



Economic Resiliency Task Force
Wednesday, April 15, 2020 1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.
ZOOM Meeting

Present:

Co-Chairs:

Cathy Burghardt-Jesson, Warden
Cara Finn, Director of Economic Development

Middlesex County:

Kelly Elliott, Councillor
Kurtis Smith, Councillor

Lower Tier Municipal Representatives:

Demetri Makrakos, Economic Development Officer, Stathroy-Caradoc
Michael Dillulo, CAO, Middlesex Centre

Employment Representative:

Bill Pigram, Manager, Community Employment Choices

Workforce Development Representative:

Debra Mountenay, Executive Director, Elgin Middlesex Oxford London
Workforce Development and Planning Board

Manufacturing Sector Representative

Karl Pfister, President, Armatec Survivability

Finance Representative:

Todd Copeland, General Manager, CFDC of Middlesex County

Agricultural Sector Representative:

Joanne Fuller, Member Representative, Ontario Federal of Agriculture

Absent: Small Business Sector Representative:

Kathy Manness, General Manager, Strathroy & District Chamber of Commerce

AGENDA

1. Welcome and Review of Terms of Reference

Cathy welcomed those in attendance and thanked everyone for being a part of the Task Force. The Terms of Reference were reviewed and it was noted that they were approved unanimously by County Council on Tuesday, April 15, 2020.

2. **Roundtable Introductions** (all members)

All members present self-introduced themselves as detailed above

3. **County Update on Work to Date**

Cara and Cathy updated members on the following work undertaken by the County in response to the COVID19 pandemic:

Business Impact Survey

- A survey was implemented by the County from March 23rd – April 5th to ascertain the local business impacts of COVID19
- 218 responses were received
- A summary of the survey results was provided to members for preliminary review
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Business Resources

- ✓ COVID-19 Website
- ✓ Social Media – Economic Development & Tourism Platforms
- ✓ Workforce Development Efforts

4. **Roundtable Discussion re: Current State** (all members)

Debra Mountenay

- Workforce development boards have rolled out a survey with emphasis on the impact of COVID19 on workers.
- Working regionally on sector specific recruitment efforts (i.e. agricultural operations)

Michael Dilullo

- Municipalities operating most departments as essential services
- Some staff have had to be laid off due to nature of their positions being put on hold (i.e. recreation)
- Implementing a daily check in with all departments
- Middlesex Centre is suspending some capital projects in order to reduce pressure on the lower-tier budget while deferrals are being offered
- Staff tracking all internal COVID19 costs

Kurtis Smith

- Adelaide Metcalfe extending drainage loans
- Challenges of small municipalities with staff working remotely

Demetri Makrakos

- Managing Strathroy-Caradoc COVID19 Site
- Conducting one on one discussions with local businesses
- Promoting Countywide survey re: business impacts

Karl Pfister

- Operating as essential
- 100 staff still working
- Productivity is down; likely in the range of 50%
- Workforce anxiety is high due to health concerns
- Employer anxiety is high due to the expectation to continue to operate, keep staff healthy and employed, while supply chain is disrupted
- No procedural manual available to independent businesses
- Emphasis of province on safety of employees puts employers in the position of questioning liability; lack of legal knowledge exists
- Pivoting is not as easy as it seems; product quality and resulting liability in question
- Need to be looking 12-18 months ahead; learn from overseas countries who have had more time to adapt
- Illness is inevitable; need to know how to live and work together with those who are ill/recovered
- Loan programs and deferrals for short-term cashflow are helpful in the interim, but not effective for long-term survivability

Bill Pigram

- Delivering employment services remotely has interesting challenges
- Working one on one with job seekers and employers to orchestrate matching
- Had employer roundtable planned for late March in partnership with the County. Had to reschedule. May consider offering it virtually.
- Actively promoting workinmiddlesex.ca platform to all local employers and job seekers in partnership with the County

Todd Copeland

- CFDC offering principle and interest deferrals for current loan clients (38)
- Offering a new emergency loan program for new clients requiring access to funds 10K-25K. Interest fixed at P+2%; 5 year.
- Recognizing that these measures are a temporary fix
- Emphasis being placed on consulting businesses on how to pivot in the current economy. CFDC staff is limited, but available to provide consulting to local businesses without a fee
- Rent is one of the major concerns for a number of local small businesses.
- Discussions are taking place regionally among the CFDCs and FedDev/FedNor with respect to securing additional supports in the wake of COVID19

Kelly Elliott

- Thames Centre offering tax and wastewater payment deferrals – no penalties or interest charged until 30 days post re-opening
- Sharing information with County and vice versa regarding all local efforts to address COVID19 concerns

Joanne Fuller

- Foreign workers continuing to arrive this week
- Some crops lost due to delay in workers getting on the ground and quarantine requirements that are rendering traditional accommodations inadequate (bunkies)
- The industry has been successful in getting agriculture construction back on the essential list and an extension to existing Pesticide Management Certificates
- Backlog of animals and product (i.e. milk) being realized as processing plants are slowing or shutting down temporarily (due to demand; illness, etc.)
- Processing plants are needing to retool to adapt to changing demands (major reduction in restaurant demand resulting in lost contracts)
- Estimated that 80% of farms will be impacted due to an inability to conduct business as usual
- Current emphasis is on immediate employment requirements, farm safety (vehicles are on the road, and more youth will be working on farms) and ways to pivot farm gate operations which may not be able to operate the way they did before

5. Next Stage Tasks and Projects (Cara & Cathy)

Phase 1 Survey

- Summarize, analyze and disseminate survey results in a report to respondents, government officials (Municipal; Provincial; Federal), public

Phase 2 Survey

- Participate with regional partners in launching Phase 2 Survey in order to compare results and see progress/identify gaps in supports

Research

- Look for examples of COVID19 Preparedness and Procedural Manuals for Business
- If not available, speak to LCC regarding a lobbying effort to discuss efforts to get these resources in place

Workforce Efforts

- Continue to support local and regional efforts to promote employer/employee matching through workinmiddlesex.ca

Supports/Services

- Promote CFDC emergency loan and consulting services to local businesses (materials to be provided by CFDC)
- Investigate additional opportunities to link local businesses to webinars and training
- Continue to link to central sources of COVID19 business support information; continue to push out new programs via social media and direct email to appropriate businesses

6. Meeting Schedule & Adjournment

- Bi-weekly virtual meeting schedule for the immediate term
- Next Meeting: Wednesday, April 29th 1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
- The meeting adjourned at 3:35 p.m.