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Explorers' Edge Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
Thursday November 8, 2018
Hidden Valley Resort, 1755 Valley Rd, Huntsville, ON P1H 1Z8

Present: Gail Burrows, Jeff Suddaby, Michael Simonett, Brenda Scott, Scott Doughty, Eric Miglin

Conference Call: Don MacKay, Kim Loader

Resource: Laura Ross

Regrets: Curt Dunlop, John Langford

Staff: James Murphy, Kate Monk, Peter Coish

Guests: Michael Duben, Kelly Haywood

Welcome and Chair Remarks: Chair Jeff Suddaby called the meeting to order at 9:35am

Suddaby made opening remarks and briefly spoke to efforts being made to build partnerships and network in the region. Suddaby also introduced a guest, Kelly Haywood, Executive Director of the Huntsville Lake of Bays Chamber of Commerce and board member with Muskoka Tourism.

Conflict of Interest: no conflicts stated

Approval of Agenda – November 8, 2018

Motion: Michael Simonett

Seconded: Gail Burrows

Discussion: n/a

Approval of Minutes – September 5, 2018

Motion: Scott Doughty

Seconded: Brenda Scot

Discussion: n/a

ED Murphy presented the financials, period ending September 30, 2018. It was noted that the organization is on track for spending. Marketing, as noted, is being held in order to coincide with the potential launch of commercial air service and the selling of the 2019 travel season in early 2019.

Motion to approve the Income Statement and Balance Sheet period ending September 30, 2018

Motion: Eric Miglin

Second: Michael Simonett

Discussion: n/a

Carried

Regional Tourism Strategy: Overview Presentation

ED Murphy spoke to the Explorers' Edge vision and mission while reiterating the transition the organization has embarked on as a result of the newly adopted Regional Tourism Strategy. Murphy reiterated the organization's evolution from domestic marketing to international marketing, and the shift from individual stakeholder development to broader destination development.

Murphy spoke to recent successes at the inaugural Regional Tourism Summit and the attendance of the RTO at TIAO's Ontario Tourism Summit (OTS), where RTO12 was a finalist in the Excellence Awards / Digital Marketing category. Directors were briefed on a provincial RTO meeting with Minister Sylvia Jones at the OTS, at which work completed on commercial air services was lauded the kind of work the RTOs should all be doing. The update then touched on workforce development, the foundational output completed on product development, and noted that the provincial and federal governments are developing new tourism strategies over the course of 2019.

As the discussion moved to marketing, Senior Director of Strategy & Communications Kate Monk along with RTO strategist Peter Coish, updated the Board on domestic and international results. Domestically, compared to 2017, the domestic spend is down 77% while the output related to site traffic is only down 22%. On the international front, it was noted that the marketing for the region in key US destinations has been a tremendous success to start; exceeding expectations, the new content has delivered 152K link clicks at a cost of 1/3 of the plan while the content performed consistently across the designated market areas. Directors were updated on the content used in this campaign, with only 10 blogs posted since June, 2018, with some of the posts having a dwell time of 7 minutes (the highest ever in RTO12 content output). Directors were briefed of the important learnings and outcomes from the new content, and noted that the positioning "The Great Canadian Wilderness" is brilliant as no other Canadian destination has used this positioning: we "own it." Additionally, 8K international email leads and an additional 4.4K FB followers have been added, and a communications strategy for international tour operators, MICE facilitators, travel agents (focus groups) has just been finalized (report pending). Monk also briefed directors on the development of a PR opportunity in early 2019 in the US.

RTO12 staff then gave an update on Commercial Air Service, including the renew communications with the airline industry regarding scheduled service in 2019 and discussion with the airport regarding site status - specifically operational readiness, CATSA services and Transport Canada designation. In the

same discussion, directors were briefed on the progress being made related to the goal of creating a Regional Tourism Training & Innovation Centre.

RTO directors then heard from the District Municipality of Muskoka's Chief Administrative Officer, Michael Duben representing the Muskoka Airport Board, who informed the RTO12 Board that the District is moving forward with airport infrastructure updates regardless of the status of commercial air service; however, while budget has been allocated, specific items cannot commence until an agreement has been signed to ensure commercial air service is definitively happening. On the topic of agreements between all parties, Duben reported that the Airport Board is now on the fence about whether to proceed with a Tri-Party Agreement or unilateral agreements between separate partners. Murphy noted that if a Two-Party Agreement were to take place between RTO12 and the District of Muskoka, an MOU would be required between the RTO and District of Muskoka. The topic of agreements also raised the question of the 2018 Toronto to Muskoka taxi service and the role of MTMA communicating this service. MTMA board members Doughty and Haywood expressed to the board that staff of MTMA is to reach out to RTO in order that duplication is avoided and that roles were clear when it came to commercial air service communication or air service communication in general. Duben then shared with the directors that the District has received communication from federal agencies underlying that progress is being made in order to receive all necessary accreditation to ensure commercial air service can be launched in 2019. Duben informed the RTO12 directors about the current process being undertaken to hire an airport CEO (a change from the current position of airport manager). Duben emphasized that ongoing updates would be shared with the RTO in order ensure that there is open and transparent dialogue to ensure success.

BREAK

The Board reconvened and Directors were briefed on current partnerships with regional stakeholders and provincial partners. Work completed pertaining to all sub-regions (Algonquin Park, Almaguin Highlands, Loring-Restoule, Muskoka and Parry Sound) was indicated. Provincial partnerships have impacted the sub-regions, and this info was also shared. The RTO has also been nurturing additional partnerships that will come to fruition in the near future. And ED Murphy noted that work proposed in the Almaguin Highlands' new Regional & Economic Development Plan is partially the result of RTO12's investment in planning back in 2016 ('The Villages of Almaguin' branding).

Directors were updated on the current state of tourism at the provincial level and informed that the MTCS has a new Minister: replacing Minister Sylvia Jones is Minister Michael Tibollo. Directors were also briefed, high level, on the process that will unfold in the coming months as the province develops its new tourism strategy. It was also re-iterated to Directors that the trajectory of RTO12 under the 'Worldly Wise Strategy' is seen as one of the top examples how a regional tourism organization should perform. ED Murphy spoke to his ongoing dialogue with Ministry staff and the continuous information-sharing that takes place in order to keep the RTO portfolio top of mind with Ministry representatives.

As the update wrapped up, Directors were asked to provide input into the 2019/2020 Operational Plan. The following items were outlined by the ED that are currently being considered for the next year's plan and supporting budget:

- Dispersion - Transportation & Last Mile – International Markets
- Website Updates
- Transacting – International Markets
- Tracking and economic impact
- Workforce Development (regional “currency”, urban immigration centre facilitation)
- Housing
- June Regional Tourism Summit / Coincide with the launch of Commercial Air Service
- International Media Programs
- Regional Training and Innovation Centre
- International Marketing
- Bridge Financing

Directors enquired about partnership process and its role in supporting 2019/2020 operational priorities. ED Murphy shared with the board that the partnership objectives would be developed once the core activities of the RTO have been solidified. Next steps for the Board will be the completion of a questionnaire that will be circulated in November in order to help staff draft an Operational Plan.

BREAK

Directors reconvened and discussed the Draft Policy document as an outcome to our 2018 governance review. ED Murphy noted that the draft policies being presented to the Board is a follow-up to the bylaws being passed and adopted at the September AGM.

Motion: To accept the presented policy document as our working policies for the organization.

Moved: Michael Simonett

Seconded: Eric Miglin

Discussion: The directors noted that the policies can be changed at any board meeting with supporting motions if necessary. Directors also noted that the document was very thorough and covered several aspects of the RTO.

Carried

The Chair asked that, to be respectful of everyone's time, the election of the Vice Chair should be postponed to the December Board meeting. Ed Murphy noted that the Board will be required to meet in December, January, March and April.

Motion to Adjourn

Motion: Scott Doughty

Seconded: Gail Burrows

Discussion: n/a

Carried.