
MEMORANDUM**ED 7-2020**

Subject: COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Economic Development
Date: May 13, 2020
To: Planning and Economic Development Committee
From: Val Kuhns, Acting Director, Economic Development

Economic Development**Current Status of Operations**

Following the formation of the Economic Rapid Response Team (ERRT), Niagara Economic Development has re-focused its work to support our Niagara businesses impacted by COVID-19. Initially, this involved the development of a dedicated ERRT web page as a source of information on funding announcements, the creation and monitoring of an ERRT email address for business inquiries across the region, and the design and deployment of a COVID business impact survey on the immediate impacts of the pandemic to our local economy. Our social media and digital marketing channels have been used to widely promote these tools.

Service/Operational Changes

- All Foreign Direct Investment work has been suspended and staff redeployed within the Division to support our local companies and work on economic recovery planning. However, despite the suspension, 9 investment inquiries have been received in the last 6 weeks.
- External marketing activities have been suspended and are now supporting efforts to get information out to businesses and communicate with our stakeholders.
- Economic Development staff are involved in the development of the Project Charter for a holistic Region-wide Pandemic Recovery Plan.

Significant Initiatives or Actions undertaken

- The first COVID-19 Business Impact Survey yielded more than 2,600 responses in 10 days. The analysis was been completed on the data and the report was

released on April 14. The data is being widely used to inform economic recovery planning as well as advocacy efforts. Local area municipalities are using the survey as a tool for continued engagement with their businesses.

- Regular virtual meetings are being organized with economic development staff from the 6 offices across the Region, Employment Ontario, Local Chambers of Commerce, and other Sector associations.
- Niagara Economic Development has also joined the weekly GTA Economic Development Recovery Team to tie the Niagara Recovery Plan into a larger effort.
- 'Open in Niagara' was launched to Economic Development Officers and stakeholders as a free tool to use to promote business that are open and offering modified services in Niagara (www.openinniagara.ca) As of May 6, 275 businesses have self-registered and with that base of companies on the site, the media campaign has been launched to promote to residents and businesses.
- A second COVID-19 Business Impact Survey has been developed to be distributed to Niagara businesses in mid-May to assess the ongoing impact on businesses and industries now that the COVID-19 timeframe has been extended and government funding programs are available. The data collected will also inform economic recovery planning and advocacy activities.
- In collaboration with economic development staff across the region, work has started to develop the Terms of Reference for an Economic Recovery Plan and the identification of resources that will be needed going forward.
- Corporate calling program to 44 of the larger employers in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Pelham, Thorold, Wainfleet and West Lincoln has been completed.
- Niagara Economic Development initially re-purposed a webpage, but has now created, a dedicated COVID-19 business support page. This resource acts as a clearinghouse for updates from the Provincial and Federal Governments on the programs available to businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Operational Outlook

1 month

- Continue to monitor government funding announcements and promote to the business community. Work will be underway on the development of an Economic Recovery Plan working in collaboration with the 6 economic development offices and regional stakeholders. Data and information from the

second Business Impact Survey will be incorporated into economic recovery planning and used to inform advocacy plans and implementation.

3 months

- Economic Recovery Plan will be completed.
- Coordination with the local Economic Development Offices, Chambers, and the Niagara Workforce Planning Board etc. on continued support to businesses re-opening.
- Stakeholder engagement with key sectors (tourism, agribusiness and manufacturing) to stay informed about their current needs and adapt support as necessary.
- Monitoring the economic indicators to better understand how COVID-19 has affected the regional economy, compared to previous years, and determine where resources could best be utilized to maximize ongoing economic development programming.

6 months

- Execution of the Economic Recovery Plan.
- Support ongoing communication between local government and businesses.
- Review of the pandemic's impact on the Economic Development Strategic Action Plan and make revisions as necessary.
- Development of an economic emergency communications plan to address possible future emergencies that may impact the regional economy.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

Valerie Kuhns
Acting, Director
Economic Development