



To: **Economic Development Sub-Committee**

Agenda Section: Matters for Consideration
Division: Engineering, Planning and Environment
Department: Economic Development

Item Number:

Meeting Date: February 9, 2021

Subject: Economic Development and Tourism COVID-19 Recovery Plan

Recommendation

That Item EDS 2021-030 dated February 9, 2021, regarding the Economic Development and Tourism COVID-19 Recovery Plan, be received; and

That the immediate implementation of the COVID-19 Recovery Plan as generally outlined in EDS 2021-030, be approved; and

That staff report at the mid-year and year-end progress update on the COVID-19 Recovery Plan.

Executive Summary

Item EDS 2021-030 provides a summary of the Economic Development and Tourism COVID-19 Recovery Plan that has been developed by the Economic Development Office (EDO) and Tourism Simcoe County (TSC) to support the local economy. The Recovery Plan includes goals and objectives aimed to assist regional businesses as they recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background/Analysis/Options

In response to the initial COVID-19 closures in March 2020, the County of Simcoe's Economic Development Office (EDO) conducted three (3) Business Impact Surveys in collaboration with area municipalities to gather data on the impact of the pandemic on the business community, identify the supports needed, and advocate to various levels of government on behalf of businesses. In response to the Business Impact Surveys, the Business Support and Economic Stimulus Action Plan was created to address the most immediate and prominent issues and help the local economy stay active (EDS-2020-

151). The Action Plan was approved by the Economic Development Sub-Committee of County Council on April 23, 2020, and updates were later approved on June 9 (EDS-2020-199) and October 13, 2020 (EDS-2020-265).

In addition, between September 14 to October 7, 2020, EDO and TSC undertook fifteen (15) virtual focus groups within the geographic quadrants of North, South, East and West Simcoe (matching EDS representation) with the key sectors of manufacturing, tourism, agriculture and entrepreneurship (technology/innovation) to determine what new or existing initiatives, supports and programs could be utilized to help with recovery efforts. The focus groups were facilitated by the local Agriculture and Rural Economic Development Advisor from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), while local municipalities and business support agencies recommended focus group participants. Local municipal and business support staff also had the opportunity to listen into the focus groups to gain valuable insights.

The overall goal was to develop initiatives that move beyond immediate support and instead focus on developing strategies for recovery effects in the region. A summary of key opportunities and challenges identified in the focus groups is enclosed in Schedule 1.

The Recovery Plan's Goals and Objectives

The COVID-19 Recovery Plan (Schedule 2) merges the past survey and focus group data into a Plan to provide goals for implementation in collaboration with area municipalities that aim to assist regional businesses with recovery. The overall goals and objectives of the Plan are:

1. Continue to provide businesses with the tools, resources and connections they need to remain dynamic and grow in today's uncertain and ever-evolving environment.
 - a. Facilitate the development of business to business (B2B) connections that create opportunities for learning, innovation and collaboration.
 - b. Work with partners to offer educational events and tools to support and, where possible, enable businesses to effectively respond to and monitor existing and future business opportunities under the high levels of uncertainty created by COVID-19.
 - c. Increase marketplace share for the regional business community on a business to business (B2B), business to consumer (B2C), and tourism basis.
 - d. Be an advocate for the needs of the regional business community to address challenges and leverage opportunities.
 - e. Support employers to attract and retain their workforce through periods of uncertainty created by COVID-19.
 - f. Improve destination related infrastructure to enable increased visitation to the region's recreational assets and tourism businesses.
 - g. Work together with municipal and regional partners and the business community to build awareness of COVID-19 related programs, resources and supports.

2. Leverage targeted investment attraction opportunities that arise from COVID-19.
 - a. Continue to pursue and support strategic investment attraction opportunities that arise as a result of COVID-19.
 - b. Participate in opportunities with provincial and federal agencies, and other relevant partners, involved with trade and investment to promote Simcoe County businesses.

Action plans lead along with potential partners is outlined in Schedule 3. As the COVID-19 pandemic is changing and evolving, the COVID-19 Recovery Plan will be an evergreen document that will enable changes as domestic and international situations change.

Financial and Resource Implications

Funds for this Plan have been allocated in the 2021 Operating Budget of the EDO and TSC.

Relationship to Corporate Strategic Plan

This Item supports the vision established in the County of Simcoe's 2015-2025 Strategic Plan (Strategic Direction: Economic and Destination Development).

Reference Documents

- EDS 2020-151 (April 23, 2020) Business Support and Economic Stimulus Action Plan
- EDS 2020 -199 (June 9, 2020) Business Support and Economic Stimulus Action Plan Update
- EDS – 2020-265 (October 13, 2020) Covid-19 Business Support and Economic Stimulus Action Plan and Phase 1 Recovery Plan Update

Attachments

Schedule 1 – COVID-19 Recovery Plan: Focus Group Trends Summary
 Schedule 2 – Economic Development and Tourism COVID-19 Recovery Plan
 Schedule 3 – COVID-19 Recovery Plan Chart

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Date

January 28, 2021
 January 28, 2021
 February 2, 2021
 February 2, 2021