

**Explorers' Edge Board of Directors Meeting Minutes**  
**Tuesday, December 13, 2016**  
**Quality Inn, Bracebridge**

**Present:** Michael Simonett, Jackie Leung, Drew Rachar, Anthony Rizzo, Curt Dunlop, Dympna Hayes, Jeff Suddaby, Rob Wallace, Gary McMullen

**Regrets:** John Miller, Kim Loader, Karina White, Andrew Vitich

**Via Conference Call:** Hilary Chambers, Nicole Saulnier

**Resource:** Laura Hernando (via conference call)

**Staff:** James Murphy, Cindy Kaupp

**Welcome and Introductions:** Jackie Leung called the meeting to order at 9:40am.

**Conflict of Interest:** N/A

**Approval of Agenda – December 13, 2016**

**Motion:** Anthony Rizzo

**Seconded:** Drew Rachar

**Discussion:** n/a

**Carried.**

**Approval of Minutes – October 26, 2016**

**Motion:** Curt Dunlop

**Seconded:** Drew Rachar

**Discussion:** n/a

**Carried.**

**Financial Presentation: Financial Presentation – December 8, 2016 Income Statement & Balance Sheet**– James Murphy for Andrew Vitich

ED Murphy spoke to the budget; constant oversight and diligence to ensure budget is adhered to. Murphy noted that there are no red flags. Murphy noted that Fuel & Fun vouchers have been coming in through transacting with Suddaby highlighting that he has been monitoring partnership activities; not a true reflection of what has been happening. Two things happened: because of FedNor in September - we went out with this content marketing program with great success and some invoices cannot be posted until the New Year because of businesses' fiscal years. We also have meetings happening in the next few days – with those invoices totaled, would make up about 50K. We are on track to have the partnership money in there and spent. Balance sheet; nothing is jumping out - our 6 months HST has been submitted and our book keeper has been reconciling on a monthly basis ensuring everything is accurately recorded.

## **Approval of Financials**

**Motion:** Jeff Suddaby

**Seconded:** Curt Dunlop

**Discussion:** n/a

**Carried.**

## **Executive Director Update – James Murphy**

ED Murphy discussed Industry Conferences that were attended since the last Board Meeting: Tourism Industry Association of Ontario and the Northern Tourism Summit. We were able to bring everyone up to speed on what we are doing with content marketing, and with the Canada 150<sup>th</sup> marketing program.

We have had a lot of success with Economic Developers – they've developed a site called Venture Muskoka discussing all of the economic development opportunities in Muskoka; developing more of a regional breath to it as of recent. We took the lead and paid content writers to write stories on Economic Development opportunities in the region, and they saw the benefits of that. They then took the lead in developing a content schedule and Economic Developers are now writing these stories.

ED Murphy spoke to Research Updates on the RTO12.ca website; we have gone online and updated the research landing page with more current information. There is relevant research on there that if you need it, is accessible on the site; Weather, Occupancy, and Average Rates. 2013 & 2014 Ministry Data is also up there.

### **Outreach/Presentations:**

- AGM Port Loring
- Rotary Club
- Simcoe Muskoka Workforce
- Parry Sound Workshop
- Jack Rabbit Presentation; Kudos to Tyler - first presentation and did really well. We are starting to talk to Municipalities about adopting the JackRabbit widget on their site. Anthony Rizzo asked if it is a cost share program. ED Murphy commented that there is potential for revenue generation. Anthony Rizzo stated that ultimately, it is being managed by us - they are just buying into the program and all work is being done for them and the widget is just on their site. Therefore, it is not unreasonable.
- Tourism Round Table

In regards to Partnership Completion; Girlfriends Getaway Weekend, Great Muskoka Paddling Festival, Muskoka Autumn Studio Tour, Active Women's Weekend, What's Cooking Bracebridge, and Georgian Bay Biosphere are all completed/ wrapping up. Girlfriends Getaway Weekend did outstanding and Great Muskoka Paddling Festival got press in the newspaper saying that it did fantastic – the Paddling Festival was up 40 or 50%. I think we deserve some credit for this because we put some money and content behind these, and What's Cooking Bracebridge sold out this year. Murphy noted that success is directly

tied to the Director of Communication who not only writes the content, extensive research, editing and interviews are completed to ensure content works hard.

ED Murphy spoke to Partnerships in-Progress; Deerhurst, Club Link, Active Women's Weekend, Georgian Bay Airways, Resorts of North Muskoka, Yoga Festival, Loring Restoule Trails, Pine Grove Resort, UK Trade Show – Algonquin Outfitters, and UK Sales Mission – Deerhurst Resort.

ED Murphy discussed partnerships that included a UK Trade Show and a discover mission with a tourism operator to London UK to meet with tour operators – this would complement our Canada 150 program. The UK discovery mission will be to educate tour operators in the UK about the area and where to book; 30 tourism operators over 4 days in order to highlight our product, our destination, and what accommodation looks like. Anthony Rizzo asked if we are going with the operator, is it open on behalf of the entire region? ED Murphy stated that it is open to the entire region. Curt Dunlop mentioned that 5k partnership in our budget is not a huge thing, and it will help because businesses are going to be getting direct phone calls from a tour operator. ED Murphy noted that he recommends this because it fits into a considerable investment that we are involved in already. Michael Simonett noted the importance of getting the message about the rest of the region out. Dympna Hayes mentioned that we have to make sure it's not just the voice of the individual – the UK tradeshow; it is hand-picked and it's not necessarily a benefit to the entire area, it is a benefit to one individual. Someone needs to go for the region. ED Murphy mentioned that he will keep the members up to date on this.

ED Murphy spoke to additional items:

- Craft Beer: stakeholder follow-up sessions in January 2017
- Itinerary and Packages: package project updates
- Tourism Excellence North: Parry Sound Fast Track to Success (3 Business Operators)
- Research Updates: Online real time data

In regards to Investment Attraction; Commercial Air Service - outreach & interviews with the industry and airlines are taking place. US/UK Strategy via the Director of Communications– creative is underway and launch is scheduled for January 19<sup>th</sup>. I don't think any other RTO is going to have a 150 campaign like we are going to have – excited to launch it.

Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport; progress report was completed on time with minor adjustments.

- The Strategic Framework for Tourism in Ontario
- Satisfaction Survey
- Amendment 2017-2017
- Budget – Forecast to Actuals Report (due January 3, 2017)
- Operational Plan (due January 15, 2017)

**Regional Tourism Satisfaction Survey Result Presentation (RTO specific) – James Murphy**

ED Murphy spoke to the RTO Specific Questions:

- Satisfaction survey; 182 responses, a 45% increase.
- Commercial Air Service is notably loud and clear. 92% play a leadership role.
- International vs. Domestic; 1/3 of the budget.

ED noted that the results are something to be very proud of, the RTO is doing a great job. Chair Leung noted that the first few questions in the survey were from the Ministry and the rest were ours. These are useful for us to plan what we are doing in the next year – and that what we are planning is on track with what our constituents want. Rob Wallace mentioned that it is helpful because yes, you get an affirmation of how you are doing, but where the target is down the road is the more important question to understand.

### **2017 – 2018 Draft Operational Plan**

ED Murphy spoke to the Explorers' Edge Strategy; 2016-2017 saw an evolution of the organization with the development of our first international marketing campaign (aligned with Canada's 150 Birthday celebrations) and the initiation of the commercial air service project. Explorers' Edge continues to position itself as an organization focused on the consumer, where collaboration and leveraging resources through partnerships are at the forefront of activities.

Looking back to move forward:

- Marketing & Promotion
- Product Development and Innovation
- Investment Attraction
- Workforce Development and Training; TEN program – great feedback, in particular the one on one mentorship program.
- Industry Communication and Accountability; reports done on time this year and there is always room for improvement with industry communication.

Overall, a very exciting year – we are close to hitting our 1 million website hits; last year we had 750,000 hits. This means there have been more outbound links and more viewing of content, and our Facebook page is doing better than ever. Anthony Rizzo mentioned the importance of celebrating the 'wins' on a regular basis; there are people who do not really know what is happening – ex: our website doubling. Curt Dunlop mentioned the possibility of once a year, taking some of the data we have and highlighting our 'wins' so people are aware of what we are doing. Chair Leung also noted that it is important for the operator to know what worked for us in terms of successes, because they are using us as a template – let's let them know what works and doesn't.

ED Murphy discussed the Explorers' Edge Vision; in 3 years (2017), Explorers' Edge will be the most popular tourism destination in Ontario., the Associated Mission; Explorers' Edge is an operator-driven organization whose mission is to develop a profitable and thriving tourism industry, and the Explorers'

Edge Mandate; the Explorers' Edge mandate is to TIIC: Train, Innovate, Ignite and Collaborate with industry stakeholders to help consumers choose our tourism destination.

Overarching Goals for Explorers' Edge:

1. Double tourism receipts by 2020
2. Identify regional priorities that move the provincial RTO agenda forward
3. Change how government and industry work together to develop and foster economic growth
4. Maximize and measure the impact of private and public tourism investments and new revitalized product
5. Reach out to consumers before they get here and once they arrive so that we can welcome more tourists
6. Set standards for success to become more internationally competitive in areas such as workforce development, skills training and others
7. Establish measurable ROI criteria

ED Murphy also spoke to the Explorers' Edge Worldly Wise Strategy:

RTO's major push in 2017-2018 will be on building the region into a competitive renowned global destination. This work, which will also attract domestic visitors and 'float stakeholder boats', will entail bringing areas of operation that are traditionally done in silos into a more streamlines focus.

We intend to create a region that is globally competitive using shrewd strategies and by refining and optimizing our output in as many applicable areas as possible.

**Investment Attraction;** 5K has been budgeted.

- Airline Attraction & Communication
  - Consumer Marketing Plan
  - Commercial Air Service Communication Plans
  - '*Muskoka: Worldly Wise*' strategy (The Last Mile)
- Venture Muskoka
  - Economic Development Content Strategy
  - Collaboration with seven regional Economic Development Agencies

**Workforce Development and Training;** 35K has been budgeted. We are getting into new markets and destinations and everyone has to be on the same page. It will still be an RFP process – still on the high end and will be fleshed out once the RFP has been completed.

**Workforce Development and Training – 41K (Partnership);** Continue executing and implementation of the Tourism Excellence North initiative.

### **Marketing and Promotion – 577K**

- Continued investment in “social, mobile, content marketing” as our primary marketing strategy
- Continued investment in media relations/ PR to complement our content strategy
- Targeting of audiences in Southern Ontario and key northern US destinations
- Development of transacting program that supports long haul visitation

### **Product Development Strategy (Spring 2017) – 60K**

- Inventory assessment, market demand analysis (domestic and international), competitive review, final strategy
- Subject to a RFP process

### **2018-2021 Organizational Strategy (Fall 2017) – 25K**

- Off the heels of a product development strategy and progress related to investment attraction, the RTO will develop it's their 3-Year Strategy to create a road map for future endeavours pertaining to Product Development, Marketing, Workforce Development, Investment Attraction, and Governance & Administration.

### **Partnership Allocation Alignment – 332K**

- TEN
- Festival & Event Marketing
- Content Development
- International Development (Parry Sound Cruise Ship & Muskoka Airport)
- Dedicated Staff - Manage partnerships

### **Industry Communication, Liaison and Accountability – 504K**

Senior Project and Partnership Manager will complement the current team

- Report fulfilment
- Private partnerships
- Industry partnerships
- Government partnerships
- Additional Tourism Operator Relations Internship

ED Murphy discussed aspirational budgets - if we can get some investment than that cost will come down. He also spoke to the Fuel & Fun program; we've used it as a tipping point program and we need to figure out how to position this program in a U.S. /U.K. market moving forward. Fall Fuel & Fun may be put on hold for a year, as it targets Southern Ontario currently. Chair Leung mentioned that as an operator, she would like to make an argument to keep to Spring Fuel & Fun – we won't decide this firmly at this point but it's a conversation that needs to happen.

Curt Dunlop suggested the possibility of having a fulltime staff do Project Management. Murphy noted that in addition to a project manager we are in good hands with our strategist. The monthly retainer to have a strategist on board is valuable. Hilary Chambers noted that we would be hard pressed to find anyone as beneficial as current strategist, Peter Coish. ED Murphy stated that next fall, we will have a new 3 year direction – which means new RFPs and a review on how work is completed.

ED Murphy also spoke in regards to new staff and job description; experience writing successful grants, and successful programs they have ran, do they know the RTO? Chair Leung also noted they would be looking for somebody with the experience and confidence to be able to meet with the DMO, ED's and Economic Developers and deal directly with them.

Resource Laura Hernando provided an update; things are the same as a few weeks ago – in approvals right now. If there is appetite for change it won't be until the next budget. This year, it's been recommended to work with this budget. There is a lot happening at the Ministry - over 400 applications for Celebrate Ontario. We want to work with all of the RTO's to ensure alignment wherever possible.

**Motion to Approve a Draft Budget**

**Motion:** Curt Dunlop

**Seconded:** Anthony Rizzo

**Discussion:** n/a

**Carried.**

**In-Camera with Executive Director**

**In-Camera without Executive Director**

**Motion to Adjourn**

**Motion:** Michael Simonett

**Seconded:** Curt Dunlop

**Discussion:** n/a

**Carried.**