 16 <sup>th</sup> . Over 1,000 completed surveys were received. The analysis is underway.

Actions	Status/Progress	Notes
and agribusiness and Task Force members.		
Supply Chain replacement project.	Completed	The DISCORD App has been launched to address the supply chain issues of Niagara's 650 manufacturers, 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 manufacturers, with this virtual drop-in centre.
Retain and develop OpeninNiagara tool to be a comprehensive online regional business directory tool with input from municipalities. Survey businesses for commonalities in supply demand locally. Identify essential supplies and support companies in sourcing Niagara/Canada.	Completed	Online business directory, based on Niagara Employment Inventory database now live and being promoted. It both supports the 'Buy Local' campaigns for residents and encourages strengthening business supply chains by sourcing local.
Provide regular research updates to stakeholders on general market conditions. Maintain a strong base of	On-going	Latest Economic Update report was provided to PEDC in April, including data on the effect of

Actions	Status/Progress	Notes
data on the local economy and businesses, available to stakeholders to inform decision making.		COVID-19 on the economy. Next update will be in the Fall 2021. Five presentations were made to stakeholder groups.
Promote and post new Federal and Provincial initiatives and announcements on the ERRT website page.	On-going	COVID-19 Business Support Site is continually updated. Information on government programs and protocols is added on an ongoing basis. ERRT email address is constantly monitored and questions answered.
Monitor development application activity upon re-opening of the economy including year over year analysis as indicator of economic growth post-pandemic.	On-going	Economic Update reports contain data on development and investment activity. Last specific report was ED 13-2020 COVID-19 Impact on Investment and Development in Niagara. Will continue to monitor post-pandemic.
<p>With Emergency Management and Public Health support businesses in re-opening in a safe and responsible way by sharing guidelines and protocols through update calls as needed.</p> <p>Work with Public Health to provide clear guidance on public safety/appropriate PPE for businesses</p>	On-going	Bi-weekly calls with a broad group of stakeholders provide regular updates on Public Health protocols and business support. Recently had a Q&A session with Dr. Hirji and a talk on mental health resources. Minutes go out to over 90 stakeholders

Actions	Status/Progress	Notes
		with a regular attendance of 30 on the calls.
Fed Dev Ontario – Tourism Adaption and Recovery Fund	On-going	Fed Dev approved an application to this grant fund to assist tourism dependent businesses with the impacts of COVID-19. An application and evaluation process was developed with the ERRT members. 168 applications have been approved and will shortly be receiving funding. NED developed and implemented a communications plan to promote the funding opportunity.
Recognize and showcase businesses that are successfully pivoting through the ERRT website and other channels.	Underway	The businesses have been identified but COVID-19 restrictions have made it difficult to get access to facilities to take photos.

Below is a high level overview of the action items from the Economic Recovery Plan. Actions in the Plan have been coded as to whether they are **Finished**, **Ongoing** or **Underway** illustrating the progress of its implementation. Actions that are not shaded have not yet been started.

RESEARCH AND INFORMATION PILLAR	IMMEDIATE	MID-TERM	LONG-TERM
RESEARCH AND INFORMATION PILLAR	Conduct a second COVID-19 economic impact (Business Impact) survey	Prepare a report on the second regional COVID-19 Business Impact survey results	On-going: Provide regular research updates to stakeholders on general market conditions, including local workforce changes, large expansion investments, business closures, etc. as available/released  Conduct a third COVID-19 Business Impact Survey in Phase 3 to determine the status of recovery of businesses.
	Maintain a strong base of data on the local economy and businesses, available to stakeholders to inform decision making	Identify vulnerable companies and sectors from the survey as a focus for municipal BR+E efforts	
	Promote and post new Federal and Provincial initiatives and announcements on the ERRT website page	Prepare and circulate sector- and municipal-specific reports from second COVID Business Impact survey	
	Promote Provincial and Federal aid programs, including the Resiliency Help Desk at 1-866-989-1080 where businesses can access accountants or financial advisors	Monitor development application activity upon re-opening of economy, including year over year analysis as indicator of economic growth post-pandemic	
	Monitor and assess the impact of remote (online) education at Brock/Niagara College on Niagara's economy and business's employment needs	Recognize and showcase businesses that are successfully pivoting through the ERRT website and other channels	

		Provide regular/on-going updates to Regional Council on COVID-19 impact related activities, issues and efforts	
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RESEARCH AND INFORMATION PILLAR	IMMEDIATE	MID-TERM	LONG-TERM
RESEARCH AND INFORMATION PILLAR		<p>Monitor activities and impacts in other comparable municipalities to benchmark Niagara and learn from best practices</p> <p>Host online webinars on topics relevant to supporting business</p> <p>With Emergency Management and Public Health, support businesses in re-opening in a safe and responsible way by sharing guidelines and protocols through update calls, as needed</p> <p>Survey businesses for commonalities in supply demand locally. Identify essential supplies and support companies in</p>	

sourcing Niagara/Canada  
suppliers

ADVOCACY PILLAR	IMMEDIATE	MID-TERM	LONG-TERM
ADVOCACY PILLAR	Continued alignment between Regional and LAMs' Government Relations strategies and advocacy efforts.	Strive for consistent application of bylaw enforcement across LAMs and the Region	Immediate and longer term: Advocate for changes to the Ontario Planning Act to allow existing CIP funding programs to support COVID-19 related relief efforts. For example: CIPs allowing for an enhancement of virtual a presence (e.g. website design)
	Advocate for alignment and longer-term repayment schedules for all deferral programs to allow businesses reopening to generate sufficient cash-flow	Advocate for COVID-19 relief programs to continue into 2021 for tourism and hospitality sectors, including but not limited to CERB, CEWS, and rent relief programs	
	Continue to provide research and anecdotal findings from Niagara businesses to the appropriate levels of government within relevant Ministries, as well as AMO, FCM, FedDev and the joint Ontario government committee	Advocate to keep COVID-19 relief programs in place for employees while they are in re-training or re-skilling process	Immediate and longer term: Advocate for accelerated broadband infrastructure investment in areas with limited/no service, working with SWIFT and other available programs
	Continue participating in the GTA and provincial recovery planning efforts to identify best practices and synergies across	Advocate for expedited planning approvals at the Provincial level including MTO, Greenbelt, Niagara Escarpment Commission, etc.	Immediate and longer term: Continued advocacy for infrastructure investments for major/regionally significant projects and expediting those already in process



	<p>communities in recovery efforts</p> <p>Monitor Provincial direction and decisions on childcare services through communication with Niagara Region Children's Services department and communicate to ERRT for assessment on local impact</p>		<p>Support Planning departments in review of red-tape reduction efforts to increase speed for development to re-start</p> <p>Advocate for digitization of Region permits and applications, where possible, to assist business cost savings</p>
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RESILIENCE PILLAR	IMMEDIATE	MID-TERM	LONG-TERM
<b>RESILIENCE PILLAR</b>	<p>Conduct significant engagement with stakeholders representing tourism, manufacturing and agribusiness and Task Force members.</p> <p>Expedite approval and coordination of use of public realm spaces by businesses to allow for distancing while supporting business resiliency</p> <p>Execute targeted business retention efforts (BR&amp;E) led by the EDOs in the local area municipalities with specific strategies to assist businesses in distress</p>	<p>Work with Public Health to provide clear guidance on public safety and appropriate PPE for businesses</p> <p>Assist businesses in procurement of PPE by maintaining database on ERRT website and other tools</p> <p>Work with partners in workforce development – helping displaced workers find employment and deploy talent attraction initiatives to fill gaps</p>	<p>Monitor level of demand for office and retail space due to increased adoption of online technologies and work-from-home options by business. Creative thinking to repurpose use of any excess space made available.</p> <p>Supply chains have been strained. Seek opportunities for import replacement – sourcing new domestic suppliers, or</p>

	<p>Encourage “buy-local” promotion via Social Media, particularly Linked-In &amp; <a href="http://www.openinniagara.com">www.openinniagara.com</a>. and amplify existing or complementary buy-local initiatives across Niagara</p> <p>Strive for increased digitization of government services including but not limited to: digital business advisory/support services, consultations and webinars, pre-consultation meetings, online applications, virtual town hall meetings, etc.</p> <p>Assist businesses that need access to capital by partnering on the promotion of the Regional Recovery &amp; Relief fund at Venture Niagara</p> <p>Maintain a listing of Niagara PPE suppliers on the ERRT website.</p>	<p>Identify programs/funds for workforce training/re-training/re-skilling for a more flexible and adaptive workforce and assist employers in accessing them</p> <p>Assist businesses in increasing their online presence – promotion of Digital Main Street and/or other resources to get gain virtual presence</p> <p>Review decision-making process to allow for expedited approvals on development initiatives to support business re-opening</p> <p>Monitor any future wave of business closures or bankruptcies that may occur when relief programs end.</p>	<p>supporting repatriation of manufacturing.</p> <p>Re-focus FDI strategies and messaging to opportunities post-COVID. Develop new tools to undertake investment attraction, including site selection virtually</p> <p>Retain and develop OpenInNiagara tool to be a comprehensive online, regional business directory tool with input from municipalities</p> <p>Include a portion in the Long Term Economic Strategy that addresses mitigation plans for future pandemic impact.</p>
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## 10 Year Economic Development Strategy

Initial discussions on the start of a new long term strategy were begun just as COVID-19 started. The strategy was put on hold and attention focused on the implementation of the Economic Recovery Plan. Although, we are still in the pandemic, work has now started again on the new strategy with the aim that it will come to PEDC in spring 2022.

Following a motion at PEDC in January 2020, this strategy will be developed collaboratively by all 9 economic development offices. Letters of commitment signed by the Mayors, CAO and Economic Development staff have been received from all 8 municipalities that have offices and the other four will be represented by a Regional team member. At the time of writing this report an initial meeting has been launched to address the supply chain issues of Niagara's 650 manufacturers and the initial EDOs meeting has been arranged at the beginning of May.

### **Alternatives Reviewed**

No alternatives.

### **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

The ERRT Economic Recovery Plan supports Council Strategic Priority "Supporting Businesses and Economic Growth".

### **Other Pertinent Reports**

- ED 11-2020 Economic Recovery Plan Update
- ED 15-2020 Economic Recovery Plan Update 2
- ED 5-2021 Economic Recovery Plan Update 3

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