

Explorers' Edge Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
Monday, December 14, 2020
Webinar

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

Resource: Laura Ross

Regrets: Dave Anderson, Christine McRae

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

Welcome and Chair Remarks: Chair Michael Simonett called the meeting to order at 9:37am.

Conflict of Interest: n/a

Approval of Agenda – December 14, 2020

Motion: Gail Burrows

Seconded: Don MacKay

Discussion: n/a

Carried.

Approval of Minutes – September 15, 2020

Motion: Don MacKay

Seconded: Scott Doughty

Discussion: n/a

Carried.

Financial Presentation – James Murphy & Angela Pollack

Income Statement & Balance Sheet – December 7, 2020

ED Murphy updates since last meeting – Payroll has been updated as a result of HR contract reviews which were put off due to the pandemic. This resulted in adjusting marketing, transacting and some overhead (pandemic has impacted overhead expenses). Murphy noted that the organization has spent allocated marketing budget from both core and partnership on summer hyper local campaigns. Murphy noted that applications are in progress with FedNor (\$200k) and NOHFC (\$80k). Should hear back on these projects and receive final paperwork by the end of the year. Voucher expense for CCS program has been moved to accrued liability - \$80k remained in that fund post project reconciliation (from a 60-70% redemption rate for the summer program). This is where the winter CCS program funding came from.

Don MacKay asked if the updates to the salaries will be updated to 'staffing and benefits' for the next fiscal year – will become straight overhead in 2021/2022.

Motion to Accept Financials as Presented

Motion: Hilary Chambers

Seconded: Darren Smith

Discussion: n/a

Carried

Business & Operational Plan Status Report – James Murphy

ED Murphy updated the board on potential changes to our insurance as a result of impending “travel agency” associated with Jack Hopkins and James Murphy completing their TICO license. Looking at the impacts of the license and if we operate as a not-for-profit division of Explorers’ Edge or as a separate business travel agency – an update on this will be made at the next board meeting with input from a lawyer.

Staff, Murphy & Monk, are also taking part in an Indigenous Canada course with the University of Alberta (industry recommended). The course explores key issues facing Indigenous peoples today from a historical and critical perspective highlighting national and local Indigenous-settler relations. Good for individuals working in the tourism industry, it is recommended that the whole team at Explorers’ Edge will be taking this course. Discussed Native land acknowledgement website – Christine McCrae is now the Executive Director. Angela Pollack asked if this information could be shared more widely with our audience via newsletter.

Monk discussed the reboot of the ‘content machine’. Focusing on hyperlocal, some domestic but no international. Strategy is to soft sell with no specific calls to action; also avoiding shop local duplication. Content is being created to more closely mimic a travel magazine; hosting operator interviews for quote insertion and to bring more operators to the forefront to showcase their expertise and highlight their offerings. RTO strategist Coish will be targeting more local audiences with the new content while we are in the COVID red zone.

It was noted to the board that this past summer we saw lots of new visitors travel to our region who had not traveled here before and there was lots of feedback about travellers who didn’t have much experience in the area and we heard about things like overcrowding, litter, dangerous operation of rentals, etc. Content worked to disperse crowds away from attractions dealing with over-tourism this fall and to highlight other locations as alternatives; this was very successful and will be done again through the winter. Pollack brought up the ‘Iceland Pledge’ – wondered if this was an approach we might take as well. Monk spoke to the ‘Welcome to the Wilderness’ piece and how this will touch on some of these themes but that an official statement would need to come from the provincial marketer and municipalities specifically.

Monk spoke to results to content from October 1-December 10, 2020 – 8.4 million impressions, 1.5 million reached, 220k engagements, 150k landing page views, average CPC .25 cents, 31k referrals, 300 email signups for \$38k spend.

Group of Seven 100th Anniversary organic Facebook campaign was very successful; 100 artists were highlighted with a post over 100 days starting in August. Resulted in 8k average reach per artist, 120 average clicks to post, 70 people average engagement; contest for this product is on hold due to COVID restrictions.

Cottage Country Spirit Local Travel Package – 265 tourism businesses participated; very successful from the perspective of operators we have spoken with and great feedback from local and seasonal residents as well. Monk discussed the potential for regional currency by moving the vouchers forward. Also discussed regional collaboration (working with four COC) to develop content to promote participating businesses in their catchments.

Photography and video is underway as part of the DO partnership. Photos will be done through a social distancing lens over each of the four seasons. Georgian College was also intrigued by this and are interested in asset development for themselves as well.

Social media audits for tourism operators are currently underway – this is a test with one operator to start with and if this is successful a wider program may be rolled out. Upcoming marketing will include product pieces highlighting snowmobiling including a RAP map partnership with Destination Ontario and OFSC District 11. Will try a zoom interview with Mike Jacobs this year which will then be broadcast via content. Zoom gatherings will commence on January 17th – first will be called the Explorers’ Edge Vroom Zoom and will feature Mike and Murphy discussing sledding in winter 2021. This is the first test of this ‘facilitated session’ – will continue highlighting cycling, golf, paddling, winter adventures, outdoor adventures and the winter arts collective.

Monk discussed the Winter Arts Collective – same concept of the Group of Seven 100th Anniversary celebration on Facebook but will highlight artists across multiple mediums (not just painters like with GO7). The digital campfire will also return this winter on social media (Monk to tour the region and visit operator campfires) and lead nurturing will be rebooted in January. The new Explorers’ Edge website is also underway; wireframes completed, designs in development and a merger of the two sites will take place. Explorers’ Edge will not be selling overnight or attraction bookings on this site, will be package sales only (as to not compete with direct bookings for operators).

A winter version of Fuel & Fun was anticipated, but this has now been placed in a holding pattern with the new COVID restrictions in place as part of our region is in the Red Zone.

Explorers’ Edge Kate won an Ontario Tourism Excellence Award for Tourism Innovator of the Year for the introduction of commercial air service with Porter Airlines from TIAO conference.

Additionally Explorers’ Edge is involved with the District of Muskoka ‘Muskoka Employment Partnership’ Committee (recovery funding, etc.). Partnerships took place with HMAT – Sweater Weather in Fall 2020 with 300 midweek packages and an additional 50 packages went out in November (which was an addition that included weekend bookings as well). The content for the program worked hard and produced excellent results with a CPC of \$0.23 cents - \$8k spend, 41k post engagements, 35k link clicks,

32k page views. Other partnerships this year included Parry Sound Cruise Video, Muskoka Economic Developers, Almaguin Highlands snowmobile content and South Algonquin signage.

Ryerson University Student's Union Partnership; 'Let's Talk' panel webinar, AGO marketing panel, hospitality school student workforce survey, social media contest, HR webinar highlighting job opportunities in our region, attendance at Student Conference with video advertising.

RTO12 is publishing Thought Leadership Articles on LinkedIn (B2B); Investment Attraction in the Great Canadian Wilderness (published), Voucher Packages for Consumer and Operator Success (January) and Regenerative Tourism in Action: The Case for Social Enterprise Catalyst Housing (February).

Monk discussed the workforce development program for catalyst housing; this is a long game project offering housing and experiential learning through employment to enhance staffing sustainability for rural properties in our region; 'attract workers, develop professionals'.

Governance Board Accountability & Monitoring

In January 2021 there will be a current board review; report back to governance committee. February 2021 access gaps, March and April 2021 nomination period opens, May and June 2021 nomination review and July 2021 will be a virtual AGM. Angela asked about working through the first five policies; board members to please familiarize yourself with these policies and flag anything that sticks out to you for discussion at the next board meeting.

Meeting went in camera at 11:08am.

Information Items

n/a

Motion to Adjourn

Motion:

Seconded:

Discussion: n/a

Carried