



Economic Resiliency Task Force
Wednesday, May 13th, 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

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

2. Phase Two Survey

- The Phase Two Survey wrapped up on May 1st
- 110 responses were received in one week
- Phase Two Survey report has been rolled up into both a local and regional report
- Members were asked to submit any suggested edits to the report to Cara by end of day on May 14th

- The Middlesex report will be disseminated to all MPP & MP offices, County Council, all respondents, and the Task Force following the above noted comment period
- 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. Emphasis was placed on the results of Question #4 which provides comment on supports requested from municipal government to aid local business.

3. Roundtable Discussion re: Current State

Jacqueline Demendeev (on behalf of Debra Mountenay)

The Workforce Planning and Development Board is moving forward in varying capacities with 3 potential Ontario Labour Market Partnership (OLMP) applications:

1. **Fresher** - an examination of the needs of the food sector, looking at the changes and damages and creating an action plan for moving forward.
2. **Name TBD** - a response project following the re-opening of the labour market in the London Economic Region. This project will look to redirect the local workforce based on the movement of employment opportunities.
3. **Scenario Planning with Workforce Planning West** - through a scenario-based planning approach, this project will identify how the supply and demand of the labour in Southwestern Ontario may shift in the next 12-24 months as a result of COVID-19 and identify specific actions or initiatives that employment and training services, government, business, and community leaders can start implementing in the near future in order to bridge skills gaps that emerge in each of these scenarios.

Michael Dilullo

- Has put together a recovery plan for lower tier municipalities which involves a staggered approach to resuming operations in concert with Provincial guidelines (attached)
- Is organizing a virtual business networking opportunity; highlighting local resources and engaging businesses from across Middlesex Centre

Kelly Elliott

- Receiving feedback at lower tier level that building is getting backlogged without moving to a virtual platform for holding public input sessions for Planning applications
- Noted that the process is being piloted in other Middlesex municipalities and being met with positive feedback.

Kurtis Smith

- Echoed Kelly's comments; hoping new Planning processes may be an improvement and serve as a new norm once proven to meet all provincial guidelines.

Kathy Manness

- Chamber is moving its Home Show online; will become part of its Facebook offering. (Kathy will share information with the group to publicize across County)
- Online membership spotlights will be commencing soon
- Relaunching Voice of Business segment on Rogers TV
- Noted that only a handful of businesses were able to re-open over the past two weeks as regulations were relaxed for curbside retail pick-up, etc.
- Will be listening in on Premier Ford and Minister Fedeli's roundtable session with the Chambers of Commerce across Ontario taking place on May 14th.

Demetri Makrakos

- Meeting with Stathroy Farmer's Market representatives on May 14th to determine whether not they will operate in 2020

Cathy Burghardt-Jesson

- Lucan Biddulph has had to make the difficult decision to cancel Baconfest for 2020.

Karl Pfister

- Workplace inspector's policy statements, and the application guides for staff instruction corresponding to these policies, need to be defined and made public.
- We have to transition from the good and best effort ideas from lots of caring people, to a policy and guidance document by the government that would stand up in a dispute situation. Either at the Labour Board or in Human Rights or Civil matters. Current guides and recommendations are not practical without a policy and a pass/fail criteria set before any inspector is sent out. What employers don't need is another set of subjective ideas clouding an already confusing operational landscape.
- The policy and inspection criteria need to be communicated to the employer and to employees. Criteria needs to be easily understandable and not ambiguous; clear cut for interpretation by the legal system, labour and human rights law. Based on the policy, the level of safety can then be reasonably assumed when followed. The residual risk is force major and not the liability of anyone and the risk of life itself. This policy background is a government responsibility to allow any employment to commence fairly to employees and employers.
- It would be best to see a tiered approach based on the risk exposure rate and employee density for different size companies to make the adaptation of these additional rules workable. Only if workable rules can be defined in the government policy, the labour situation can get under control. If overburdened, the already stressed business will just not reopen or continue operations.

- As we have seen in past labour legislation, the misuse of well-intended laws can hurt employees and employers alike. Only if safe guarded against misuse and negligence, we will have success.
- Core elements to consider for all employment relationships:
 - The current recommendation relies on self-declaration of potential for COVID infection, which may be asymptomatic and if declared, has a penalty effect to the employee's income. (Detrimental)
 - Employers mandate for safe workplace is out of employer's control if it is on an honour basis of self-reporting by the employee.
 - Contact tracing and reporting by employer is only window dressing and not practical based on the self-reporting honour system of a penalized employee.
 - Asymptomatic employees would not know to report a COVID situation and therefore, the employer cannot take liability for safe workplace in that case.
 - The social distancing and infection prevention outside of the workplace again is mainly in control of the employee. His/her social environment and behaviour is outside of the control of the employer. The community infection cannot be the liability for the employer and there will be no practicable way to ensure real contact tracking on an honour principle.
 - The obligations currently published to be the employer's responsibility cannot be fulfilled or even attempted without violation of privacy rights by asking for medical screening and discriminating if infectious illness exists. The employer needs a ruling to enable his responsibility to put public health above that of an individual.
 - The medical privacy of information may be extremely difficult and further impractical if a contact tracing is required for protection of coworkers. Again, we need a ruling how that is to be performed.
 - Even if the ideal case of honor principle would work, the following process of self-isolation, waiting for a real case test confirmation, then successful cure cycle, negative testing and release to work causes huge income losses for the employee and capacity impacts for the employer. This is now amplified by the similar procedure for contact-traced coworkers. Very quickly one case causes a large portion or the entire operation to be shutdown. The current criteria in the Ontario self-assessment test will have a false alarm consequence for cold/flu.

- The guidance provided in the most recent update www.ontario.ca/page/resources-prevent-covid-19-workplace#section-1) provides the opposite guidance that the MLHU provided so far. For reference:

“Track your workforce

...If an employee tests positive for COVID-19, the local public health unit will ask employers to provide information on where the employee worked as well as the contact information of any other employee who may have been exposed. Employers will provide that information and Public Health Units will respond.”

- We need a consistent and significantly better idea of how to manage a confirmed infection case in a workplace going forward.
- There are some good examples being developed and implemented in Europe, however they are not easily transferrable as the underpinning legal and liability backdrop is very different. It would be helpful for upper level government to investigate these further to apply them to the Canadian context.
- Based on past labour issue experience, employers are spending time running different role-play scenarios to understand the complexity of the situation but we run into many difficulties in conflicting laws and advice from legal counsel.
- It will be a serious issue for all small and medium size businesses of any kind to afford such situations and potential disputes. Large businesses may be able to cope with government bailouts. There are efforts underway in Europe and the US to adjust the roles and responsibility for a pandemic and ease the load of an employer to enable him to rescue and continue the business. We need the considerations here.
- Additional loans and deferrals will not solve this problem. We need government leadership to make (what may be considered unpopular) policies and lead with the vision of public interest above individuals on a fair and reasonable basis. The fair part will be a balance act of give and take, affordability and risk exposure.

Bill Pigram

- Staff keeping busy consulting with individuals and employers
- Virtual roundtable taking place May 14th in partnership with the County
- Some local employers still working on Canada Ontario Job Grant applications

Todd Copeland

- CFDC has started to distribute emergency loans to existing and new clients requiring access to funds 10K-25K. Interest fixed at P+2%; 5 year
- FedDev Ontario has announced new Regional Relief and Recovery Fund which will flow \$287 Million through the CFDCs

<https://www.canada.ca/en/economic-development-southern-ontario/news/2020/05/covid-19-feddev-ontario-launches-regional-relief-and-recovery-fund-to-support-local-economies.html>

- Middlesex CFDC has funds available to lend from both the General and former Sand Plains accounts; new fund will be additional

Joanne Fuller

- Encouraging farm businesses to do some pivoting to carry on business - online platforms, farm gate sales - OFA compiled a draft list of e-commerce resources available for guidance and help (attached). OFA has guide to operating your essential farm business and Direct to Consumer Sales Guide. All attached.
- Federal funding - 252 million - 77 million for food processing PPE and protocols; 125 million for beef and pork for surplus product; 50 million for product waste. Doesn't help with the critical needs of the food system
- OFA farmers are concerned about financial impact, health and safety of employees and the trade and supply chain
- 60% of farmers reported lost revenue & less consumer spending since COVID19
- Commodity impacts across the Province:
 - o Beef losing \$2 million per week
 - o Eggs down 15%
 - o Beekeepers are dealing with reduced revenue due to lost pollination contracts as growers have been forced to adjust their crop plans, loss of farmers' market access and decline in commercial sales
 - o Mushrooms down 30% loss of production
 - o The floriculture industry is expecting to endure a 40% reduction in sales
 - o Grape growers have been assessing and preparing for increased labour and production costs. According to a recent Grape Growers of Ontario survey, 15% of growers indicated that grape contracts have been cancelled and 36% report that contracts have been reduced
 - o Veal sector - loss of 70% of veal produced for the food service and hospitality industry and the remaining 30% for retail and specialty butcher shops
 - o Ontario fruit and vegetable growers are still facing major labour gaps as many do not have a full contingent of employees available to them, including seasonal and temporary workers
 - o Dairy farmers received a 2% cut in their quota and producers will share the cost of dumping excess milk
- 10,000 acres of ginseng to cover in a short time frame with a limited labour - if gardens are not properly covered it could impact not only this year's harvest, but the next four years' worth of harvests. With 10,000 acres under production, it

amounts to more than \$700 million dollars of lost farm gate sales, leading to an economic impact of \$441 million annually or \$1.8 billion over the next four years

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- Canadian Federation of Agriculture – Video and letter writing campaign to MP's CFA www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxt1_8OmuWM
- Click on the following link to send a letter to your MP:
www.producingprosperitycanada.ca/WriteyourMP/
- OFA is ramping up rural internet lobbying – encourage letters from all to be sent to MPP's need all sector support to make businesses thrive
- Farm Safety Campaign with Bell Media – radio and tv

4. 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. Big business funding
 - b. Protocols and toolkits for businesses working through the pandemic
 - c. Numerous webinar opportunities
 - d. A mapping of the new local dining page
- ✓ **Social Media Campaigns**
 - continue on both the Economic Development (Invest) & Tourism (Visit) Platforms
 - a. New Tourism campaign launched on May 1st #VisitList – has been receiving a lot of positive attention
 - b. Continuing #MiddlesexStrong campaign
- ✓ **Online Learning**
 - a. Employer roundtable taking place virtually on May
 - b. Promoting a series of free webinars being offered across the region on a variety of topics
 - c. In discussions with a regional partner for an upcoming sector specific virtual job fair
 - d. Will be speaking about the efforts of the Task Force to local CAO's on May 14th and to businesses throughout Middlesex Centre as part of Michael's virtual networking event in June.

5. Next Stage Tasks and Projects

Survey Reports and Analysis/ Recommendations

- Summary report to be finalized and disseminated within the next few days to respondents, government officials (Municipal; Provincial; Federal), public; as applicable
- A subcommittee was formed (Demetri and Kathy) to compare the Phase One and Two Survey Results and bring forward any recommendations for the consideration of the Task Force. These recommendations to be integrated into the Action Plan as applicable.

Communication

- Minutes of our meetings will be posted to the COVID19 website upon approval by the Task Force, and circulated to Council and MPs; MPPs
- Continue to advise via social media and webpage all related programs and re-opening guidelines as the information is made available

Advocacy

- Contact Minister McNaughton regarding need for workplace inspection guidelines with note that Karl is available for consultation on this matter

Task Force Action Plan

- Finalized Draft Response Plan with the input provided at today's meeting
- Share with County Council; government representatives and public via website

Interactive Business Mapping

- Based on the positive feedback regarding the newly produced interactive dining map; speak to GIS department regarding public release of mapping of all Middlesex-based businesses included in our online directory.

6. Meeting Schedule & Adjournment

- Bi-weekly virtual meeting schedule will continue for the immediate term
- Next Meeting: Wednesday, May 27th 1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
- The meeting adjourned at 3:05 p.m.