



Economic Resiliency Task Force

July 22nd , 2020 1:30 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

Employment Representative:

Bill Pigram, Manager, Community Employment Choices

Manufacturing Sector Representative

Karl Pfister, President, Armatec Survivability

Finance Representative:

Todd Copeland, General Manager, CFDC of Middlesex County

Small Business Sector Representative:

Kathy Manness, CEO, Strathroy & District Chamber of Commerce

Workforce Development Representative:

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

Agricultural Sector Representative:

Joanne Fuller, Member Representative, Ontario Federal of Agriculture

Regrets: Lower Tier Municipal Representatives:

Michael Dillulo, CAO, Middlesex Centre

1. Welcome & Minutes

Cathy welcomed those in attendance; thanking them for their commitment to the Task Force. The minutes of the June 24, 2020 meeting were presented.

Motion by Karl Pfister to approve the minutes as presented; 2nd by Demetri Makrakos; carried.

2. County Updates

- CIP Support
 - Following presentations by the Economic Development and Planning Departments, and the unanimous approval of County Council to provide financial support to those lower tier municipalities in Middlesex looking to develop or revamp existing CIPs:
 - Middlesex Centre has engaged a consultant to revamp their existing CIP
 - Lucan Biddulph has engaged a consultant to develop their CIP
 - Southwest Middlesex has issued an RFQ to engage a consultant to develop their CIP
 - North Middlesex is in discussion regarding engaging a consultant to develop their CIP
 - Thames Centre has requested a presentation from the County on August 10th to discuss the development of their CIP
- Tourism Relief and Recovery Fund
 - Several shop local promotions are underway now:
 - Culinary guide being released online; in print next month
 - Partnership with Strathroy BIA for pop-up patios
 - Partnership with Strathroy BIA for video highlighting shop local and visiting local natural sites
 - Partnerships being discussed with three groups in Thames Centre; another in Komoka; and a regional group that will be offering privately funded grants directly to Middlesex restaurants
 - Billboards and print ads in the works
- Ministerial Communication
 - Follow up promised by Minister McNaughton's staff following the receipt of the letter sent by Warden Burghardt- Jesson on behalf of the Task Force, was not realized. Cara followed up to enquire but, no contact has yet to be made with our representative Karl Pfister.
 - Warden Burghardt- Jesson will be following up with Minister McNaughton during a previously scheduled meeting tomorrow.

3. Roundtable Updates

Demetri Makrakos

- Two pop up patios will be installed on Friday; remaining two over the weekend
- Municipal by-laws have been adjusted to accommodate patio expansions
- Received an inquiry for a 125,000- 250,000 sq. ft building but, none to offer in Strathroy-Caradoc
- Media release tomorrow regarding the launch of the regional transportation project Seeing some stage 3 openings around town
- One closure reported (unrelated to COVID-19)
- Seeing a few new businesses establishing themselves now; others expanding during this time
- Working with Cara on a major inquiry at this time

Kelly Elliott

- Thames Centre has provided (free of charge) window/floor physical distancing decals to local businesses, along with shop local lawn signs
- transportation soft launch will take place end of summer . Four busses will be running Monday-Friday when fully established
- Concerns raised regarding Human Rights Code violations in the wake of mask requirements, etc. Several municipalities have moved forward with mask by-laws following the Health Unit's recommendation; difficult position to be in politically and imposition being placed on the business community to enforce
- London's mask by-law has conditions that will render it non enforceable when the Province lifts it's State of Emergency

Kurtis Smith

- Hosting a significant Planning application meeting next Wednesday
- Looking at a public opening of the office on August 17th
- Kerwood Adelaide Metcalfe Optimists did a great job of pivoting their annual bbq to advance sales. Sold over 300 tickets

Kathy Manness

- Excitement building among businesses for Phase 3 openings
- Working on Digital Main Street project to get businesses more effectively working online
- Working with BIA on a physical map project
- Businesses expressing difficulty in operating among all the complex guidelines

Joanne Fuller

- Activists are protesting and causing issues regarding the freeing of livestock
- Agri-business in Middlesex are doing a very good job of pivoting
- Farmers and business owners are tired/busy trying to sustain operations
- Shop local and Ontario-grown is an important focus for post-Covid19 consumer behaviour in Agriculture
- Responded to Warden's inquiry regarding supports for local farmers impacted by drought noting that risk management programs are in place to help mitigate the impact of weather conditions on crops

Karl Pfister/ Gudrun Haas

- International business is slow; seeing supply reductions
- Encouragement of shop local and Ontario made puts those companies who rely on exports at risk
- Need blocks on export licenses removed; political meddling is affecting international business
- Manufacturers that rely on international trade need business development assistance
- Seeing more layoff happening now as things drag on
- COVID-19 has slowed government administration
- USMCA:
 - priority on US is resulting in discrimination of Canada business in the manufacturing sector
 - administration burden in dealing with tariffs seems to be increasingly more

- complicated and causing unnecessary frustration
- immigration by US to Canada more difficult; easier the other way around right now which puts pressure on Canadian firms who require competitive talent

Bill Pigram

- met with regional employment service providers yesterday – CEC activity in Middlesex County is up; hitting and in some case, exceeding the targets despite COVID-19
- job seekers and employers are reaching out for assistance
- CERB ending will be a major impact to watch
- Skills Advance Ontario program may proceed with the City (matching County employer with social services recipients in order for them to build job-ready skills). Decision about whether or not this will proceed sits with the County Social Services Department

Todd Copeland

- Request for Recovery and Relief loans sitting at over \$700,000 with over \$300,000 advanced to date. Take up is steady but lower than in some other areas.
- Two summer students are going door to door to promote in certain communities
- 17 payment deferral requests were originally received from current loan clients; that number has been reduced to 12 now
- Waiting to see if demand for RRF loans increases once CERB and other support programs expire.

Deb Mountenay

- Employer Needs Assessment taking place this month. Goal is to gather information on what local employers need. Results will be rolled up regionally.
- Western Region Sector Planning project approved by the Province – business representatives will be sought to join

Cathy Burghardt-Jesson

- Nothing additional to add that has not been covered

4. Next Stage Tasks and Projects

✓ **Communication with MPPs**

Cathy will be speaking to Minister McNaughton directly to see why the intentioned meeting has not yet been scheduled re:

- Provide transparency in sharing the COVID-19 Inspection Checklist to be used in evaluating business practices

✓ **TRRF**

Task Force members are asked to communicate the availability of TRRF to tourism partners/community agencies that may be interested in hosting shop local events/campaigns

Cara will work with her staff to source cloth face masks to be given to local businesses in need with the #MiddlesexStrong on them. Will try to source a local supplier.

✓ **Economic Development Strategic Plan Refresh**

Task Force members to advise Cara as to whether they wish to join Cara on a subcommittee for refreshing the County's Economic Development Strategic Plan

Task Force agreed that it would be advantageous to include a survey to identify any impediments to development being caused by each level of government

5. Meeting Schedule & Adjournment

- ✓ Next Meeting: Wednesday, August 19, 2020 1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
- ✓ The meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.