

To:	Warden McQueen and Members of Grey County Council
Committee Date:	November 12, 2020
Subject / Report No:	EDTC-CW-15-20
Title:	Covid-19 Impact on Grey County Businesses 3 and Recovery Update
Prepared by:	Savanna Myers, Director of Economic Development, Tourism & Culture Steve Furness, Manager of Economic Development Jacinda Rudolph, Economic Development Officer
Reviewed by:	Kim Wingrove, CAO
Lower Tier(s) Affected:	All
Status:	Recommendation adopted by Committee as presented per Resolution CW196-20; Endorsed by County Council November 26, 2020 per Resolution CC93-20;

Recommendation

1. **That Report EDTC-CW-15-20 regarding Covid-19 Impact on Grey County Businesses 3 and Recovery Update be received for information.**

Executive Summary

The Grey County Economic Development & Tourism Working Group continues to meet monthly and coordinate with regards to Covid-19 related support for businesses. In collaboration with the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus, Grey County and member municipalities launched the third business impact survey from September 28 to October 16. The results of this survey along with themes collected from numerous consultations with businesses and stakeholders as well as a recovery plan update are shared in this report.

Background and Discussion

Grey County Business Impact Survey #3

Attached to this report are the results of the third Business Impact Survey. Survey fatigue certainly had an impact seeing our lowest response rate with only 113 replies.

That said, given the tremendous business and stakeholder consultations ongoing through the working group, staff have confidence in the themes and comments gathered.

Unfortunately, as was expected, with cases rising across the province this fall, outlook has changed and concern is once again growing among businesses as we head into the winter season. The most common concerns shared are financial impact on operations, decreasing consumer confidence/spending, global or Canadian recession and employee stress/health.

While some businesses are thriving, the trend of hardship on small businesses under 100 employees continues with few supports available. Furthermore, 40% of employers experienced barriers bringing employees back to work. The three key contributing factors include Covid-19 restrictions/ability to physical distance, not enough business, and CERB. More than half of businesses surveyed are still running at a capacity of 50% or less.

As more and more businesses adapt their business model to include a more permanent presence online, broadband is becoming more of a challenge throughout our rural areas. This was not identified in earlier surveys as a challenge, but today, its access and reliability is a growing concern among business.

As with past surveys, these results have been shared with Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus for use in their regional data roll up to upper levels of government. They are also actively being shared with policy analysts and advisors at both provincial and federal ministries during regularly scheduled meetings.

Economic Recovery Plan Update

Through the Economic Development & Tourism Working Group, staff developed a phase one recovery plan to assist in regional recovery. This plan was endorsed by County Council on June 25th and immediately actioned. Underlying the entire plan was the need to enable our local entrepreneurs through facts, confidence and support.

Starter Company Plus Recovery Program

The Starter Company Plus (SCP) Recovery Program was developed to assist local businesses, newly operating for one to five years, by providing both financial and professional support during the Covid-19 pandemic. 45 local businesses were successfully enrolled in the program, each receiving a grant of \$2500 to assist them with their recovery efforts. Common uses for the grant funding were physically modifications to stores/offices allowing continued operations throughout Covid-19, development of marketing material, websites and e-commerce sites and the purchase of PPE for staff and clients. Some participants were also able to use the funding received through the SCP Recovery Program to leverage additional funding through

programs such as those offered by RT07, allowing them to execute further recovery plans.

Each business was also provided with the opportunity to be matched with an advisor/mentor in the specialty of their choosing. Staff are keenly aware that small businesses who receive mentorship support are twice as likely to succeed as those who do not, which is why, specifically in a climate such as this, professional support is as important as financial support. One third of business in the program requested to be matched with an advisor through the SCP Recovery Program. The feedback received from the businesses enrolled in the program has been incredibly positive. Many claim that the combination of funding, training and mentorship was a key component to them maintaining operations throughout the pandemic. Furthermore, as a result of the program, these businesses now have a stronger more resilient business model to carry them forward.

Campaigns

The [Outdoor Activity Map](#) and [Rediscover Grey](#) campaigns helped our municipalities and businesses deal with increased popularity of outdoor spaces and shifting capacity around the county. What's more, together, these campaigns put a spotlight on our small businesses and encouraged residents and visitors to support local through purpose driven spending. Over the past five months, the Outdoor Activity Map consistently saw between 50 and 100 visits per day, some days peaking as high as 500 views. With a local geofence, the Rediscover Grey campaign saw a virtual reach of more than 160,000 people. In addition to this, the video series for the campaign organically reached an additional 112, 555 people. Campaign feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

As a result, these themes have been carried throughout fall and are now being worked into the upcoming winter campaigns. The shop local message will continue, though direction is shifting to also include out of market messaging as we brace ourselves for a capacity winter in the region. Staff are working cross-departmentally and with community partners in an attempt to advance the safety message around the reality of winter in Grey County in addition to opening outdoor trails and spaces to help alleviate hotspot pressures.

Toolkits

In consultation with public health, staff produced the [Business Re-Opening Toolkit](#) to help guide businesses through their re-opening questions with a single source document. Accompanying this toolkit was a [webinar](#) geared direct to business featuring Dr. Arra and his staff who were able to speak directly to businesses and answer their re-opening questions.

To further assist small businesses and encourage consumer confidence, the Destination Infrastructure Toolkit enabled municipalities to individually identify and purchase resources most needed in their community. From this, City of Owen Sound purchased planters barriers to expand patios; Town of Hanover purchased branded masks for distribution; Municipality of Meaford purchased hand sanitation stations and portable toilets, and The Blue Mountains purchased hand sanitation stations. Remaining municipalities are considering opportunities as we move into the winter months.

Next Steps

As uncertainty persists and we head into a long winter, it will be key to restore confidence. A focus on tourism infrastructure, business investment and focused, wide-reaching marketing are being considered. Through the economic development and tourism working group, staff have developed a 2021 priority work plan which will be presented through a joint meeting of the Economic Development and Planning Advisory Committee and Tourism Advisory Committee on December 15th before coming to County Council for consideration.

Legal and Legislated Requirements

There are no legal or legislated requirements relating to this report.

Financial and Resource Implications

There are no further financial and resource implications associated with this report, all resources were included in departmental workplans and budgets.

Relevant Consultation

- Internal – Economic Development and Tourism staff
- External – Economic Development Working Group

Appendices and Attachments

[Grey County Covid-19 Business Impact Survey #3 Results](#)

[Economic Recovery Plan](#)

Key Action Items identified in the June 25th Report:

To date, the Plan includes 27 action items in addition to data tracking. The following items were actioned immediately:

- All-Sector Business Impact Surveys: [April](#), [May](#)
- [Business Resource Page](#)
- [Business Toolkit Resources](#)
- [Community & Business Resiliency Map](#)
- [Access to PPE](#) – Local Vendor Form for inclusion on Resiliency Map
- [Small Business Transition Program](#) (Starter Company Plus)
- [Ask a Professional Series](#)
- Regional Retention - [Grey Bruce Class of 2020](#)

The following action items will be actioned immediately:

- [SHOPHere Program](#)
- [Ontario Live](#)
- Business Toolkit
- Marketing Communications – Industry & Consumer
 - [Information blasts to business and community partners](#)
 - Buy local campaign (with Grey Bruce Huron Strong)
 - Capacity campaign – promoting trails and outdoor space
- Infrastructure Development & Destination Protocols (Downtown toolkit)