



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
Tuesday, February 8, 2022
Webinar**

Present: Hilary Chambers, Don MacKay, Scott Doughty, Gail Burrows, Darren Smith, Angela Pollak, Andrew Rusynyk, Dave Anderson, Michael Simonett, Mike Strong

Resource: Laura Ross

Regrets: Christine McRae

Staff: James Murphy

Call to Order and Chair Remarks: Vice Chair Hilary Chambers called the meeting to order at 9:36am.

Conflict of Interest: n/a

Approval of Agenda – February 8, 2022

Motion: Don MacKay

Seconded: Angela Pollak

Discussion:

Carried.

Approval of Minutes – November 23, 2021

Motion: Darren Smith

Seconded: Don MacKay

Discussion:

Carried.

Financial Update – James Murphy & Don MacKay

Income Statement & Balance Sheet: January 18, 2022

MacKay noted the RTO does a good job of spending to our budget; suggested looking at the budget at the end of the meeting after reviewing the upcoming projects. This overview of the financials is a look at what we spent over the past fiscal year and the impact of those programs we invested in. ED Murphy discussed juggling four TPAs; we are currently on budget in each line item. Asked if anyone had any questions on what they are seeing on the balance sheet and would be happy to provide updates; there were none. MacKay mentioned the board's priority as watching spend in program development; not just what we're spending but the impact we are having. Murphy noted the only YTD difference will show in the three weeks between this presented document (January 18, 2022) and projects where monies have

been spent since include economic development projects with Kyra Cole, content marketing for workforce development, student FAM trip, micro credential rural tourism certificate asset development, etc.

Approval of Financials as Presented – February 8, 2022

Motion: Don MacKay (showing YTD surplus of \$168,167.26)

Seconded: Darren Smith

Discussion:

Carried.

Program Update and 2021 – 2022 Business Plan Update

ED Murphy noted he was the only staff member on this call today; Kate Monk is in another meeting and Erin Smit was at a personal appointment and will take the minutes from a recording of this meeting on February 9, 2022.

TRANSACTING

After the last meeting on November 23, 2021 the Winter Edition of the Fuel & Fun Package was pushed forward to be ready to deploy in December 2021 instead of January 2022. We budgeted for 700 packages, but as the rumors of another provincial lockdown circulated the packages did not sell out; program ended with 200 bookings (approx. 450 room nights) for stays between January 10-March 10, 2022 with \$10k worth of vouchers then dispersed into the regional economy. The marketing did very well; over 1 million impressions with 14k clicks and consumers staying on content for over two minutes but found the looming lockdowns did hamper traveler bookings (noted considering travelers' intentions to book last minute moving forward). As a result of this, we quickly changed gears and leftover budget from the Fuel & Fun program was allocated to the dispersion of a Winter 2022 Cottage Country Spirit Local Travel Package; 1500 packages sold out in 5 hours and each one was stuffed and mailed within the week; results in \$75K worth of vouchers out into the region to an estimated value of \$375k.

CONTENT

Content marketing did very well in December and January; 2.6 million impressions, 42k link clicks, 15k referrals and 100k page views with an average cost per click of \$0.36 in December (noted this is higher than usual because of Fuel & Fun promo); down to \$0.22 in January with 4.6 million impressions, 68k link clicks, 19k referrals and 127k page views.

FISCAL 2021-2022 PARTNERSHIPS

FedNor has different percentages for different line items; we submitted a second claim for research, marketing and the sustainability program with GreenStep – once we reconciled it allowed for more room for a few more partnerships. The group 'Explore South River' reached out to us and had budget available to partner on wayfinding signage, content marketing and the promotion of their Explore South River app. Bill Farnsworth will meet with the PARC Association and the Village of South River to develop the content for this partnership. ED Murphy also noted the report for the Destination Canada/Destination Ontario partnership has been submitted and signed off on (was a two year, \$350k program that Minister McLeod announced two years ago).

TIK TOK FAM TOUR

Four graduates from the Humber College Tourism & Revenue Management program (who did their final case study on Explorers' Edge) visited the region February 4-6, 2022 on a FAM tour. The group is working on a pilot to develop new consumer audiences and potential workforce connections on the Great Canadian Wilderness Tik Tok platform.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

ED Murphy discussed the RTO12 job bank; continued postings from operators being submitted and a content launch will be deployed to test if this will resonate more with prospective job seekers and result in more conversions than the display ads we are currently promoting. Also discussed the high school hospitality and co-op outreach that has been ongoing; instructor identification and contact information has been gathered. Explorers' Edge has also again received Diamond Member Status with the Ryerson Hospitality & Tourism Students Society; gives us access to the students for outreach with surveys (micro credentials and job recruitment). Monk has also been working with Ryerson University on an experiential/sustainable marketing case study with Professor Rachel Dodds sending students out with Robin Tapley and Canadian Adventure Expeditions.

The RTO12 Rural Tourism Certificate & Experiential Learning

This program (with funding from the MHSTCI TPA) is a lead nurturing tactic for regional job recruitment. ED Murphy noted that having students come up from a classroom on a tour doesn't always lend itself to having the most active or engaged potential students involved if they're just here as part of their curriculum. In an effort to curb this, the Rural Tourism Certificate program and its information modules will work to peak interest in working here and distinguish this region from others in Ontario for job opportunities. The first series will target students (test run for Master Class modules with area operators) and will link to the EE job bank and to ongoing email marketing (regarding job opportunities and recruitment events). The content will live on the redeveloped corporate website (Learning Management System) where scripts, quizzes and branded elements will be completed. Asset acquisition for this is currently underway by Birchbark Media (photos, video footage, animation, etc) with recording taking place in mid-February. The program will launch in mid-March with hopes that some certificate holders will travel to the region for experiential interaction with visitors in the upcoming fiscal year.

The modules serve as a four season connecting theme and include:

MODULE 1 - Introduction to the Rural Tourism Certificate

MODULE 2 - Welcome to Rural: The GCW Just North of Toronto

MODULE 3 - The Rural Tourism Revival

MODULE 4 - Developing Tourism Products & Experiences: A Rural Approach

MODULE 5 - Work & Play in the Great Canadian Wilderness

The program aims to 'own' rural tourism and position the region as the premier spot for job opportunities outside of the urban sector. Hilary asked if this program is free to potential participants; yes it is.

Sustainable Tourism Assessment Pilot Project

Behind the scenes work ongoing since November 2021, including 9 regional businesses completing MOUs with great representation from across the region.

- Clear Lake Brewing Co & Muskoka BeerSpa
- Diamond Waters Sailing
- Elm Cove Cottages
- Muskoka Highlands Golf Links
- Muskoka Steamships & Discovery Centre
- Harmony Outdoor Inn & Ontario Sea Kayak Centre
- North Ridge Ranch
- Sail Parry Sound
- Voyageur Quest

This pilot group have begun their assessments with the GreenStep Solutions team and will work with RTO12 staff to create a year over year business case tracking and development. Presentations on this project will be made at the RTO Regional Tourism Summit and the Ontario Tourism Summit.

JOB POSTINGS

Since November two job postings have been circulated. One did not result in a hire, and the other produced a three month economic development contract with Kyra Cole which commenced on January 4, 2022. Kyra has been an EDO for Caldwell First Nation, has her TEAD certification, was an Indigenous Business Advisor for Indigenous Tourism Ontario, has worked with Parry Sound Tourism, and has previous grant experience. Kyra was also named one of Ontario's top ten economic development professionals in 2021. To date she has completed Indigenous stakeholder desktop research and an overview of her communication approach. Next steps for Kyra include research into grant opportunities and applications, as well as looking into the next BOP to determine any projects where grants may be available.

RTO12 CORPORATE WEBSITE

The design and staging of the new website is complete. It will have the Explorers' Edge branding and we are hoping to launch it in early March (content inventory review is currently underway). The website will focus on workforce development, will house content and features consistent branding with the Great Canadian Wilderness website. The URL will change from RTO12.ca to ExplorersEdge.ca.

REGIONAL DATA HUB FOR ONGOING STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

The Environics Research surveys are currently in development; this is part of the FedNor partnership (JM offered a separate Zoom meeting for this if required). Will include:

- Business Confidence Index (quarterly)
- Regional Labour Shortages and Requirements
- Worker Insights
- Resident Sentiment
- Environmental Impact Index (TO BE ADDED LATER)

This will be a similar dashboard to the current paid promotion data we receive from Google Data Studio and will live on the corporate website. More information will be available after the meeting taking place with Environics later today.

COMMERCIAL AIR SERVICE

The second year of the three year contract will commence for Summer 2022. Porter will offer a 10-week service with Friday and Monday flights (better to sell week-long mid-week packages). Service begins on June 24, 2022 and the price for tickets is TBD by their revenue management team. New staging will be required at YQA due to COVID which the airport will be tasked with completing, and CATSA has been confirmed. For us, dispersion will again be key for cross-regional impact and will include a revised shuttle service. Testing with TICO will begin to test selling high yield packages, as well as the use of hyperlocal markets to push outbound flights as well. No announcement will be made about the service until it launches in market at the request of the airline. MacKay mentioned Fly GTA is also interested in returning. Chambers asked about the revised shuttle service. Murphy noted no decisions have been made yet but a meeting with Hammond Transportation is on the books. MacKay asked about co-op'ing a minor part of the cost of the shuttle service to operators interested in participating so they have some skin in the game; Murphy noted this will be considered when developing packages.

REPORTING CONTRACTS

TPA 1 for the Business and Operational Plan; we have submitted our mid-term report which was approved. TPA 2 for the Workforce Development project; we have submitted the mid-term report on that as well. The DO-DC partnership is completed so that will now fall off our radar. The second part of the FedNor funding (next fiscal) will be upcoming, the first year one report and claim have been submitted.

MISC.

Monk to take part in speaking engagements with the University of Prince Edward Island and on an Ontario Culture Days educational podcast. Training for senior staff is also taking part with the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association and the Institute of Corporate Directors.

Regional Outreach

- MTMA
- Parry Sound, Great Lakes Cruise Association & FOTS
- Welcoming new EDOs
- Village of South River Clerk presentation
- Ongoing dialogue with RTOs, Ministry and Ministers office
- Ontario Culture Days Round Table Advisory (KM)
- Muskoka Watershed Council Membership (KM)

As we close out the fiscal year, ED Murphy is focusing on governance (develop nomination package and outreach), submitting the TICO application and completing the 2022-2023 BOP to submit the plan and budget. Don MacKay asked if the upcoming election would have any impact on our funding. ED Murphy mentioned a meeting on Friday where that subject will be discussed. Word around the table is funding

will continue as is with no disruptions but the focus is to have all BOP plans submitted ASAP so TPAs can be drawn up and submitted.

MacKay asked about staffing for the upcoming fiscal year. ED Murphy noted we will be applying for a summer student experience position with the Ministry to help man the office over core staff holidays and to staff the airport; also mentioned the possibility of contract positions as needed throughout the year.

Pollak asked about the Learning Management System and which we will be using; Murphy noted it is proprietary and being built from scratch for our needs. EE looked at a number of different platforms but none suited our specific needs and timeline.

FISCAL 2022-2023

BUSINESS & OPERATIONAL PLAN

Vision: RTO12 is a Destination Development Organization that leads the Canadian tourism industry in regenerative development, ensuring that the region's tourism stakeholders and communities are resilient and able to thrive long-term.

Mission: RTO12's mission is to steward the regional tourism industry's recovery, rebuild and renewal by developing innovative, regenerative programs to ensure long-term sustainability and success for all stakeholders.

Mandate: Steward – Invest – Build Community – Innovate – Train – Attract (workers, investment, etc)

“The Business of Tourism”

Short Term:

- Stabilizing the tourism economy & SMEs
- Packages, marketing and transacting for hyper local, domestic and international markets
- Investigate new, regional supply chains (ie. field to fork, art suppliers, authentic Indigenous product, etc)
- Job recruitment

Long Term:

- Building community connections and supply chains
- Improve resident and workforce sentiment (what will research uncover)
- Inclusion – community input and feedback related to tourism
- Revenue generation and community reinvestment
- Social enterprise catalyst housing
- Improved infrastructure

THREE YEAR STRATEGY (replaces five-year strategy)

Year One: 2021-2022

- Package sales targeting higher yield visitors
- Transacting programs (HMAT, Fuel & Fun, Cottage Country Spirit)

- Continued development investment – Workforce Thrusters Strategy (housing, training/education, regional currency)
- Hyper local market development – stabilizing tourism SMEs
- Domestic markets when viable
- Job recruitment (Humber, Ryerson and Georgian)
- Expand/improve outreach with First Nations and Metis communities

Year Two: 2022-2023

- Establishment of the Revenue Generation Advisory Group (with the ED)
- Benchmark year for revenue generation
- Membership: creation of funding via membership and investment strategies to ease future industry stresses
- Visitor sentiment index
- Development of housing build approach and road map for community/private/public investment (ie. community bonds, social impact bonds or outcomes funding)
- Development and launch of significant region-wide communications strategy for housing/training
- Housing build EOI
- International travel – commercial air service
- Launch re-investment into communities

Year Three: 2023-2024

- Launch community regional workforce thrusters program
 - housing builds
 - training curriculum (includes master classes with area stakeholders)
 - transportation
 - regional currency (initial investigation)
- Continued in Year Three
 - community investment
 - SME development
 - workforce development
 - marketing & transacting programs
 - commercial air service

DRAFT BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

Product Development – \$64K

Economic Development Specialist

- Ongoing relationship building with Indigenous stakeholders
- Development of Indigenous cultural tourism experiences
- Determine applicable funding programs which align with the BOP
- Draft applications and agreements that align with BOP outcomes

Sustainability Program

- GreenStep Solutions business certification
- Benchmarking and communication
- Bring on additional stakeholders

Annual Occupancy Research

- CRBE annual subscription

Workforce Development - \$176K

Communication Training and Outreach

- Job bank marketing and communication
- FAM trips
- Rural tourism certification, micro credentials and communication

Workforce Research and Development

- Employment insights
- Resident sentiment
- Labour shortage
- Continue to track year over year changes

Marketing - \$452K

Commercial Airline Agreement

- Year two of three year marketing investment

Content Marketing Program

- Development, support, strategist, reporting

TICO License

- High yield packages and regional dispersion

Shuttle Service – Dispersion

- Supporting and integral to the commercial airline component

Transacting

- TBD: hyper local, shoulder season, packages, workforce

Investment Attraction - \$23K

Workforce Thruster Program Communication

- Communicate and present components and supporting research

Investment Outreach

- Impact investing and community bonds

Partnership - \$182K

FedNor Industry Canada

- Marketing \$100k FedNor and \$100k RTO funding

Regional Partnerships

- Regional partners \$56k and RTO funding \$56k
- Alignment with RTO objective and priorities

Motion to Approve 2022/2023 Draft Plan and Budget as Presented

Motion: Darren Smith

Seconded: Don MacKay

Discussion: n/a

Carried.

Motion to Move Meeting In Camera at

Motion: Don MacKay

Seconded:

Discussion: n/a

Carried.

Motion to Adjourn

Motion:

Seconded:

Discussion: n/a

Carried.