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**Explorers' Edge Board of Directors Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, September 28, 2022  
Webinar**

**Present:** Angela Pollak, Dave Anderson, Hilary Chambers, Gabriela Hairabedian, Hilary Chambers, Jackie Leung, Michael Martyn, Darren Smith, James Roberts, Didier Dolivet

**Resource:** Laura Ross

**Regrets:** n/a

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

**Call to Order and Chair Remarks:** Chair Hilary Chambers called the meeting to order at 9:33am.

Chair Chambers began the meeting by reminding board members to watch the new onboarding video and discussed board confidentiality.

**Conflict of Interest:** n/a

**Approval of Agenda – September 28, 2022**

**Motion:** Darren Smith

**Seconded:** Angela Pollak

**Discussion:** n/a

**Carried.**

**Approval of Minutes – May 31, 2022**

**Motion:** Darren Smith

**Seconded:** Jackie Leung

**Discussion:** n/a

**Carried.**

**OPERATION PLAN & PROGRAM UPDATE**

ED Murphy began the meeting with a land acknowledgement.

While we are a not for profit, we treat the organization as an agency in the business of tourism. Senior staff will discuss programs, new projects and help board understand their scope during these board meetings – emphasized board members will be wearing regional hats.

### Big Applause Awards

The event that captured the AGM this year was the Big Applause Awards. Staff had the opportunity to meet with winners in their workplaces and hear about how they went out into the region with their prizes and had the opportunity to be a tourist in their own backyards. Gala lunch will be postponed until next year following the AGM that will be moved to the fall (September). Will circle back to the board members in the future to help ramp up the program for next year. It was noted the importance of the program for employee retention – employer and patron recognition for staff from a wide range of roles and positions in the industry.

### 2022 Ontario Tourism Summit

Deerhurst Resort is hosting the Ontario Tourism Summit in October this year. All board members have been registered if they are able to attend. Explorers' Edge contributed to the Summit Reception Committee working with Dan Watson from Huntsville Festival of the Arts. There will also be a presentation of a traditional Algonquin birch bark canoe by Chuck Commanda and Christine Luckasavitch. EE staff will replicate the RVC 2019 experience during the opening reception with VR headsets showcasing the winter and summer product previously filmed for use. The RTP will also host a pre-summit open house at the Explorers' Edge office to welcome industry colleagues, discuss our region and introduce new work.

ED Murphy and Chair Chambers plan on attending the Northern Ontario Tourism Summit (RTO13) taking place November 22-24 in Thunder Bay.

### Industry Trends

Monk reported on industry trends that pertain to the deliverables in the BOP and introduced the board to a new tool that is launching pre-summit to act as a community engagement tool. Coming out of the pandemic, the regenerative strategy was imperative – seeing other organizations follow suit. Tourism Vancouver Island has rebranded as a social enterprise to foster revenue generation for sustainability - now focused on destination development, revenue generating to put money back into communities. Once TICO agency is humming we will be underway with our own social enterprise program with monies earned being reinvested.

Destination Canada is also developing a nation-wide strategy for regenerative tourism (August 2022). Key word they have focused on which we use in our own strategy is 'stewardship' (rather than management). Does question how a grassroots approach from a national entity can affect change at a local level – will wait to see how this progresses, is happy to see a shift to destination development.

### Explorers' Edge Tourism Co-Creation Lab

Discussed how we best engage communities. Must have tourism seen as a driver for economic growth – enter the Explorers' Edge Tourism Co-Creation Lab 'building communities through the business of tourism'. Each session will describe what the project being undertaken is and then look for those with skills or expertise who can contribute to its development; to foster engagement with the community and showcase their vested interest in the development of tourism (as opposed to a set committee structure used in the past). The end user will always be consulted with terms of reference being utilized to ensure positive participation.

- the collective development of innovative tourism initiatives for our region
- an end goal is always defined by EE's senior management team for each project
- allows for direct and indirect stakeholders, as well as specialists, to provide insight, critical feedback and expertise
- different participants depending on the project, and extra-sector experts invited to participate
- end-user is consulted when possible
- more likelihood of success for creative & strategic collaborations – and resiliency
- Terms of Reference to ensure positive participation
- not bound to outcomes

## Research

Going back to the Regenerative Tourism Strategy, the regional data hub (with the intention of *'inform(ing) regenerative strategies and initiatives with timely and region-specific intelligence to ensure the sustainability of the industry, stakeholder communities and RTO12'*) is underway collecting information:

- Business Confidence Index (bi-annual)
- Labour Gaps & Requirements
- Employee Survey
- Resident Sentiment Survey
- Environmental Impact (to be developed)
- Occupancy, Visitation & Spend (CBRE)

This data is being built into a dashboard for access to timely information and insight. Discussed some results from the Spring 2022 survey:

- Approximately 100 responses
- All sub-regions represented
- All categories represented (accommodations, F&B, etc.)
- 79% of regional businesses have Mid to High Confidence regarding the summer season
- 54% expect sales to be higher
- 60% say inflation and rising prices could limit their ability to meet their business objectives
- 30% say they increased their debt load in previous year
- Labour shortage is a priority issue

Number one problem identified was availability of potential employees in this region, not housing as we had projected. Need to develop funnel for attracting workers to this region, while also understanding that those people will require housing to be drawn here. Also discussed the importance of having the support of the local community with an understanding of the business of tourism and its impact on our local economy.

Preliminary analysis indicates following potential regional tourism labour shortages in the upcoming year of operation:

- 1,300 full-time positions
- 4,600 part-time positions
- 42% said they have full-time vacancies (average 3.5 open positions)

- 59% say they have part-time vacancies (average 7.7 open positions)
- 60% of regional workforce is female
- Average hourly wage provided by respondents: \$15.50

The next survey will be incentivized with a voucher program – a loyalty and reward program for employers who participate in the survey to earn vouchers which they may then distribute to their staff to reimburse with participating local businesses (more details available soon).

Up next:

- Business Confidence Index FALL: incentivized for more participation
- Employee Survey (deploy post-busy summer season)
- Resident Sentiment Survey (deploy post-busy travel season)

#### Regional Data Dashboard Development – Explorers’ Edge Tourism Co-Creation Lab

- Curates statistics
- Uses AI to anticipate shortages
- Technology infrastructure may be of use if customization is possible (TBD)

OTEC asked RTO12 to meet about a new program focused on Destination Forecasting – felt it lacked specific regional breakdown for us, but does use AI to anticipate labour shortages and its platform is a dashboard that already exists. Discussed possibility of using their technology infrastructure instead of recreating our own if customization was available.

#### Workforce Development: Micro-Credentials

Region specific, helps users understand our area and the difference between an urban and rural environment for employment. Creates engagement and interest before offering a FAM trip; not only as a gatekeeping method but as a way to move participants into a lead nurturing database. To date, 170 people have received their Rural Tourism Certificate. This creates a benchmark for additional micro-credentials, online learning, work integrated learning and industry master classes. RTO is currently holding off on developing more to ensure curriculum and programming that is created is working optimally, don’t want to duplicate.

#### Workforce: Job Board

As of June 2022, page has seen 1.7mil impressions, 24k clicks at an average of .35 CPC. We’re able to track traffic to individual job postings but not conversions to third party websites. The fall newsletter (which will be deployed shortly) will request updated postings with marketing to try and get more eyes on it for the next season.

#### Workforce Development: Work Integrated Learning

Georgian College ‘Sustainable Hotel & Resort Operations’ students travelling to the region to conduct a sustainability audit at three properties; Grand Tappatoo Resort, Sherwood Inn and Clear Lake Brewery/Muskoka BeerSpa. The trips include 50 students at each property working in groups of 4. Students will develop a report that includes:

- Energy, Waste, and Water Sustainability Audit

- Staff Engagement and Competitive advantage Audit
- Recommendations for improvements in several areas such as redesigns of area, adoption of new technologies, waste, water & energy usage
- Funding recommendations for improvements where applicable.

Another group of Georgian College 'Eco Adventure Travel Program' students will travel to the region on October 3<sup>rd</sup> to take part in a guided canoe trip from Algonquin Outfitters' Oxtongue Lake location, to have a Brewmaster presentation from LOBBC's Huntsville Brewhouse location, and to participate in a guided hike with local naturalist Chris Gilmour on site at Arrowhead Provincial Park. The purpose of this FAM is to showcase the region to prospective future employees while also continuing the momentum with our post-secondary relationships.

#### Workforce Development: Social Enterprise Catalyst Housing

Mentioned that the Explorers' Edge Co-Creation Lab is essential for the social enterprise catalyst housing project. The concept is not ready to be unveiled.

#### Marketing

Only running paid content on Facebook for cost effectiveness; focus on general topics for this season to get eyes on whole region. Core content from April 1-September 26, 2022 saw 9.9mil impressions, 3.5mil reach, 156k link clicks at a CPLC of \$0.26 (for a total spend of \$40,793).

Commercial Air Service – season two is now complete. Marketing this service is a priority for senior staff; niche content results in a higher CPLC. Discussed how success of the service relies on inbound as well as outbound travel. Comparing 2019 to 2022 as far as load factor – increased number sold in both southbound and northbound. Challenge for RTO going into year two was fulfilling the airlines objectives of increased load factors (taking into account additional seats on planes and added dates) while also meeting our own business objectives of increasing international visitors. EE made clear we will make the service hum as we'd like to keep it but can also promote fly and drive from Pearson with. While we were not in international markets for 2022, the program saw an increase in American guests travelling from those key target locations. Toronto accounted for less than half of the inbound seats in 2022. The rest of Canada accounted for 23% of seats while the USA accounted for 34%. There was a 34% increase in seat sales from the rest of Canada, and a 47% increase from the USA.

Director Smith asked about feedback from the carrier on what their benchmarks for success are – are we meeting their objectives? Senior staff noted that the airline is focused on their jets, but that they're happy with year two – however we'd like to have longer lead time to know route plan for 2023 season so we can move to market earlier with international travel packages. We need to focus on our own objectives of bringing in those guests without the focus on outbound travelers using the service – over to the District to market to local residents flying outbound as a succession plan (the District marketing to outbound travellers, Muskoka Tourism marketing to inbound domestic travellers and RTO12 marketing to inbound international visitors all with a united business objective).

Director Roberts asked for a separate session for new board members to better understand the objectives of the Porter project and the overall marketing spend that is being contributed to it. Chair Chambers agreed it would be beneficial to add the details of this project to the onboarding session videos for board members.

ED Murphy discussed the shuttle service for the 2022 season – noted a drop in cottagers using the service this season (possible link to afternoon flights on Monday vs. 2019’s Monday morning flight). 32 registered guests used the service, as well as 30 additional riders loaded unregistered. The flight packages with Blue Jays game tickets helped fill 380 outbound seats. While we weren’t able to hire for the TICO packaging position, the team did develop golf packages in house with Muskoka Bay Resort and was able to have 8 guests travel and utilize those offerings.

The GCW Tik Tok platform is being developed with the hiring of regional high school students. This summer a student from Parry Sound published a number of videos highlighting tourism product in the Parry Sound area. This project will continue into winter.

### Partnership Process

Partnership process includes an online application, screening meeting, MOU development, a third party competitive process, contracts developed, follow-up meeting and reporting, as well as the presentation and communication of outcomes.

Current and completed partnerships for 2022 include:

- Fed Nor
- Festival of the Sound
- Bracebridge BIA
- Huntsville Municipal Accommodation Tax
- Muskoka Arts and Crafts
- Hammond Transportation
- Destination Ontario
- Parry Sound Tourism
- Town of Parry Sound
- Muskoka Chautauqua
- Huntsville Festival of the Arts
- South Algonquin Business Association
- Muskoka Tourism
- Huntsville Chamber & Muskoka Tourism (TIAO Conference)
- Georgian College (Sustainability Program & Eco Adventure Program)

Reconciliation of these partnerships will be circulated and will coincide with mid-term reporting.

### Sustainable Tourism Pilot Project

The participating businesses will have a regroup in fall (the busy summer season meant some could not participate but some have already received their preliminary accreditation). The RTO may consider a different approach to the business case; the program did not role out as RTO has planned. A discussion with the third party business running the project will need to be addressed.

### Industry Outreach & Networking

- Muskoka Arts & Craft Entrepreneur Panel
- Muskoka Watershed Council Strategy Development
- Minister Randy Boissonnault office (federal tourism)

- Trillium Lakelands District School Board apprenticeship liaison
- OTEC/Tourism Skillsnet
- The Sandbox/Parry Sound Community Network Simcoe County Entrepreneur event
- Canadian Council of Small Business
- Muskoka Community Futures (Co-Creation Lab)
- Parry Sound Economic Development Dept (cruise ship dispersion development)
- Georgian College
- Toronto Metropolitan University Ted Rogers School of Management annual conference
- Humber College PAC

Staff upskilling is also taking place –Monk has completed the “Sustainability Leadership: Innovation for Growth” program through U of T Rotman School of Management.

### Human Resource

As a result of board feedback, new RTO positions are being posted including a Social Media Manager, Regenerative Package & Sales Consultant and a Bookkeeper/Accountant.

### Governance

ED Murphy has been working with lawyers to update our trademark (articles and letters of patent). The 2023 AGM will also need to include transitional documents and newly developed by-laws pertaining to updates to the not-for profit act. Notice, resolutions for the meeting and additional documents will be circulated.

Workback Schedule includes:

BOP Submitted: January 15  
 Planning Session: November 14-18  
 Survey: November 1-11  
 Q&A Session: October 26-28  
 Video Circulation: October 10 -21  
 Video Recording: October 4-5

### **ROUND TABLE INTRODUCTIONS**

Chambers: from Loring-Restoule and is current board Chair. Owns and operates Pine Grove Resort Cottages, has a jewelry line and has added canine tourism as a new facet of her business. she is also the president of LRBA and a past president of NOTO.

Pollak: secretary at SABA and lining up to take over as Chair next year. Working hard to keep afloat in the region and build up their area – partnerships for social media, grant writing for trail development.

Smith: founder and President at LOBBC, joined the board two years ago. Excited to continue to be involved and see the organization continue to evolve.

Anderson: family owns and operates 30,000 Island Cruise Lines, as well as a few retail shops and a small marina in Parry Sound.

Leung: owner and operator of Fern Glen Inn B&B in Emsdale. Is a returning board member and past Chair. Happy to be back and contributing to the work of the RTO.

Roberts: new to the board, owns and operates Ontario Sea Kayak Centre which runs the Paddle Canada Instructional system, as well as offers guided trips all over Canada and abroad. Georgian Bay Tours is a new facet of their business which provides boat assisted paddle tours of the Georgian Bay islands.

Martyn: Executive Director at Festival of the Sound (since March 2021). This is first meeting with the RTO board - excited for the future of the Festival and what they will accomplish.

Dolivet: GM at JW Marriott The Rosseau Muskoka - first time on the board. Looking forward to contributing, getting to know other board members and creating relationships with other businesses. Works to position the JW as a destination, while also running events and programs to raise funds for good causes and promote tourism. He mentioned he has worked with OTEC in the past and would be happy to take part in the development of those programs or to provide feedback on past work with the organization.

Hairabedian: owner/operator at Four Seasons Algonquin Cabins in Madawaska, new board member. Founder of SABA and former Chair.

Ross: works at the MTCS. No updates today, working on TPA for reconnect program.

## **ELECTION OF EXECUTIVE**

Hilary is the current Chair (elected at AGM), Darren will become secretary/treasurer and Angela becomes Vice Chair with possibility to transition from three to four person executive. Have moved from 18 directors in the past to 7-11. Role of executive apart from the policy is meeting once a month on a separate call with the ED as a sounding board and fills roles of other executive members in case of absence. Also has more legal responsibilities as far as bank signing, etc. (noted 11 years of clean audits).

### **Motion for Angela Pollak to be appointed to Vice Chair**

**Motion:** Jackie Leung

**Seconded:** Darren Smith

**Discussion:** n/a

**Carried.**

Hilary asked if anyone wanted to stand for secretary position. No nominations at this time. Michael Martyn mentioned he would be interested in moving into an Executive role in the future, but as a new member of the board would like to take part as a director to start.

### **Motion for Darren Smith to be appointed to Secretary/Treasurer**

**Motion:** Jackie Leung

**Seconded:** Michael Martyn

**Discussion:** n/a

**Carried.**



**FINANCIAL STATUS – August 31, 2022**

Income statement and balance sheet – total, MTD, YTD. We spend more than we receive due to tax rebates for not for profits – will see as federal recoverable under HST.

**Motion to Approve Financials as Presented**

**Motion:** Darren Smith

**Seconded:** Jackie Leung

**Discussion:** n/a

**Carried.**

**Motion to Adjourn**

**Motion:** Michael Martyn

**Discussion:** n/a

**Carried.**