

Stratford Economic Response & Recovery Task Force

MEETING MINUTES

November 26, 2020

Zoom Video Conference

Present: Joani Gerber, Joelle Lewis, Julia Merritt, Jeff Orr, Mike Pullen, Joan Thomson, Rob Russell, Rebecca Scott, Zac Gribble, Hayden Bulbrook, Oonagh Vaucrosso

Regrets: Janis Auster, Elke Bidner

Purpose

Incorporating immediate and long-term actions to support local industry, small business and the workforce across all sectors during the COVID-19 pandemic response and eventual recovery.

J. Gerber welcomed everyone and provided a general update re: current Task Force activities and long-term planning.

1) **Z. Gribble reported on HRT:**

- i) Lights on Stratford is going very well; Tom Patterson Theatre location officially opens tonight. Should COVID restrictions move into RED zone, then locations will need to be gated to control attendance numbers.
- ii) Regional marketing activities have been paused and moved to hyper-local only.

2) **J. Lewis, H. Bulbrook and O. Vaucrosso reported on Business Intelligence:**

- a) Trillium grant was denied due to complexities with financial reporting requirements.
- b) J. Lewis noted the great work of H. Bulbrook and O. Vaucrosso that has generated a strong report that will be released in under a week and used for long-term planning.
- c) H. Bulbrook provided a high-level overview of report findings – 20 points in total; top 3 priorities as follows:
 - i) Hire Social and Economic Specialist to implement and coordinate longer-term recovery efforts.
 - ii) Develop Stratford into a year-round tourism destination.
 - iii) Better address mental health issues and provide appropriate resources in the community.
- d) Report is 40 pages and includes a very extensive analysis of community consultations, literature review and community comparators.
- e) Report is structured to allow for more input and adjustments as circumstances evolve.

Comments & Discussion:

- J. Gerber noted the extensive roundtable and individual consultations that were undertaken by H. Bulbrook and O. Vaucrosso to formulate the report and applauded their work.
- Z. Gribble asked about impressions of the mindset of those interviewed. O. Vaucrosso advised that there was enthusiasm regarding potential for more partnerships and collaboration among businesses and groups, as well as excitement for further development of year-round tourism. H. Bulbrook advised that many people are feeling exhausted and finding adapting to new restrictions challenging; however, were pleased that the Task Force was listening, and work was being done for greater collaboration and developing winter tourism opportunities.
- Z. Gribble noted the positivity around embracing winter for new tourism development and the opportunities to augment with sports tourism and other further diversification of the sector.

- Z. Gribble also noted that hyper local tourism is proving that locals want similar experiences as visitors, and this opens up opportunities for new and refined programming.
- J. Gerber cited the potential opportunities for City collaboration and enhanced facility use for tourism programming.
- J. Thomson noted the current City service delivery review and review of facilities that may open up more opportunities for sports tourism, etc.

3) J. Thomson reported from City:

- a) J. Thomson noted that there are many City projects underway.
- b) J. Thomson also added that there was much excitement around Lights on Stratford and its message of hope.

4) Other Business, Comments & Discussion:

- J. Gerber noted the differences between Yellow and Orange Zone restrictions and government supports. Staff are following Provincial and HPPH reports closely in order to be ready for inquiries and be prepared.
- Z. Gribble advised that accommodations continues to be the most challenging sub-sector of tourism due to pandemic restrictions and the challenges for developing strategies for new revenue generation.
- R. Scott and Z. Gribble noted that both the BIA and Destination Stratford are promoting staycations and free room nights targeting locals, and the need to develop more localized marketing programs.
- R. Russell agreed with the potential for developing new programming and projects for greater local experiential tourism.
- R. Scott noted that embracing winter with new creative programming starts with changing people's state of mind regarding winter and the positive connection between outdoor leisure and mental health.
- Z. Gribble recommended brainstorming ideas for potential new government funding in order to be prepared.
- J. Gerber advised that potential for new Provincial funding will likely be after April 1, 2021 and agreed that the Task Force be prepared for developing and submitting applications.
- Z. Gribble suggested a new objective to source more grants and the potential for a co-funded City resource to identify and apply for funding that is currently not being utilized.
- J. Lewis agreed with the suggestion and noted that grants and funding programs are a great deal of work to apply for and then to administer.
- J. Thomson noted a proposal for a grant matching service for the City that is subject to 2021 budget approval.
- J. Lewis reported that the United Way had distributed \$1.1M to date for community supports.
- R. Scott commended the work of the United Way and promoted an upcoming Dec. 18th fundraising event.
- R. Scott provided an update re: restaurant delivery and take-out feasibility work; BIA survey sent out – waiting on feedback; potential for partnership with local cab companies - would need to go to Council (cabs are governed by City - will reach out to J. Thomson to discuss). Online platform is \$3,000 - fees charged are less than other delivery services.
- J. Gerber once again thanked H. Bulbrook and O. Vaucrosso on behalf of the Task Force.
- For the next meeting, J. Gerber requested that members think about 3 new people to add to Task Force.