



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  
Business & Operational Plan Development 2022-2023  
Tuesday, November 23, 2021  
Webinar**

**Present:** Don MacKay, Gail Burrows, Darren Smith, Hilary Chambers, Angela Pollak, Andrew Rusynyk, Dave Anderson, Scott Doughty

**Resource:** Laura Ross

**Regrets:** Michael Simonett, Christine McRae, Mike Strong

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

**Call to Order and Chair Remarks:** Vice Chair Hilary Chambers called the meeting to order at 9:34am.

**Director Round Table**

**Conflict of Interest:** n/a

**Approval of Agenda – November 23, 2021**

**Motion:** Darren Smith

**Seconded:** Angela Pollak

**Discussion:**

**Carried.**

**Approval of Minutes – September 13, 2021**

**Motion:** Don MacKay

**Seconded:** Darren Smith

**Discussion:**

**Carried.**

**Financial Update – James Murphy & Don MacKay**

Discussed timelines for projects and completion before year end. Board was reminded that with a Transfer Payment Agreement (TPA) delay of two months, projects themselves were delayed by two months. It was noted that the RTO has been locked into a tighter timeline.

During the financial discussion the board discussed HR, specifically the job posting for the Communications Specialist position. Additionally, directors were briefed on:

- Outstanding insurance quote / update – November 30, 2021

- Next steps for the RTO TICO license i.e. deposit
- Spend related to the Marketing Communications Specialist hire and the overall Winter Marketing (how it will address the outstanding Marketing Spend)
- The outstanding research spend will be allocated to the Employee Research program
- Business development, sustainable development and marketing will address the Partnership Activities Spend
- Winter diversity program, worker FAM tours and Masterclasses will address Workforce / Supplementary Spend
- On the Partnership Revenue spend, partnerships with winter FedNor, South River, Parry Sound Festival of the Sound will complete the incoming revenue partnership – some wiggle room is available here as we reconcile these projects
- Balance Sheet – Additional accrued liability added for Winter F&F

The RTO continues to oversee and administer the following Funding Streams.

- Core TPA - to be Renewed April 1, 2022 – two months delayed but on track to complete
- Workforce TPA - to be Completed March 31, 2022
- DO / DC Partnership - to be Completed March 31, 2022
- FedNor - to be Completed September 30, 2022 – first claim has been submitted

**Approval of Financials as Presented** – November 23, 2021

**Motion:** Don MacKay

**Seconded:** Andrew Rusnyk

**Discussion:**

**Carried.**

### **Program Update and 2021 – 2022 Business Plan Status Report (60 minutes)**

Directors were provided with an update of where the RTO stands related to fiscal deliverables. Additionally directors were briefed on programs from the 2021-2022 Business and Operation Plan (BOP) that began in this fiscal year will flow into the following year, they include:

- Economic Development Specialist deliverables
- Sustainable Tourism Pilot Project
- Marketing: Porter Airlines Update & New (?) Objectives
- Research: Workforce Attraction & Retention
- Regional Database: Brief
- Micro-credential Training & Workforce Attraction (Fam Tour)
- Ryerson Diversity & Inclusion Event/Community Outreach
- Mapping Catalyst Housing

Directors were given additional information related to product development, specifically the Sustainable Tourism Pilot Project which will be renewed next fiscal. It was noted, the Booking.com 2021 Sustainable Travel Report which stated that 83% of global travellers say sustainable travel is vital – 32 standards have been vetted by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). The webinar with Greenstep in

October kick started this pilot project to move local businesses through the certification process; prove the business case further for sustainability. Outcomes will be tracked and results will be presented at the RTO Summit and at the Ontario Tourism Summit. The reason to build a business case is to convert the unconverted – Travel.com utilizing this program is a huge push for the industry.

- RTO12 Business Case for Sustainability: Prove the ROI
- “The Group of Five” businesses participating in Sustainable Tourism Certification (GSTC accredited and delivered by GreenStep
- YOY tracking of investments/resources required vs. ROI
- Present Year-One results at the Regional Tourism Summit and at the Ontario Tourism Summit
- Voyageur Quest (AP), Diamond Waters Sailing (PS), Harmony Outdoor Inn (PS), Muskoka Discovery Centre (Gravenhurst) and North Ridge Ranch (Huntsville)

Additionally the RTO will move forward in posting a Economic Development Specialist position. The posting for this position is now closed and resumes submitted are being reviewed. This is currently a three-month contract (to close out this fiscal year) with the possibility of moving it into a one-year contract for the next fiscal year. The position includes;

- Liaise with Indigenous stakeholders in the Explorers’ Edge region/Robinson Huron & Williams Treaties territory to nurture strong working relationships and to identify tourism development opportunities to serve those stakeholders
- Research, identify and apply for federal, provincial and municipal grants to serve the business objectives of the RTO, and also individual or member-agency stakeholders
- Liaise with regional economic development representatives to identify collaboration opportunities that align with the business objectives of the RTO, and to communicate updates on RTO initiatives
- Provide expertise to sub-regions with no economic development entity
- Identify potential partnerships that align with the RTO’s Regenerative Tourism Strategy

Senior staff discussed the current marketing landscape. It was noted that the budget will be tight next year. As such our resources need to be spent on projects that are not duplicating efforts being made by other local organizations. The RTO will continue to market to locals to push the outbound flights, but otherwise we will not reach out to local markets moving forward as this market is being served by other local groups. Observations were shared with directors.

- It was noted that a lot of duplication for hyper local markets, many new “micro-marketing” entities (e.g. Explore South River)
- Our organization will continue to support regions with no marketing and promote our products (packages, itineraries, Fuel & Fun, etc.)
- Regional marketing partners MTMA now has additional marketing staff (x 2), HMATA voucher partnership has concluded after 3 editions which were administered by RTO12.
- Domestic audiences (using new consumer segments from extensive Environics research done in 2020) will be the focus of marketing moving forward
- It was noted that the Destination Canada / Destination Ontario partnership funding will be completed and conclude in the coming weeks

Senior staff continued by briefing the directors on Marketing Priorities for 2022 – 2023 and beyond. It was noted:

- Commercial Air Service – Year 2 of 3 Year Commitment for summer 2022. Staff shared with directors the importance of having a second successful year as it relates to commercial air service.
- With changes in the Canadian aviation landscape the team at RTO12 will continue to prove the value of our destination as a leisure route. This requires a multi-level as our destination continues to play a role in leisure commercial air service.

Additional marketing considerations include:

- TICO Travel Division (Packages, Reservation System, Shuttle Service, Tracking)
- Voucher / Transacting Program (Budget for one program, needs to be nimble to adjust to travel restrictions if they come about)
- Contesting / Trade Shows / Influencers
- End of DC/DO additional funding

Of note, senior staff have been in contact with a law firm, Carters Professional Corporation to have Explorers' Edge registered as a business name. The process will begin with a \$3k retainer. Additional work to be completed will include the business registration, legal checkup, issue identification, stress test or the organization and three-year transition period from the not-for-profit act.

**Motion to Approval entering into an agreement with Carters Professional Corporation.**

**Motion:** Don MacKay

**Seconded:** Gail Burrows

**Discussion:**

**Carried.**

Workforce development was discussed as a current update and work to be slated for the 2022 – 2023 fiscal year. Staff briefed directors on the current job bank results via content marketing on Facebook.

- Page Views: 11,794
- Unique Page Views: 10,429
- Clicks: 1,354
- Avg. Time on Page: 0:54
- Job Ads, Marketing via Facebook: 800K reached \* \$5000 spend \* .35 cents CPC average

Tracking with the current plugin was limited, so finding out more with content about page views and resulting click through to employers' website will be valuable. There was good response with the ads – hoping to enhance the experience with the rebuild. Darren asked if in the new format their functionality for employers could be to make their own updates to their ads – it was noted that we post and make updates to ensure consistency across the platform. This was also needed as we had to gate keep some submitted positions that fell outside the tourism industry. Discussed posting of the wage for the positions listed on the site – also mentioned listing housing opportunities available to potential employees. Angela noted she thinks a more equitable site will be created by posting of wages or offering the link to where the wage is posted for transparency to potential employees (building trust with potential employers by being transparent). Staff confirmed it is not our role to push for wages to be

made public – we must work to encourage potential employees to visit your page for more specific details and to contact the operator directly; how the RTO incentivizes you in other ways other than the wage.

Another program, Micro Credential Training & Workforce Attraction which is part of the workforce TPA, was discussed with directors. Directors were provided an overview/refresher of the program; we are putting together a certificate program to bring potential workers to the region to tour. This format weeds out those who just want a free day out. Developing curriculum with this program is also integral to the catalyst housing project. In the way of an updated 2021 Rural Tourism Certificate Program includes an online training module(s) (five being produced over the next couple weeks, each about 8 minutes long), experiential learning component (familiarization tours in January-Feb), a Zoom recruitment event(s) and a diversity & inclusion event / community outreach. Of note, all elements will be part of the workforce section on the new RTO12.ca website

In addition to the programs being completed the workforce research for attraction & retention is being developed simultaneously. Staff updated directors noting that gaps have been identified on what is being undertaken with research right now, will help lead the business case for needs in the region. There are a ton of surveys being undertaken right now to survey the employers, but we are seeking more unbiased and granular data for our industry from potential employees. Angela asked about the survey responses and how the information gathered will compare to Muskoka and other smaller sub-regions. Doesn't see how this will benefit South Algonquin – how does RTO see this impacting more rural regions? Group discussed catalyst housing – how this is not just room and board but a development program with specific criteria in place to be eligible. Housing project's overarching goal is to provide a competitive advantage to employers here; discussed social enterprise and their interest in investing in young people and the development of sustainability-based projects (outside groups).

Components of the Employer Survey include:

- Actual job vacancies (how many jobs need to be filled each season across the region?)
- What level needs to be filled (entry level? management? full-time? temporary?)
- Tactics used to attract and retain workers besides wage
- How many provide staff housing
- Obstacles to hiring
- Hiring segments (youth, students, semi-retired, gender, etc.)
- Estimated revenue loss from inability to attract workers

Components of the Employee Survey include:

- Those currently employed in the regional tourism industry (why do they stay?)
- Those who quit or did not return (why? what would it have taken to keep you?)
- Those outside the region seeking employment (what will it take?)
- Living wage requirement – what is your estimate of what is needed to live in the region
- If you left to work elsewhere was it in hospitality and tourism or another industry (and which one)? What was the appeal of your new job?
- “Top 3” recommendations to tourism industry employers

*As it relates to the Business Barometer which is also in development staff continue to work towards expanding measurements from the original Business Barometer to track the “health” of the industry, not just revenue, gauging external influences on the bottom line as well, ascertaining whether revenues are Up or Down Year over Year, Supply chain issues are impacting business (increase, decrease, steady), if inflation is effecting a business bottom line, ect..*

Board updates concluded with information / update related to the collection of regional data. i.e. housing availability, housing costs, inflation, gas prices (for staff transportation), resident sentiment, visitor satisfaction. In addition, staff touched on the catalyst housing and the foundational work being completed while touching on our two-year FedNor agreement and work completed on the Ontario Northland: Rail Development program.

Staff concluded with setting out timelines for next steps which include a pre-Christmas: update with feedback and draft budget followed by an early January: Draft 2022 – 2023 BOP with budget.

Ministry representative provided a brief updated noting that the Ministry is now discussing the role of the RTO related to destination development. Staff noted that our current team has been leading in destination development for several years and our current BOP reflects that.

**Motion to Move Meeting In Camera at 11:36am**

**Motion:** Don MacKay

**Seconded:** Andrew Rusnyk

**Discussion:** n/a

**Carried.**

**Motion to Adjourn**

**Motion:**

**Seconded:**

**Discussion:** n/a

**Carried.**