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**Explorers' Edge Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, August 22, 2023
Zoom**

Present: Hilary Chambers, Angela Pollak, Gabriela Hairabedian, Jackie Leung, Didier Dolivet

Resource:

Regrets: Darren Smith, James Roberts, Dave Anderson

Staff: James Murphy, Kate Monk (taking minutes)

Call to Order and Chair Remarks: Hilary Chambers called the meeting to order at 9:34am.

Hilary asked for any conflict of interest – there were none.

Approval of Agenda – August 22, 2023

Motion: Dolivet

Seconded: Pollack

Discussion: n/a

Carried.

Approval of Minutes – May 16, 2023

Motion: Hairabedian

Seconded: Dolivet

Discussion: n/a

Carried.

Approval of Consent Agenda Items – August 22, 2023

Partnership Program update to be given in the BOP Plan Update (next item)

Motion: Chambers

Seconded: Dolivet

Discussion: n/a

Carried.

Business and Operational Plan Update

Murphy gave an update on the F2023-2024 BOP action items pertaining to the government pillars:

MARKETING

YTD core marketing results (April 1, 2023 – August 22, 2023)

- 15 million impressions
- 8 million reached
- 4.5% engagement (high)
- 3 mins average on content (being read)
- 530K page views (primary objective)
- 45K referrals (secondary objective)

Destination Ontario Content Partnership – Spring (category: Outdoor Adventure)

- Top performer for outdoor adventure category in the province
- 217K ad clicks (Instagram, FB, Google)
- Average time on page: 2-1/2 minutes
- Investment in partnership means cost per click = approximately .14cents for our investment
- Does not track referrals – we attempt on our end
- Adjusting for winter partnership (which does not include Muskoka to avoid duplication) and hope to test TikTok & Zoom content with Ontario Parks.

Fall Fuel & Fun Package

- first edition since 2018
- meant to stimulate accommodations bookings in particular
- in response to mid-July operator survey results that says occupancy is down this summer and September looking very slow
- meant to assist particularly as CEBA loans are coming due

Chambers commented that the provincial government's staycation tax credit in the previous year was a good incentive and that travellers made use of it at her establishment last year. She noted that the Fuel & Fun package is great continue with incentivizing travel. Pollock noted that business was down in South Algonquin and that 7-8 operators are considering selling as a direct result of lost revenue. Dolivet noted that summer was down a bit across the board for most establishments, but the fall is looking very good at the JW Marriott with the return of conferences.

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Authentic Indigenous Experiences Development

Murphy noted that the following Indigenous tourism offerings have been supported by RTO12

- Waaseyaa Cultural Tours support (business development – MOU in development)
- Misko-Aki: A Confluence of Cultures support (marketing – MOU and content promotion)

Rail

Murphy noted that RTO12 attended the Ontario Northland consultation on tourism potential that was invite-only by MPP Stan Cho. Murphy also noted that staff will be connecting with Kelly Johnson of Metrolinx/Go Train (formerly of DO) this fall. This work also falls under the Investment Attraction pillar.

Great Lakes Cruising

Murphy reported that RTO12 staff has been working with the Downtown Parry Sound Business Association and Town of Parry Sound staff to enhance the shuttle bus map/route (which RTO12 funds) to ensure as many businesses as possible can benefit from cruise ship day excursions. RTO12 also continues to support the Great Lakes Cruise Association by paying membership fees. These items also fall under the Investment Attraction pillar.

Content Promotion

RTO12 marketing staff continue to promote product via the social mobile content marketing program.

Regenerative Travel Agency (RTA)

Murphy gave an update on the status of the Regenerative Travel Agency and TICO licensing.

- TICO – Director information is being collected for administrative application.
- The RTA business model is in development
- RTO12 staff met with Ontario-By-Bike staff to get recommendations & best practice updates (e.g. payment, booking) as OBB now has their own TICO license.
- Higher yield itinerary & package development underway
- Criteria for participation by operators to be reviewed (see *Itinerary & Package Development for Int'l Markets* (report 2016) for considerations)
- Winter content to test “transformative travel” in development

INDUSTRY COMMUNICATION, LIAISON & ACCOUNTABILITY

Murphy updated the Board on all the meetings and outreach that has occurred since the May 2023 meeting.

- Almaguin Community Economic Development
- Almaguin Highlands Chamber of Commerce
- Town of Huntsville
- Muskoka Community Land Trust
- Near North District School Board
- Trillium Lakelands District School Board
- Parry Sound Airport stakeholders
- Georgian College – Steven Hilborn
- Peterborough Housing Corporation – Maisie Watson
- The Mount Community Centre – Steven Kylie
- YMCA Simcoe Muskoka Immigration Services
- Downtown Parry Sound Business Association
- Town of Parry Sound
- HMATA (voucher programs)
- Parry Sound Social Services
- Loring Restoule Business Association – 22 attendees

Murphy noted that the RTO12/Explorers’ Edge Annual Audit is underway with auditor Brandy Harris. A Provincial Tourism Audit is also underway and near completion – all RTO’s participated in this.

RTO12/Explorers' Edge also continues to develop monthly (minimum) industry communication via email:

- June – Luke Preston Hire, Videos (Sustainability & Workforce Resources), OBB workshop, Ted Rogers School of Management Students
- July – a) Industry Survey determining voucher program stimulation (40 responses) & b) Fuel and Fun registration
- August – Regional Tourism Summit (47 RSVPs to date), Big Applause Awards, Call for Nominations, Co-Creation Lab (17 RSVPs)

The new Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Policy was finalized and posted, and info and intelligence from various industry stakeholders was circulated:

- Ontario Chamber of Commerce Housing Report – Catalyst Housing recognized as a potential solution
- Federal Tourism Growth Strategy Released
- 2023 Tourism Development Fund Open for Intake
- TIAO's Workforce Program

PARTNERSHIPS

Murphy presented a status on the Partnership program, including completed and pending projects. Gabriela Hairabedian inquired as to if one property can access the partnership program. Murphy replied that there are set criteria to ensure the partnerships align with the Regenerative Tourism Strategy, and that each partnership be of benefit to as many businesses as possible. The partnership in question was an event put on by a business, but staff explained the event also helped attract visitors to a sub-region during the spring shoulder season, and helped with destination brand recognition.

Pollock inquired if the South Algonquin Business Association submission for signage, etc. had been received. Murphy indicated he would review the intake to ensure the ask was reviewed.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Big Applause Awards

Murphy reported that the annual Big Applause Awards were launched in June and 7 local high schools students received the "Future of Tourism Award" prior to public school breaking for the summer. There are six additional categories that are now open for nominations, and deadline to submit is September 14. The categories are:

- **The Employer Applause Award**
- **The Fellow Staff Applause Award**
- **The Guest/Patron Applause Award**
- **The Exceptional Communications Award**
- **The Above & Beyond Customer Service Award**
- **The Innovative Problem-Solving Award**

Sector Job Board

Murphy gave an update on the short-term projects to build workforce in the region, including completions of the Rural Tourism Certificate Micro-credential (approx. 400 completed-to-date) and the promotion of continuously updated jobs on the Explorers' Edge Job Board. The most recent campaign to promote the latter resulted in 8K views of the landing page in Spring 2023. Viewers are remaining on the site for 3 minutes, suggesting they are reviewing the content. Murphy also updated the Board on the exceptional feedback from Toronto Metropolitan Students relative to their spring fam tour and case studies, and noted that there is another student fam tour with Georgian College pertaining to sustainable tourism that is in the works.

Catalyst Housing

Murphy and Monk gave a quick status on the developments for the Work-Integrated Catalyst Housing project, including training, potential partnerships and investors, and timeline. Murphy noted that more granular details will be presented at the Regional Tourism Summit on September 20. Murphy told the Board that Senior Staff has been working constantly on this critical "Workforce Infrastructure Strategy," with many key meetings taking place.

GOVERNANCE:

Ontario Not for Profit Corporations Act

Murphy explained the recommendation from the legal consultant that the organization move to a "closed membership" format and Chair Hilary Chambers called for a motion to bring Draft Bylaws to be presentation at the AGM on September 20, 2023.

Motion: Pollock
Seconded: Leung
Discussion: n/a
Carried.

Murphy informed the Board that the legal consultant would be engaged to create legal motion for the AGM.

Succession Management

Murphy briefed the Board on the staff project management software, Wrike, which tracks the status of each project relevant to the Business & Operational Plan.

FINANCIAL STATUS

Income Statement & Balance Sheet Period Ending August 22, 2023

Motion to Accept Financials as Presented – August 22, 2023

Motion: Hairabedian
Seconded: Leung
Discussion: n/a
Carried.

Murphy provided additional info in the financial statements to make the budget more understandable pertinent to individual items, as was requested by a Board member. He asked if this was helpful and if the Board would like this continued. Leung, Hairabedian and Chambers all indicated that they would like the practice to be continued.

Gabriela Hairabedian asked that the marketing plan for the winter season be presented at an upcoming Board meeting.

Motion to go in camera:

Motion: Pollock

Seconded: Hairabedian

Discussion:

Carried.

Motion to Adjourn

Motion: Chambers

Discussion:

Carried.

DRAFT