



Naturally Adventurous

11A Taylor Road, Bracebridge, ON P1L 1S6
1 800.835.7303
Algonquin Park, Almaguin Highlands, Muskoka and Parry Sound
www.explorersedge.ca

**Explorers' Edge Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, April 2, 2014
Nipissing University Campus, Bracebridge, Ontario**

Present: Don MacKay (Chair), Tony Armstrong (Vice Chair), Andrew Vitch (Secretary/Treasurer), Jerry Feltis , Jackie Leung, Diane Wiber, Andrew Ryeland, Nicole Saulnier, John Miller, Anthony Rizzo, Hilary Chambers.

Regrets: Michelle Berry, Ken Turner

Staff: James Murphy, Margaret Gage

Resource: Laura Hernando – MTCS

Call to Order: Don MacKay (Chair) called the meeting to order at 9:30 am.

Approval of Agenda – April 2, 2014

Motion: moved by Diane Wiber that the Agenda for April 2, 2014 Board of Directors meeting be approved.

Seconded: Anthony Rizzo.

Discussion: N/A

Carried.

Approval of Minutes – January 15, 2014

Motion: Moved by Andrew Ryeland that the Minutes for the January 15, 2014 Board of Directors meeting be approved.

Seconded: Tony Armstrong

Discussion: Armstrong asked whether there was an action item on moving forward with the “Billboard Signage” idea. Murphy responded that this was under the purview of the Marketing Committee.

Carried.

Approval of Financials – Period ending March 28, 2014

Motion: moved by Andrew Vitch that the Financials dated for March 28, 2014 be approved

Seconded: Jackie Leung

Discussion: In presenting the Income Statement, Vitch noted that reconciliation of the financials still need to take place, taking into account the reconciliation the financials will break even by year end. Vitch commented that we should be very proud of the organization and that the ED is running a very lean organization, additionally we have increased income over precious years through partnership and collaboration. The challenge moving forward is to raise more revenue as we cannot be guaranteed of the existing funding model moving forward.

Carried.

Approval of Consent Agenda

Motion: moved by Armstrong that the Consent Agenda items for April 2, 2104 be approved

Seconded: John Miller

Discussion: Andrew Ryeland requested that the Executive Director Update be pulled out of the Consent Agenda and inserted into the Agenda.

Carried.

Executive Director Update – ED Murphy

- Provide insight and representation to a **FedNor** delivered tourism Vision in Steering Intelligent Tourism (VISIT) program workshop in Sudbury ON
- **Staff** will be increased to five with the onboarding of a Tourism Relations and Communications Coordinator.
- For **Capacity Building** continues to take shape in regional communities, specifically continued efforts in Parry Sound, Almaguin Highlands and Port Loring / Restoule
- **Partnership Program** – Completing review of 2013 - 2014 projects and have received communication regarding a total of 18 possible partnership programs for 2014 - 2015. The Ministry has provided additional templates to help steer the process of establishing partnership programs in our region. It was noted that not all projects are at the same level of development and some are more time sensitive than others.
- The **Tourism Product Development Fund** was highlighted to the board. The fund was administered through both an application process and project identification based on research and recommendations from regional stakeholders. The topic of brand usage was discussed, specifically how Explorers Edge might increase its' brand recognition by using the "Ride the Edge" logo on videos from 3rd Party organizations. The group discussed the logo in the context as it being an organizational asset, thus being subject to process before it is associated with 3rd parties, this would preserve brand reputation. It was recommend that as an organization we step back, develop criteria and implement an approval process for logo use. Going forward Third Parties may be useful in promoting the Explorers Edge brand. Murphy added that Explorers' Edge

needs to be involved in the development and planning rather than after the fact, that way brand messaging can be incorporated and then it would be a natural fit to use logos on projects.

- Marketing Committee will consider guidelines for logos that included but not limited to Ride the Edge, Fuel and Fun, Explore the Edge etc.

Transacting Presentation – Feltis & Murphy

ONLINE BOOKING AND REFERRAL SYSTEM –

ED Murphy brought the board up to speed on the RFP process regarding the Online Booking Referral and Reservation System. In total the RTO received four responses which then were narrowed down to two possible providers. After a committee presentation, staff were then asked to explore an initial vendor to gather more information, address committee concerns and articulate the Online Booking Referral and Reservation System for the board of directors. The final vendor provided key attributes:

- Ability to handle Core Lodging, Attractions, Events and Packages.
- Customer is able to utilize loyalty points
- Ability for all operators to adopt a reservation system regardless of size or technical savvy.
- Creates no additional work as it is a aggregator service
- No additional cost of operator
- Operator has full control of inventory.
- Social Media Aspect (allows us to have on Facebook page)
- Packages will be populated into the system

Q&A

Ryeland asked who would be eligible for the system, any tourism operator in Explorers' Edge region. Feltis asked the board for support of the Online Booking Referral and Reservation System, the board was unanimous. Next steps include:

- Contract negotiation, the estimated cost that would come from the Transacting budget include 53k consisting of 11k in one time Set up Fee and an Annual License Fee of 41k.
- Finalize a work back schedule, the system providers estimate 60 days from the approval date
- Establishing internal resources out of the transacting budget, approx. 10k to work the operators regarding one on one communication and possible reservation implementation

Feltis addressed the Board and encouraged them to take a lead role in communicating to partner organizations such as Destination Marketing Organizations, Chamber of Commerce, etc to adopt the system widget on their websites.

Feltis ensured the board was aware of the program and shared with the board that over 1/3 of the budget for the upcoming year be appropriated toward this new initiative.

Saulnier commented that this means the board is committing to the program for the current year by noting that there is an ongoing lease fee of approx. 40k moving forward for three years.

Action Item- During the negotiation process the RTO will seek clarification of the cost involved in having partner organizations host the reservation widget.

Research Committee Presentation –Wiber

An overview of the project was provided to the board highlighting the development of the Dashboard.

- HST index is not statistically valid since we were not able to get enough data
- Golf Index had only one participating contributor
- All indices were up in the fourth quarter year over year
- Our RTO is at the forefront of gathering business related statistics

A quick snapshot of statistics will be provided on our website on a quarterly basis with a more detailed analysis for those who participate/contribute in data collection, this will be password protected. The challenge moving forward is to get more data, more operator participation.

Ryeland updated the board on new technology noting that a USA based DMO is utilizing technology in their visitor centres with wearable mobile devices and the collection of data at computer terminals which collect visitor data at input.

Action Item – Circulate the new url and password to the board of directors regarding the dashboard.

Community Relations Presentation

Armstrong shared with the board positive feedback from the most recent committee meeting with industry stakeholders. The meeting provided great dialogue with updates from the regional Chambers regarding a Muskoka Pride program and a Muskoka Tourism proposed visitor information project. The board reminded the ED that projects require the proper steps i.e. the partnership process. Armstrong concluded the presentation sharing with the board that the District of Muskoka is moving forward on outcome recommendations from the service review that include a Tourism Summit, facilitated by the MTCS, the development of Key Performance Indicators which mirror the RTO model and the three committee of funding to the DMO Muskoka Tourism.

***** LUNCH BREAK *****

Ministry of Tourism Correspondence Discussion

Minister Communication - MacKay informed the board that he had received communication from the Ministry regarding templates and tools to assist in the RTO reporting. In response, MacKay responded to the Ministry via Minister Chan asking that the Ministry obtain HST information from the Ministry of Revenue. Hernando informed the board that a response to Mr. MacKay's letter was in the works and that a representative from the Ministry would be attending a meeting of the board in the near future.

Transfer Payment Agreement (TPA) – Documents pertaining to and a full copy of the new TPA agreement were circulated before the meeting. Murphy explained that there has been a change of process in the TPA, the chair of the RTO now signs off on the TPA. An executive summary of the TPA was circulated to the board which highlights major Goals, Objectives and Activities. Many of the objectives include a 20% growth expectation, Chair MacKay challenged the group to set goals such as 50% or 100% growth. While the question was posed to the entire board Murphy explained

that our success in the past year was due in part to adding Branded Content to our website which increased traffic to our website exponentially. The potential for new unique visitors becomes more and more difficult. MacKay pressed the board, we must be on the lookout for the next big thing, and be conscious of new trends in the travel marketplace in order to maintain a competitive edge. Feltis felt that EE needs to continue to concentrate on SEo while Ryeland suggested that we look into emerging technology like Google Now and Wearable Internet. Overall MacKay stressed that we not get complacent. With this in mind.

Roundtable/Discussion:

Jerry Feltis – Currently has a movie cast and crew on property which has been responsible for 2500 room nights and opened up in the off season specifically for this. Since the winter weather has been long and cold, the movie has delayed production and shooting and is now impacting the upcoming season. He is optimistic about the upcoming season.

Nicole Saulnier- Just completed the first ever winter flying season for Georgian Bay Airways. Had contract with MNR to conduct Angling Survey. Is diversifying business and teaching people how to fly.

Diane Wiber- Was open during the winter due to good conditions for horseback riding. Conducted wagon and sleigh rides. Was open to schools. Will be conducting a summer riding camp this summer which looks to be a promising year.

John Miller- Up 9 % over last year, month to month. Has a mobile app now while also investing into Social Media and the interior theatre.

Laura Hernando – Asked Board if they wanted her to continue providing Ministry updates in the future. The Partnership Fund Review is complete and a few changes will be implemented. Celebrate Ontario announcements were just made. Due to collaboration of various organizations, our region was successful in obtaining 13 grants totalling \$875,000. The TODS review is complete and there will be a few changes. Also, the application process for the Summer Experience Program is currently under review. She also mentioned the Travel Intentions and Signature Experiences Program for whom the point person is Nicole Lever.

Hilary Chambers – Was closed for the winter. Has been concentrating on Social Media and website development. Happy to say that she has close to 8,000 likes on Facebook. Hosting Rider Retreat.

Anthony Rizzo – Member of Burk's Falls Chamber of Commerce. Will be closing downtown for street party in May. Has enjoyed being on the board of like-minded agencies. Business is good. Over-booked on seasonal rentals.

Andrew Ryeland – Best ever winter for gift certificates. New trend in ATVing is Side by Sides. This is a huge new market and will be changing the industry. Is a member of Ontario Powersports Industry. Unfortunately concerning the legislation of ATV use in the province, the government is behind. Potential for growth is up. US visitors/bookings are up. Have changed the slogan for Parry Sound Region to "Wickedly Canadian."

Jackie Leung – Up 25% this winter. However, because of leaky roofs etc. will probably be spending winter profits on spring repairs.

Tony Armstrong – Stepping down from board, he started Back Country Paint Ball as a family business. Children are now grown and he is reverting back to forestry which is picking up again. Business is evolving and he will run it for one more season. Has good feeling about economy. Laser Tag looks promising. May be doing full time contract at Camp Olympia.

Andrew Vitch – Business is slow right now. Pre-sales are lagging a little behind what they were last year. Believes we will have a good summer season.

Don MacKay – Develop a new game of “Foot Golf” which is played with a soccer ball. Owns the Canadian rights and working at developing a network of golf courses across Canada that implement the new game. As it stands, the utilization of golf courses is down.

James Murphy – Rewarding working with the EE board. Happy to say that we have an open and transparent process. Will be making a presentation to the Seguin Town Council the end of April. During our town hall meetings in the fall, we received positive response from the operators. Excited about the new employees joining the organization and our move to the new location which will save us money and better suit our needs.

Motion to Adjourn at 1:00 pm Carried.

Date and Time of Next Meeting: May 8, 2014 9:30 am at Deerhurst Resort in Huntsville.

AGM will be held at Grand Tappatoo Resort on June 3, 2014.

DRAFT