



Economic Resiliency Task Force
Wednesday, May 27th, 2020 1:30 p.m.
ZOOM Meeting

Present:

Co-Chairs:

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

Middlesex County:

Kurtis Smith, Councillor
Kelly Elliott, 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

1. Welcome & Minutes

Cathy welcomed those in attendance and thanked them for their commitment to the Task Force

The minutes of the May 13, 2020 meeting were presented.

Motion by Joanne Fuller to approve the minutes as presented; 2nd by Debra Mountenay; carried.

2. Survey Summary Comparison Report

- The draft survey summary comparison presented by Demetri was reviewed

- It was suggested that we include the number of closed businesses to the percentage of businesses reporting significant impact

3. Community Improvement Plans

- Cara provided a background on CIPs and their use in incentivizing businesses within mandated geographic areas of Middlesex County
- Michael shared how CIPs are being used by other lower and upper tier municipalities in Ontario to support COVID-19 small business relief efforts

4. Roundtable Discussion re: Current State

Debra Moutenay

- The regional Ontario Labour Market Partnership (OLMP) project being lead by the City of London focused on researching the non-participating labour force is moving ahead. Both Cara and Debra will be on the Advisory Committee for this project
- Watching workforce trends. Hiring and rehiring stalled as emergency orders extended and consumer demand has slowed

Michael Dilullo

- Lower tier municipal CAOs are working together on a recovery plan based on the extended emergency orders being imposed by the Province
- Is being cautious about plans to move forward as there are still many unanswered questions
- Partnerships are key to effectively recovering
- Has organized a virtual business networking event for the associations across Middlesex Centre on June 29th. Cara will be presenting about the Task Force and Middlesex County business supports. Todd will be presenting about CFDC offerings

Kelly Elliott

- Thames Centre is finding an upswing in planning applications. Moving towards conducting virtual meetings to help with processing
- The municipality has started to open up some fields for competitive sports; skills and practice only at this time

Kurtis Smith

- Adelaide Metcalfe is moving ahead with virtual processing of planning applications

Demetri Makrakos

- Concerns being expressed by businesses regarding expectations of opening at the same time; with limited notice

Cathy Burghardt-Jesson

- Lucan Biddulph Community Economic Development (CED) Committee is providing social distancing signage to local businesses
- Also installing shop local promotional signs at entry points and on lawns throughout the municipality
- Many retail businesses are planning to be open on June 1st

Karl Pfister

- Labour challenges continue due to anxiety of the workforce
- Working on pandemic emergency plan
- Not getting clarity from provincial and federal governments on policies and procedures
- There is an overload of information that is changing daily putting pressure on employers
- The issue of a 13 week layoff triggering severance is an issue that needs to be addressed quickly by government or many businesses will be facing payouts that they will not be able to afford
- Government should be learning from the best practices and mistakes of other countries that are months ahead of us

Todd Copeland

- Middlesex CFDC has received commitment of \$1 Million from FedDev Ontario as part of the Regional Relief and Recovery Fund
- This funding will allow the office to hire an additional full-time employee, and to offer last resort loans to local businesses (both for-profit and non-profit social enterprises) affected by COVID-19; up to a maximum of \$40,000 per business
- Local businesses are showing interest and applications have already started to come in
- The details on the new fund can be found at www.thebusinesshelpcentre.ca
- The office will also be hiring two summer students to assist with projects over the next few months

Joanne Fuller

- Running a Fields to Forks Campaign on CTV, as well as social media and on radio, focused on farm safety
- Several farms have begun planting and some are ahead of schedule from 2019
- Those farms unable to get foreign workers in time, have pivoted to less labour intense crops, or are hiring local
- Launching Feeding Your Future Campaign
- Have acquired CAP funding to work on connecting Ontario based agri-food companies to new candidates to fill gaps. Partnering with AgCareers and local

employment service providers to run virtual ag focused career fairs. The first one will be in London-Middlesex (see Bill's notes)

- Starting a new campaign focused on mental health in the next week
- All commodities are down
- Slight uptake in nursery/greenhouse business in May as people are at home and working on beautifying their homes and yards

Bill Pigram

- Staff still keeping very busy matching individuals and employers
- Virtual roundtable took place on May 14th. Several businesses registered but only one participated. Will be evaluating having another one in June. Will delay if response is not greater
- Partnering with OFA on Virtual Job Fair focused on Agricultural jobs on June 18th

5. County Updates

- ✓ **COVID-19 Website – Business Resources & New Supports**
We have been updating the website and sending out e-blasts and posts on the following new resources since our last meeting:
 - a. Numerous webinar opportunities
 - b. Re-opening guidelines
 - c. Funding opportunities
- ✓ **Social Media Campaigns**
 - continue on both the Economic Development (Invest) & Tourism (Visit) Platforms
 - a. New Tourism campaign launched on May 1st #VisitList – has been very successful
 - b. Continuing #MiddlesexStrong campaign

6. Next Stage Tasks and Projects

Task Force Action Plan

- Has been shared with County Council; government representatives and public via website and social media posts

Advocacy

- Cara will re-contact Minister McNaughton regarding need for workplace inspection guidelines with note that Karl is available for consultation on this matter; will send this information to Minister Yurek as well

Interactive Business Mapping

- Mapping off all businesses in the directory has been completed and will be launching in June

Survey Summary Comparison

- Demetri will make the final edit to Survey Summary Comparison. This will be shared with County Council directly and the public via the website.

Communication

- Minutes of our meetings continue to be posted to the COVID19 website upon approval by the Task Force, and circulated to Council and MPs; MPPs
- We will continue to advise via social media and webpage all related programs and re-opening guidelines as the information is made available
- The idea of public service messaging around healthy living was raised by Karl. As the focus of the Task Force is on business resiliency, Cara offered to follow up with MLFPC and MLHU on their efforts in this regard as their mandate(s) more closely align with this style of messaging
- A video project featuring Mayors on County Council will be undertaken thanking local businesses for their resiliency and ongoing role in the economy of Middlesex County
- A radio campaign with a similar theme will be taking place on MyFM Radio for the next few months

Business Incentives

- Todd shared information and will follow up with further details regarding loan and grant supports being offered by counties such as Wellington-Waterloo and Oxford in partnership with their local CFDCs.
- Support was expressed toward approaching County Council with a request to offer matching funds to lower tier municipalities who have CIPs in place to offer COVID-19 related incentives to businesses looking to make improvements

7. Meeting Schedule & Adjournment

- It was decided through consensus that the bi-weekly virtual meeting schedule will continue for the month of June
- Next Meeting: Wednesday, June 10th 1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
- The meeting adjourned at 3:03 p.m.