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**Subject:** ED 19-2021 Economic Rapid Response Team Business Support

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

**Report date:** Wednesday, December 8, 2021

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## **Recommendations**

1. That this report **BE RECEIVED** for information.

## **Key Facts**

- The Economic Rapid Response Team (ERRT) was formed in March 2020 to support local businesses throughout the pandemic.
- The ERRT is a collaboration between Niagara Region and the local economic development offices.
- Niagara Economic Development (NED) supports local businesses through regionally significant projects.
- Local Economic Development offices have responsibility for working with businesses in the municipalities, as laid out in the current Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).
- Niagara Economic Development's core mandate is investment attraction, external marketing, business development and expedited services and strategic economic initiatives.

## **Financial Considerations**

The activities described in this report have been accommodated within the Council approved 2021 Economic Development budget.

## **Analysis**

The formation of the ERRT was announced by the Chair and the Mayors in March 2020. It brought Niagara Economic Development and the municipal economic development offices together to support local businesses throughout the pandemic.

The current MOU determines that the local Economic Development Offices are the main point of contact for businesses in their municipality and provide support to them. However, from March 2020, the economic development group came together to provide

support to businesses across Niagara. As these efforts were region-wide, they were led by Niagara Economic Development, on behalf of the ERRT.

### 1. Economic Recovery Plan

In May 2020, an Economic Recovery Plan was finalized, in collaboration with the ERRT. It included a number of actions to support businesses through the pandemic, which are organized under three pillars: Research and Information; Advocacy and Resilience. The activities within each were divided into three timeframes: Immediate; Mid-Term and Long-Term. The implementation of the plan has been included in update reports to Planning and Economic Development Committee throughout 2020 and 2021. The Immediate and Mid-Term actions are now completed and the Long-Term actions will be carried forward to be included in the new 10 Year Economic Development Strategy currently being developed.

### 2. ERRT Update Calls

A broad group of stakeholders, the majority of whom have a business membership base, was brought together to help disseminate information to businesses about public health protocols and the vaccination program. This is being done in collaboration with Niagara Region Public Health, through biweekly update calls and email communications. This group includes: economic development offices; chambers; BIAs; downtown associations, destination marketing organizations (DMOs); employment help offices; industry associations (manufacturing, real estate, construction, homebuilders, agriculture etc.); post-secondary institutions; innovation organizations (see Appendix 1).

The biweekly calls are ongoing to this group and as well as Public Health updates also include updates on the implementation of the Economic Recovery Plan. Throughout the past months, the attendance on the calls has been between 25 and 30, with the information going out in the minutes to over 100 individuals representing over 70 stakeholder organizations.

### 3. Marketing

NED's mandate is external marketing to promote Niagara to potential investors. However, during the pandemic activities switched to focus on support for local businesses. This support included the following:

- Implementation of municipal 'Buy Local' campaigns through micro-grants and additional amplification techniques.
- Development of an online Niagara Business Directory to assist in expansion of the local supply chain by promoting sourcing locally. It is also being used to promote

opportunities to supply Canada Summer Games to local companies. In partnership with Niagara Health, we have developed an online business directory to be used by them to source suppliers for the new South Niagara Hospital, due to be launched within the next month.

- Providing information on funding programs and support for businesses as they are announced by the federal and provincial governments on the website [Niagara Canada \(https://niagaracanada.com/\)](https://niagaracanada.com/)
- Promotion of the new Niagara Region Transit routes in collaboration with Niagara Region Transportation and Communications divisions. This effort is to support local businesses, not only to bring customers, but it also provides transportation options for employees in more remote municipalities.
- In collaboration with Innovate Niagara and the Local Area Municipalities, a comprehensive digital and print marketing campaign was launched in the National Post to encourage residents to visit downtown stores in the region.

#### 4. Tourism Adaption and Recovery Fund (Fed Dev Ontario)

The ERRT, led by Niagara Economic Development, stepped in at the request of the federal government to administer funding support to tourism-dependant businesses in Niagara, throughout 2021. The fund of \$2 million is being distributed to over 160 businesses, through an application and evaluation process with reporting mechanisms in place. They have until the end of December to complete their projects and do final reporting. Many have already done so and received their funding. The funded projects include, for example, building patios, providing PPE, developing online ticketing capabilities, all aimed at conforming to Public Health protocols and keeping businesses open.

#### 5. Rural and Agribusiness Sector Support

Some activities specific to the agribusiness sector and rural communities include:

- Working to support Public Health, our Economic Development Officer provided direct outreach to food processing companies in Niagara during Phase 1 of the Vaccine Implementation Program, to arrange appointments for employees.
- Working with Public Health to continue to vaccinate migrant workers in an effort to avoid further COVID-19 outbreaks.
- Letters of support were provided to service providers for funding applications to expand broadband coverage throughout rural Niagara.

## 6. Research and Analysis

The Manager, Research and Analysis answers economic and business data inquiries and responds to requests daily from our local business community and the Local Area Municipalities. Niagara Economic Development also provides economic updates semi-annually in the spring and the fall, as regional data becomes available. Specific sector reports are also developed, for example, the latest was on trade and foreign direct investment. All of these reports help to inform the economic development and local business community through numerous presentations and media interviews.

During 2020/2021 we undertook three COVID-19 Business Impact Surveys to understand what local businesses were experiencing. Initially this provided much needed regional information that was not available from traditional data sources. The analysis was shared with the provincial and federal governments to help them understand the type of assistance that companies needed and the immediate issues they were facing. The survey results were also actively communicated to the local business community and economic development stakeholders and were used to inform advocacy efforts and recovery programming across all municipalities in Niagara, as well as the tourism sector specifically.

In addition, research and analysis was done into COVID-19 Impact on Investment and Development in Niagara, October 2020.

## 7. Exporting Support to Local Businesses

Through, the Niagara Foreign Trade Zone, the coordinator provides support to Niagara's exporters, connecting them to trade incentives and programs offered by the provincial and federal governments including: Trade Accelerator Program; Global Connections Program, Export Development Canada; Trade Commissioner Service, Global Affairs Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade's Foreign Service Program.

## **Alternatives Reviewed**

During 2020 and 2021 and the pandemic restrictions, Niagara Economic Development re-focused activities and resources to provide support to local businesses through regional-wide projects.

## **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

Economic development activities described in this report directly support Council's 2019-2022 Strategic Priority:

- Supporting Businesses and Economic Growth

## **Other Pertinent Reports**

ED 15-2021 Economic Development Quarterly Update Appendix 1

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## **Appendices**

Appendix 1            Economic Rapid Response Team Stakeholder List