



Economic Resiliency Task Force
Wednesday, April 29, 2020 1:30 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.
ZOOM Meeting

Present:

Co-Chairs:

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

Middlesex County:

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

Small Business Sector Representative:

Kathy Manness, CEO, Strathroy & District Chamber of Commerce

Finance Representative:

Todd Copeland, General Manager, CFDC of Middlesex County

Agricultural Sector Representative:

Joanne Fuller, Member Representative, Ontario Federal of Agriculture

Regrets: Kelly Elliott, Councillor

1. Welcome

Cathy welcomed those in attendance

2. Phase One Survey

- Phase One Survey report has been rolled up into both a local and regional report

- The Middlesex report has been disseminated to all MPP & MP offices, County Council, all respondents, and the Task Force
- A fulsome analysis of the survey results was prepared by Demetri for Task Force member use; members were provided with a demo of how to use the data sheets designed

3. Roundtable Discussion re: Current State (all members)

Debra Mountenay

- The Elgin Middlesex Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board, in partnership with six other workforce planning boards that are part of Workforce Planning West, released their COVID-19 Worker Impact Survey Results to help inform the ongoing development of responsive employment-related initiatives. The survey collected 2,568 responses across 16 counties in Southwestern Ontario, including 250 responses in the London Economic Region.
- This link provides a filtered view of the aggregated survey responses in a customized report for the London Economic Region: [COVID-19 Worker Impact Survey Results Dashboard](#)
- Working to identify, in advance, different scenarios of industries returning to work (i.e. shortages; skills gaps)
- Preparing an Ontario Labour Market Partnership application for an umbrella project, partnering with local employment providers to address these shortages and/or skills gaps

Michael Dilullo

- Monitoring new regulations in order to react accordingly
- Moved Council meetings to a virtual format
- Experimenting with ways to invite public engagement for planning meetings and the like
- Focusing municipal staff attention on cost containment strategies in order to continue to meet community needs
- Need to follow provincial lead and develop phased recovery approach

Kurtis Smith

- Communication is key
- Monitoring new developments as they become available for the municipality, residents, and businesses in order to navigate the best ways to open up the economy

Kathy Manness

- Chamber is considering transitioning networking events and breakfast training events to an online format

- Starting online membership spotlights to bring attention to what local businesses are offering during this time
- Brainstorming as to what sessions/small business supports can be offered virtually

Demetri Makrakos

- Maintaining communications on Strathroy-Caradoc COVID19 Site
- Continuing to monitor the situation and have one on one discussions with local businesses
- Most large businesses are continuing to operate
- Some food service businesses have adapted well; others have not
- All businesses have protocol concerns to some level
- Rent remains a primary concern for smaller operations

Karl Pfister

- Employer anxiety remains high due to the expectation to continue to operate, keep staff healthy and employed, while supply chain continues to be disrupted
- There is still no comprehensive and informative procedural manual available to independent businesses working through the pandemic; or those gearing up for a return to operation
- Need for direct protocols for when COVID19 cases come to light in facilities because they will happen. There are still many unanswered questions, and serious concerns regarding legalities. It is expensive for employers to invest in trying to get these questions answered; especially without precedent being set.
- Focus needs to be placed on business development in order to keep the pipeline moving and get the economy back in line post-COVID19

Bill Pigram

- Staff working one-on-one with individuals displaced by COVID19; employers looking to hire; and individuals looking to re-enter the workforce e. Office is keeping as busy (maybe more) than usual
- Working with Cara to move the employer roundtable to a virtual format offering in May
- There is confusion among the labour market and employers about some supports being offered
- Still working with employers on standard training support offerings such as the Canada Ontario Job Grant
- Lots of attention (good and bad) has been placed on the availability of agricultural work in the past two weeks.
- Focusing on what can be done immediately to help both individual and business clients
- Actively promoting workinmiddlesex.ca

Todd Copeland

- CFDC offering principle and interest deferrals for current loan clients; 50% have opted in so far
- Offering a new emergency loan program for existing and new clients requiring access to funds 10K-25K. Interest fixed at P+2%; 5 year
- FedDev Ontario has announced \$200 million in new funding for the CFDCs. Monies will go towards CFDC operations as well as the establishment of a standalone loan fund. Waiting for details.
- Rent continues to be a major concern for many of the small business clients
- Counselling clients on their debt to asset ratios
- Middlesex CFDC still has funds available to lend from both it's General and former Sand Plains accounts

Joanne Fuller

- Grain Farmers and Middlesex Federation is releasing a news release this afternoon or tomorrow morning on their donations to the local food banks in Middlesex County
- OFA COVID-19 link <https://ofa.on.ca/covid-19/>
- lots of webinars to offer members and community partners – two are attached along with the OFA ToolKit Coupon Code for access to the Canadian Agriculture Human Resources Council Tool Kit
- One Webinar from Agscape AGM had Maple Lodge Farms present on how they are attracting, maintaining and keeping their employees safe through COVID-19. This could help manufacturing and small businesses do the same. Maple Lodge, Vanessa White, HR, presented:
 - o She said they didn't have a lot to go on but they decided to create a campaign for their employees to keep them safe:
 - o Created a plan to make them feel like they are front line workers and important - Included them in every step of the process
 - o Communication and keeping the employees informed every step of the way.
 - o Developed a response plan when their employees did get COVID. Posting and following the rules laid out by the governments and health units
 - o Created a campaign "I Feed Canadians" Making shirts, mugs, bags, etc. Offering their employees these items. Having contests on staying safe and getting prizes.
- Engaging the youth to agriculture and the local food system – encourage sharing links to the following:

- Six by Sixteen <http://www.sixbysixteen.me> – encourage kids to cook healthy nutritious meals – looking for engagement and pictures to post Kaylee.coverdale@ofa.on.ca
- Virtual Agri-Food Week at Western Fair – www.westernfairdistrict.com/events/virtual-agri-food-week
- Farm Safety – On the Farm as more young are around during planting and On the Roads while planting is beginning
- Farmers are out starting to plant – earlier than last year
- TVO Show with Steve Paikin and Keith Currie www.tvo.org/video/feeding-ontario-in-a-pandemic
- Working with Berry Farmers to get U-Pick rules and guidelines laid out by the province.
- Temporary Foreign Workers
 - o not all will arrive as planned as some are being refused by their own countries
 - o MOL is out inspecting now – they are will go to over 50 farms
- COVID-19 outbreak at Greenhill Produce with over 40 employees affected
- Backlog of cattle and pigs and dairy due to lower demand of restaurants and slow downs/shutdowns of processors
- Decrease in poultry processing
- Some farmers are converting vegetable crops to soy beans; farmers can't take the risk with no help
- Summer businesses are struggling with whether to open or not – changing the way they do business and what they grow

4. County Updates

- ✓ Phase Two Survey
 - a. The Phase Two COVID19 Business Impacts Survey has been designed and released to the public
 - b. 100 businesses have responded thus far
 - c. Survey closes May 1st
 - d. A report that will mimic the Phase One Report will be produced and disseminated
 - e. The results of the Phase Two Survey will also be rolled up with other communities in Western Ontario by the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus
- ✓ COVID-19 Website

We have been updating the website and sending out e-blasts and posts on the following new resources since our last meeting:

 - a. Student subsidies
 - b. Canada Commercial Rent Assistance Program

- c. Several different supports for Agricultural operations requiring temp. foreign workers
 - d. Manufacturing protocols and toolkits for businesses working through the pandemic
 - e. \$20,000 Recover & Rebuilding Grant (Libro, WeTech & Pillar)
 - f. Ontario Tackling Barriers Website
 - g. Numerous webinar opportunities
 - h. Free shopify website offer for all tourism businesses
 - i. A new local dining page has been established for all County based businesses offering food service (take out and delivery)

- ✓ Social Media Campaigns continue on both the Economic Development (Invest) & Tourism (Visit) Platforms
 - a. Business profile video series and #MiddlesexStrong campaigns have been well received.
 - b. Launching a new Tourism campaign on May 1st #VisitList – which will be focused on places people will want to visit as soon as they can. \$50 gift cards to local businesses will be given away each weekday in May.
 - c. Working with SWOTC on a “See You Soon” tourism campaign across the region

- ✓ Workforce Development Efforts
 - a. Worked with CEC to support the OFA proposal to Minister Hardeman re: Virtual Agri-Food job fairs
 - b. CTV commercial campaign focused on directing employer and job seeker traffic to www.workinmiddlesex.ca
 - c. Discussing new Ontario Labour Market Partnership (OLMP) projects with EMOWPTB and WOWC
 - d. Employer Roundtable to virtual platform - looking to survey results and CEC for topic
 - e. Cooperated with SCOR on an agricultural labour attraction campaign throughout the region; received mixed reviews

- ✓ Business & Community Response
 - a. Two large scale manufacturing facility inquiries have been received from different Ministries this week; working with lower tier municipalities best suited for these opportunities
 - b. Rural based businesses raising issues related to internet service and overages – these have been brought to the attention of County administrators

- c. More local businesses tapping into Middlesex promotional services – directory, video profiles, etc.
- d. Consulted on expansion plans and new events for two local tourism providers
- e. Several companies reached out to apply for new/extended Canada Summer Jobs; provided consultation and spoke to MP Rood regarding applicable inquiries
- f. Discussing support for community campaigns (i.e. Thorndale Community Centre and I love Thorndale group)
- g. Experiential Tourism Virtual Learning curriculum designed and circulated to those operators who had previously signed up to attend our tour planned for May 5th

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

Phase 2 Survey

- Summarize and analyze survey results in both local and regional reports
- Disseminate report(s) to respondents, government officials (Municipal; Provincial; Federal), public; as applicable

Research

- Continue to advocate for procedures and protocol manuals for businesses continuing to operate through the pandemic; as well as those who will be starting up again

Workforce Efforts

- Continue to support local and regional efforts to promote employer/employee matching through www.workinmiddlesex.ca
- Cara will share the labour market survey with all local CAOs and Social Services

Supports/Services

- Promote CFDC offerings to local businesses (materials to be provided by CFDC)
- Investigate additional opportunities to link local businesses to webinars, networking opportunities and training. Middlesex Workforce Development Partnership, led by the County, has Provincial funding in place now to support these activities
- 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

- Try to get access to OFA Webinar with protocols put in place by Maple Lodge Farm

Task Force Action Plan

- Begin to develop a Draft Response Plan for the committee in moving forward
- Focus on questions we want to work towards answering

6. Meeting Schedule & Adjournment

- Bi-weekly virtual meeting schedule will continue for the immediate term
- Next Meeting: Wednesday, May 13th 1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
- The meeting adjourned at 3:05 p.m.