



3 Taylor Road, Bracebridge, ON P1L 1S6
1-800-835-7303
Algonquin Park, Almaguin Highlands, Loring-Restoule, Muskoka,
Parry Sound & South Algonquin
www.explorersedge.ca



**Explorers' Edge Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, June 9, 2021
Webinar**

Present: Michael Simonett, Christine McRae Luckasavitch, Don MacKay, Hilary Chambers, Angela Pollak, Scott Doughy, Andrew Rusnyk, Gail Burrows

Resource: Laura Ross

Regrets: Darren Smith, Dave Anderson, Mike Strong

Staff: James Murphy, Kate Monk, Erin Smit (taking minutes)

Welcome

Call to Order and Chair Remarks: Chair Michael Simonett called the meeting to order at 9:35am.

Feeling hopeful about the light at the end of the pandemic tunnel and wants to thank the team for their work. Looks forward to hard work and strides being made to help the region sustain themselves after the pandemic.

Conflict of Interest: n/a

Approval of Agenda – June 9, 2021

Motion: Don MacKay

Seconded: Hilary Chambers

Discussion:

Carried.

Approval of Minutes – March 11, 2021

Motion: Hilary Chambers

Seconded: Don MacKay

Discussion:

Carried.

Director Round Table

Laura Ross: early opening on Friday causing a lot of excitement. Behind the scenes at the Ministry working on processing funding applications (formerly Celebrate Ontario) for festivals and events. Big focus on this program is community development – hopeful announcements will be out by next meeting. Also working through Tourism and Small Business Support Grant (\$100M) – still an opportunity

to help businesses learn about it with a small uptake in applications currently. Ross responded to why there would have been such little uptake. Ontario Small Business Support Grant recipients cannot apply again for this one. There are also quite a few restrictions in place leaving many unable to apply or ineligible. Ross was asked about workforce funding announcement with RTO13 partnership with the Ministry. This program includes multiple funders and leverages RTO13s workforce funds along with partnership dollars from the Ministry. Ross was asked about how much input RTO employees and grassroots organizations had in these top-down funding programs? She spoke to advisory panels and working groups, feedback that was solicited and provided through various channels – but can't comment on who specifically was involved in the decision making. Ross was asked about the second round payment of the OSBSG and what's going on with the funds being distributed? This will be looked into it and see what she can find out.

Don MacKay: golf is in a good spot right now, but doesn't know that it will stay that way. Concern is for the little guy – hopeful that the enthusiasm to have experiences will help propel small businesses forward once the opening dates are here. Would like to see the Ministry be more responsive. Mentioned the Canada 2030 report – will circulate the link.

Hilary Chambers: massive frustration with the programs coming out of the Ministry, lack of transparency and communication. Insurance companies raising rates, etc. Pine Grove Resort will open on the 19th as originally planned – needs time to prepare safety protocols before they can safely open. Have had some delays in their construction projects which also contributes to this delay.

Andrew Rusnyk: ski season ended up fairly good for them – early closure was frustrating but overall good. Ski hills have been removed from the eligibility list for the Ontario Small Business Grant. Boat docks now have 16 person waiting list for slips. Mountain bike trails that are coming onto the property are looking good – should be open in August, making final touches and adding in the signage. Looks forward to having new group of people utilizing their property in the summer months.

Gail Burrows: lots of projects undertaken during the shutdown – new maintenance shop being built, window coverings, new Stay & Play opportunities doubling capacity. Looking forward to opening this weekend.

Scott Doughty: frustrated with the lack of information coming out of the Ministry and the timelines being provided in such short notice. Guidelines for the resort industry have been very vague. Capping occupancy at 80% as they are short staffed. Hopes summer is very profitable for all small business.

Angela Pollak: busy at her property, starting to pick up in terms of behind the scenes work. An inspector visited another local business and shut them down for what she would consider a minor infraction, so they are working to ensure their extensive safety protocols are in place. Angela's work for SABA was noted and how she was able to secure an enabling accessibility grant for their organization to build a new responsive website. They are also now an incorporated business which opens more doors for funding grants.

Christine McRae: with the news out of Kamloops has been a very heavy couple of weeks for the Indigenous population. Busy with work with Native Land digital platform and hopes to engage with resorts, summer camps and local groups as the reopening plan moves forward.

Michael Simonett: thanks board members for their comments and insights. This is a polarizing environment that we are in – worried that the people who are coming to travel don't care about the rules as a result of pent up demand to get out. Is looking into how they make plans for 2022 – mainly in regards to group travel planning (meetings, weddings, events, etc), how to book business when trying to understand what the rules are going to be long term (needs clear information and consistency).

Financial Update – James Murphy

Year End Financials Ending March 31, 2021

Current Financials Ending May 31, 2021

Board received two sets of financials, one for year end March 31st, waiting on audited financial statements. Revenue can be deferred to next year, allocation from the Ministry was spent, partnership monies could be used for core activities was approved. A portion of money on the income statement from the Minister is listed as 'supplemented income' which is the Destination Ontario funds under 'Marketing'.

Murphy was asked about the \$146k surplus for the year on the statement and is waiting to speak to the auditor and bookkeeper, will update directors in the coming week.

Healthy amount in the CIBC bank account – refer to income statement. May 28th TPA was received, eight weeks into the fiscal year. Will notice two new lines are on the income statement under expenses – supplementary marketing for Destination Ontario/Canada spend so not to mix in with core marketing budget, and supplementary workforce is for the program to be explained today so as not to muddle the core funding line under workforce. Staff meetings will be more diligent with weekly financial updates so more timely communication can be made – also happy to discuss financials at any time with board members with questions or concerns.

Motion to Accept Financial Statements

Motion: Don MacKay

Seconded: Andrew Rusynyk

Discussion: n/a

Carried

Organizational Update – James Murphy and Kate Monk

Senior staff discussed some frustration and delays getting TPAs moved through and time that was spent looking at bridge financing, etc. waiting on approval of funding – came through on May 28th, 2021. TPA 1 includes the Business and Operational Plan projects; TPA 2 is for the Workforce Development projects - rural tourism certifications program and regional employment FAM tours. Ensuring future workers understand the product offering here to engage them and peak their interest in working here. The Destination Ontario/Canada funding is available to spend up to December 31, 2021.

The 2021-2022 BOP is underway. Over 100 signups so far for the Regional Tourism Summit – will launch the organizational shift towards region-centric and regenerative approach. This year is for mapping and launching new programs and determining additional KPIs based on regenerative strategies. Revenue generation is part of a regenerative approach to sustain the industry and build a business ecosystem for everyone attached to tourism; business owners, employees and community members.

In the fall staff will lay out suggested multi-year approach to replace the 5 year strategy (2018-2023) that was sidelined due to COVID. The communications specialist position is on hold, and Marketing Coordinator has departed leaving the core team of three plus the agency of record.

Workforce Development

Working with the Ryerson Students' Society - a recruitment night was held via Zoom which was successful with applicants being received by local resorts as a result of the event. Monk also taught a class. Main concerns of students based on the student survey for working in a rural environment were housing, transportation and lack of diversity challenges.

Georgian College is recruiting in India – online lectures have low attendance for Tourism Sales and Packaging Course. The Master Class component saw higher numbers. 28 students received their TICO Travel Counsellor Certification and 52 sales pitches were submitted as part of the program.

Humber College B. Comm Hospitality & Tourism Management students took part in a 4th year thesis presentation on solving our specific regional workforce challenge of attracting and recruiting staff to rural areas. The students recommended using Tik Tok as a platform for recruitment – 62% of entry level workers use this. The team will partner with Deerhurst Resort to test this campaign and see if it will convert to job applicants. The Tik Tok team will also present their project at the Regional Tourism Summit. KM also mentioned tourism schools in Ontario closing (including Humber and MA Tourism program at the University of Waterloo) and what this means for the future of trained hospitality staff in Ontario.

The Travel Agency division is moving forward – Murphy has received his Travel Counsellor and Supervisor Manager certifications. With Jack Hopkins' departure from the organization, Erin Smit and Kate Monk will also take the Travel Counsellor exam. The TICO registration once all certified includes an application fee, security deposit, and setting up of a trust account with CIBC (will be run as a division of the RTO). Will set benchmarks to begin, and work forward from there towards revenue generation for the organization. Monies being made will not just be for organizational revenue, but to put back into programs, resource management regeneration and sustainability for product and locations, etc.

Discussed the District of Muskoka Resort Policy – senior staff have attended four district sessions. An opportunity to engage municipal representatives and community members. RTO12 has no official stance or involvement, but will continue to be a resource to answer questions or concerns. Discussed bringing back the business barometer.

RVC – Monk met with over 20 buyers during the virtual event. Tour developers (including domestic) were very interested in the GCW product on offer – wide open spaces, fresh air, natural and outdoor product. Looking for packages and itineraries (with booking widget), content development, etc. Discussed meeting with integrated booking widget developer – is global and could help promote our packages worldwide.

Website development is underway – will be no more Explorers' Edge consumer brand after June 22, 2021. Main purpose of the new site is conversion into packages. Social assets will also be merged, including the Explorers' Edge Facebook page becoming the Great Canadian Wilderness. Explorers' Edge will now become the forward facing brand for the industry site (more brand awareness over RTO12.ca).

A major editorial development and relaunch of social marketing will be underway as well – especially for winter promotion beginning in Fall.

The Cottage Country Spirit Winter Edition saw a 70% redemption rate with the vouchers distributed resulting in \$89k economic impact. The spring version of the program was ready to roll out and then was delayed due to provincial stay at home orders – new summer rollout with 2,000 available packages will launch on July 2nd with vouchers being accepted July 19 – September 30, 2021. More voucher programs are also in the works, including a possible HMAT program for fall and a winter Fuel & Fun program for that travel season.

Monk has been in contact with ITO – big part of the regenerative strategy. There are six operators in our region who are considered Indigenous tourism operators – will work with ITO to build relationships with them to help promote their market ready product. An MOU is in development to collect and amplify Indigenous stories and to identify/develop current or potential tourism businesses. Christine asked for advocacy from EE with ITO for small Indigenous businesses; has had difficulties with communication from them and timely responses to inquiries.

Looking at 2022 for year-two of the Porter contract. Murphy is also sourcing diversity, inclusion and equity training for directors and staff – as well as the opportunities for a mobile office this fall to ensure more sub-regional outreach and interaction.

Murphy discussed his involvement with the Minister MacLeod round table, lunch and learn, and RTO round table. Asked for board members to share the details of the Regional Tourism Summit on June 24, 2021. KM asked for board to come prepared with questions and concerns that can be voiced to Chris Bloore, President and CEO of TIAO for them to be elevated to the Minister.

Governance – Review Board Policy 1A through 1F

http://rto12.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/7-EE_GovernancePolicies_Jan2019_FIN.pdf

Reviewing policies 1A through 1F (see link) – asked the board to bring to the table any items that they'd like to discuss or require updating. Hilary Chambers gave a brief overview - 1A is about the governing style of the board, 1B is the job description of board members, 1C is the role of the chair and their duties, 1D is governance process and role of executive committee (how they support the board), 1E is governing process and how new committees can be developed for certain tasks/projects as needed and 1F is the board code of conduct and how board members should be representative of EE in the community.

Pollak asked about discussing board performance – Murphy noted this can be done when meetings go in camera. AP also asked about using the term 'all' throughout the document, in referring to 1B – “representing 'all' stakeholders and businesses”. Wonders if this should be changed to 'the majority' or similar. Murphy will touch base with our governance AOR, with a list of questions being posed. MacKay mentioned changes cannot be made unilaterally, these changes would need to be made at the AGM (Simonett) – Murphy will speak with AOR about holding a virtual session with the board once all documents have been reviewed. McRae Luckasavitch asked about industry standard for statements like these and asked if feedback should be collected over each meeting, and then edits made to the document once a year. Chambers would like to have one meeting to discuss; Monk would also like to have this discussed at the board planning sessions in the fall to include the new KPIs. MacKay asked if

this document could be loaded into Google Docs so all board members can make notes on a living document and its available to all at each meeting – this could also be shared with the governance AOR so she is up to date. James will load and share with the board, and will move into the next batch of points for discussion at the next meeting.

Meeting went in camera at 11:34am.

Motion to Adjourn

Motion: Hillary Chambers

Seconded: Scott Doughty

Discussion: n/a

Carried

DRAFT