

Explorers' Edge Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, June 3, 2020
Webinar

Present: Jeff Suddaby, Scott Doughty, Don MacKay, Michael Simonett, Gail Burrows, Anglea Pollack, Hilary Chambers, Brenda Scott

Regrets: Eric Miglin

Staff: James Murphy, Kate Monk

Welcome and Chair Remarks: Chair Jeff Suddaby called the meeting to order at 9:34am

Conflict of Interest:

n/a

Approval of Agenda – June 3, 2020

Motion: Michael Simonett

Seconded: Scott Doughty

Discussion: n/a

Carried.

Approval of Minutes – March 24, 2020

Motion: Don MacKay

Seconded: Michael Simonett

Discussion: n/a

Carried.

Approval of Minutes – April 22, 2020

Motion: Scott Doughty

Seconded: Michael Simonett

Discussion: n/a

Carried.

Financial Presentation – Michael Simonett

Income Statement & Balance Sheet – May 25, 2020

Currently there is minimum spending to date and due to the constant changes related to funding we are not where we planned to be with regards to financials at this point. A new draft budget is big piece moving forward based on different program scenarios with our multiple partners.

Motion to Accept Financials as Presented

Motion: Michael Simonett

Seconded: Don MacKay

Discussion: n/a
Carried

Budget & Program Updates – James Murphy & Kate Monk

Chair Suddaby discussed importance of BOD providing clear direction to EE staff for where organization is heading from now until April 2021. ED Murphy begins, mentions looking for budget approval from board at completion of presentation.

Month of May recap included details on the framework for reopening of the economy from the Premier – state of emergency extended until the end of June. Spoke to Tourism Operator Survey for Funding Opportunities – higher number of businesses still in Scenario 1, majority in Scenario 2. Business re-development poll included 22 responses detailing social media, marketing training, SME platform audits and retrofitting programs – important details needed for funding applications in the works. The month of May also included weekly webinars including guest speakers speaking on Marketing Q&A, Creating Video Content, Reopening the World’s Workplaces, The Economic Rebuild & The Future of Tourism and Education. MacKay mentioned posting links to RBC 10 minute videos for other operators to easily access. Chambers also brought up the Tourism Excellence North reference materials that are available to the public. Monk made recommendation to continue to reach out the individuals who can provide some perspective on specific topics for future webinars.

ED Murphy spoke to provincial communication including TIAO conference calls and Minister’s COVID webinars. TIAO call included questions regarding Ministry \$245k payment from the province to offset their operating costs – dollars came from tourism development fund. ED asked what process for other organizations to access that money is and was told there is no process. EE is member of TIAO and we understood them to be lobbyists but do not feel they should be accepting money from the province as they take concerns from members forward – ED Murphy wanted to bring this information to the board. Also discussed the Minister’s webinars and how this is now led by a Leaders Panel Committee, not open to everyone – Toronto and Ottawa chairing the committee. We speak to those chairs and they bring the details forward; challenge for us that both chairs are from urban areas and no one speaking directly to rural tourism.

ED Murphy then discussed current funding announcements. The Muskoka Business Recovery Fund includes \$750k initiated by the Bracebridge and Muskoka Lakes Chambers of Commerce. Muskoka Community Futures has received the money but has yet to sign an agreement with the District of Muskoka. Chambers mentioned they went through MCF and have been approved for the emergency bank account but the funds will not roll out until next week. Monk mentioned this program is not unique and has been done by other areas as well; is a loan that must be paid back in five years, some exclusivity to it for operators. The CEBA Expansion update and eligibility criteria was also briefly mentioned.

ED Murphy spoke to Porter Airlines and our three-year agreement. EE recommendation is to extend the term so that year two takes place in 2021 and year three in 2022 – formal agreement from Porter has not yet been received. Quote from Porter included states “*We believe that Muskoka has excellent long-term potential as a destination. It’s unfortunate that COVID-19 is affecting our ability to fly there this*

year.” EE will still pursue our TICO license, and include budget for international marketing, this budget has been kept back to begin promotion of the airline in January 2021. ED Murphy asked if there were any objections from the board to move forward with our request to extend the service into 2022 or any questions. Suddaby asked MacKay about details from the District and the airport BOD. MacKay answers that he understands Porter is dealing with the District directly as well as Len O’Connor. MacKay hopes the discussions will become a three-way discussion to include Explorers’ Edge. Suddaby recommends this also. ED Murphy mentioned he is in constant contact with Porter and the Muskoka Airport. Suddaby asked about payments, ED Murphy informed board that next payment to Porter will come out in next fiscal year after April 2021. Suddaby asked if anyone objected to what is being proposed – no objections.

ED Murphy then discussed federal funding that was made available to Southern Ontario, the Regional Relief Recovery Fund to the tune of \$30M from FedDev (FedNor takes care of Northern Ontario and FedDev looks after Southern Ontario). The agency that is executing this on behalf of FedDev is TIAO. ED Murphy feels this is creating an uneven playing field in the province – separate from the \$30M Destination Canada is re-allotting (\$8M to Tourism Toronto, \$4.5M to Niagara Falls Tourism, \$5.2M to Ottawa Tourism). Calls into question again the role of TIAO in the province. Discussed Northern Ontario announcement regarding funding, \$7.6M which was announced, these are funds from previous projects and is not new money.

Board discussed the current state of their businesses as far as accepting bookings and promoting travel and stays at their businesses; ED then asked that the group work towards developing a board statement that will be posted to the EE Facebook page to pin to the top with our messaging about safe travel in the region when it is appropriate to do so.

ED Murphy then moved on to discuss upcoming projects and programs. The partnership application submitted to FedNor includes five aspects: 1) retrofitting for sustainable revenue, 2) retrofitting for winter (pivoting from seasonal to year round), 3) consumer research – product development framework 2.0, 4) social mobile content marketing and 5) website redevelopment. \$225k of RTO funding committed includes a partnership budget line of 100k, website allocated at \$46k core and \$79k from marketing to offset the \$225k – FedNor ask was for \$175k.

Partnership dollars are still earmarked for programs which have already begun the application process including: 1) \$10k to South Algonquin for signage, 2) \$10k to the Muskoka Economic Developers for a content program, 3) \$10k to the Town of Huntsville for a video and content program and 4) \$TBD to the Chambers of Commerce for a local community tourism branded program.

Murphy and Monk are working with Indigenous Tourism Ontario – building relationships and meeting on a regular basis. Monk is offering immediate assistance with social media and communications and ITO has provided the RTO with guidelines for working with Indigenous people. EE will work to empower Indigenous business in the region and to assist in promotion of their products with direction from those businesses directly.

Work is ongoing with the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs – will meet for the study of the recommendations relating to the Economic and Fiscal Update Act and the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on certain sectors of the economy. A written submission will be provided before June 22nd.

ED Murphy has sent out an updated budget; this is the final draft to date that will be executed for the fiscal taking into account new developments. Changes include salaries and benefits, shuttle service cancellation and the international marketing air service delay. Suddaby asked about partnership dollars being allocated towards transacting budget; ED Murphy responded this comes from core to keep the playing field level for all sub-regions during this program.

Motion to Accept June 3, 2020 Updated Budget as Presented

Motion: Michael Simonett

Seconded: Scott Doughty

Discussion: n/a

Carried

Next steps for the organization include an RFP for the website updates and rebuild (from core budget), catalyst housing feasibility launch, marketing including lead nurturing contests, completion of the audit and the MHSTCI final report.

ED Murphy mentioned the virtual AGM happening in July and presented the tentative film schedule for the board of directors to capture feedback from them to speak to their role with the EE board and their role in the industry to be shown during the AGM online – this is intended to motivate the industry and show what this region is all about.

Finalized presentation by discussing current unknowns including clarity on tourism travel announcements, state of emergency extensions, role of DC and DO in a competitive domestic marketplace, special distancing protocols, etc.

Governance Update – Brenda Scott

Brenda has spoken with all new board members – they are engaged in Wednesday Webinars and looking forward to the virtual AGM. Will also make outreach to board members regarding executive positions for the new board. Encouraged board to reach out to their municipalities regarding 2021 budgets and how changes could affect their business.

Meeting In-Camera with Executive Director (14:02)

Motion to Adjourn

Motion:

Seconded:

Discussion: n/a

Carried