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**Explorers' Edge Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, January 25, 2023
Webinar**

Present: Angela Pollak, Gabriela Hairabedian, Michael Martyn, Dave Anderson, Didier Dolivet, Darren Smith, Jackie Leung

Resource: Laura Ross

Regrets: Hilary Chambers, James Roberts

Staff: James Murphy, Erin Smit (taking minutes)

Call to Order and Chair Remarks: Angela Pollak called the meeting to order at 9:33am.

Round Table

Michael Martyn: FOTS is going through some transitions due to contractual nature of employment – team is being reconfigured (hoping to hire local residents). Projects are moving full steam ahead. Online classical music festival 'July in January' is launching this week (funded by Reconnect Ontario). Education program with local schools is ongoing – is bringing in revenue for the organization.

Darren Smith: Seeing better results over 2021/2022 for January. Cost inflation causes challenges from a production standpoint. Guest counts are leveling off in the restaurant coming out of the pandemic – spend is up but foot traffic is down.

Dave Anderson: Preparing for the 2023 season – in full swing.

Didier Dolivet: Seen shift in market at his property over the pandemic – from groups to transient travelers and back again (mentioned conference business demand increasing dramatically post pandemic). While preparing for the summer season would love to discuss partnerships with other board members for cross exposure and value add to each business and the customer. Would also like to have board members share their business plans to gather intel/best practices into how each member grows their business in each season and attracts partnerships with other local tourism businesses.

Gabriela Hairabedian: has been in South Algonquin for 5 years running her business. Finds winter season difficult, hoping to see shoulder season and winter season push to increase business outside the summer months.

Angela Pollak: trail investment in SA totals \$200k (FedNor and Eastern Ontario Trails Alliance partnership). RTO and Community Futures partnership also investing to help grow social media following.

Jackie Leung: winter is a busy season for them. Do not attract snowmobilers but those after snowshoeing and cross country skiing (proximity to Arrowhead Provincial Park is helpful as a draw). January has been slow because of the weather – February is looking better. Has already started booking in Europeans for summer and fall; hopeful international travelers are feeling confident to travel to Canada.

Approval of Agenda – January 25, 2023

Motion: Jackie Leung

Seconded: Darren Smith

Discussion: n/a

Carried.

Approval of Minutes – September 28, 2022

Motion: Dave Anderson

Seconded: Didier Dolivet

Discussion: n/a

Carried.

Approval of Consent Agenda – Current Income Statement & Balance Sheet

Motion: Darren Smith

Seconded: Jackie Leung

Discussion: n/a

Carried.

Note: videos prepared by James Murphy are now being circulated prior to board meetings to explain consent agenda items for members to watch in their own time – will help with overall flow and timing when the board meets and ensure board members are up to date and prepared to vote on items discussed.

Financial Status Update – ending December 31, 2022

- Program contributions at \$65k
- Product development packages \$65k (Blue Jays Game and Golf Packages); break even project.
- On balance sheet please note voucher program line item remaining to reimburse operators for the Regional Rewards Program vouchers when they are sent in for redemption after February 1, 2023.
- \$200k of \$242k spent to date of marketing budget – Gabriella requested a specific breakdown of that spend. James Murphy to send a reconciliation document; also pointed to upcoming slides in today's presentation that will further breakdown spends per pillar. Didier also asked for a more specific breakdown of the budget; understanding the doubling of insurance costs, office space costs increasing (due to additional staff onboarding), membership revenue, etc. James will resend links to board onboarding videos where financials are discussed as well.

Approval of Financials – period ending December 31, 2022

Motion: Dave Anderson

Seconded: Darren Smith

Discussion: n/a

Carried.

2022-2023 Business & Operational Plan Update

Partnership Update (January Video Update Presentation)

- 14 partnerships over three sub-regions and with two educational institutions
- A wrap report for each partnership project can be sent to directors if there is interest

Tourism Industry Association of Ontario

- Indigenous Component & Reception at Deerhurst Resort

Sustainability Program with GreenStep (February Video Update Presentation)

- Pilot project operators have now completed the program

Human Resources

- Bookkeeper, Social Media Coordinator, and a Sustainability Coordinator being hired now (interview process ongoing)
- On-boarding HR Consultant (employment agreements, job mapping, etc)

Media – Commercial Air Service Program (January Video Update Presentation)

- Press Release and Interviews

CIBC Online Commerce

- James, Hillary and Darren set up online. Can now process EMT as payment instead of cheques for efficiency.

Business Confidence Index (February Video Update Presentation)

- Second Round – Incentivized with Regional Rewards Program vouchers

Labour Market Survey (February Video Update Presentation)

- Incentivized

OTEC

- Initial Collaboration with workforce AI development

Marketing and Content Development

- FAM tour development

2023-2024 Business & Operational Plan Draft

After Porter announcement there have been a number of changes to the BOP for the upcoming fiscal year (including a redistribution of that budget).

- Unleashing the Regenerative Tourism Strategy (RTS): “Transforming People & Place”.
- Transforming the Team
- The “T3Y Blueprint” (transformation over three years)
- Programs
- Budget Recommendations

Transforming the Team

Will see an increase in administrative budget as a result of new hires. Looking at hybrid work models, needs for office space and equipment as a result, etc. Some positions are immediate (Social Media Coordinator, PT Sustainability Specialist and Bookkeeper), some to be hired in the future to not onboard all at once (Regenerative Projects Manager, HR consultant). Also discussed importance of succession planning with a more robust team.

Michael asked about our funding staying the same year over year, how programs will be affected with increase in HR spend. James noted ‘spending money to make money’ – no aspirational budgets. With new staff will be able to work towards revenue generating programs (ie. Regenerative Travel Agency). Efforts continue to be made throughout the year to secure funding from partnerships and outside sources as well. Jackie asked to see a job description of the new roles to understand what their position will entail and what they will be contributing.

Board discussed concerns over increasing HR spending without an increase in revenue. James Murphy spoke to Ministry constraints as far as how pillar format forces us to spend in areas where revenue cannot be generated (ie. research, workforce development, etc). Opportunities are upcoming (catalyst housing, etc) to build revenue, but more manpower is required to complete these projects. Michael spoke to difference between not-for-profit organizations and business models of other members of the board whose main goal is to increase revenues – how we cannot compare how these two organizations function. James Murphy discussed how expenses the organization has included annually can be absolved by securing these new hires (ie. content guest authors, photography, strategist retainer changing to billable hours, etc).

Investment in:

- HR
- New Hires
- Expanded Space
- Team Ecosystem (org chart)
- First time since 2011 to focus some budget on HR
- Year of supporting & building Explorers’ Edge

The “T3Y Blueprint” (Transformation Over 3 Years)

Smashing the Silos for Regenerative Outcomes

Three year timeline keeps us on track and works for succession planning as well. Main projects to focus on include Catalyst Housing, Travel Agency, and Training.

- Multi-year goals to guide the work
- Focuses tasks for overall endgames
- Ensure project ecosystem creates successful convergence
- Not a “strategy” as those can be upended

Priority Projects

Transacting

- Voucher Program*** (will be included in items below with asterisks)

Regional Data Hub

- Business Confidence Index – Spring/Fall 2023***

Workforce Development

- Workforce Marketing / Job Board / Recruitment
- Big Applause Awards
- Training
- Catalyst Housing

Product Development

- Regenerative Travel Agency***
- Inland Coastal Tour (Port Severn to Britt)
- “VIP VFR”
- April / November Hyperlocal Focus***
- Sustainable Tourism Pilot Project

Marketing/Transacting

- Domestic, International, Hyperlocal (5 sub-regions/shoulder seasons)

Investment Attraction

- Passenger Train Service
- Parry Sound Cruise Strategy***
- Commercial Air Service
- Regional Transportation (workforce/visitors)

Partnership

- Priority to regenerative projects and shoulder season non-weather dependent events in Spring and Winter

Marketing

Hyperlocal:

- Bump the slow shoulder season months with transacting programs (April/November)
- In-house social content marketing

Domestic:

- Partner with Destination Ontario for 5-sub-region promotion in Spring/Fall
- Fund Muskoka Tourism partnership for Destination Ontario in Fall/Winter
- Promote 5 sub-regions in Winter with social content marketing
- In-house social content marketing

International

- Test new markets / retain current

Overall

- Ramp up lead nurturing machine again for all audiences
- Focus on “transformative experiences” unique to this place
- Build itineraries and packages for Regenerative Travel Agency
- Launch Regenerative Travel Agency

Budget

Consumer Marketing - 303k

Product Development – 101k

Investment Attraction – 5k

Workforce Development – 231k

Partnership – 166k

Industry Communication, Liaison and Accountability – 321k

Board discussed monies being redirected from Porter withdrawal. Those funds will now be reallocated to existing projects and focusing spend on international markets and domestic markets that weren't served when focus was directed at Porter's American hubs (NY, Boston, Chicago) while flights were inbound. James also discussed approaching the Ministry to advocate for three year funding instead of year-over-year funding to better suit project planning.

Motion to Approve 2023 Business and Operational Plan and 3 Year Strategy (with two contingency notes below) – January 25, 2023

Motion: Darren Smith

Seconded: Dave Anderson

Discussion: n/a

Carried.

****year over year highlights on budget changes**

****strategy may change or be adjusted over next two months as a result of more board input**

Motion to Move in Camera

Motion: Michael Martyn

Seconded: Jackie Leung

Discussion: n/a
Carried

Motion to Adjourn

Motion:
Discussion: n/a
Carried.