



Committee Report

To:	Chair Davenport and Committee Members
Committee Date:	February 24, 2021
Subject / Report No:	EDTC-ED-06-21 / EDTC-CW-07-21
Title:	Q1 Workplan Priorities Update
Prepared by:	Steve Furness, Manager of Economic Development
Reviewed by:	Savanna Myers, Director of Economic Development, Tourism & Culture
Lower Tier(s) Affected:	All
Status:	

Recommendation

1. That Report EDTC-ED-06-21 / EDTC-CW-07-21 regarding a Quarter 1 Workplan Priorities Update be received for information.

Executive Summary

Implementation of the 2021 economic development workplan is now underway. The Economic Development and Tourism Working Group continue to meet monthly. Several key items are progressing across all three priority areas of investment, attraction & retention and entrepreneurship and are highlighted in this report.

Background and Discussion

Investment

The Grey County Regional Foreign Direct Investment Strategy is set to begin in February through a single source contract with Think Compass consulting, founders of Think Canada. The strategy is expected to be completed later this year and will build on the investment work staff have engaged the consultants in over the past three years. The strategy is wholly focused on investment attraction and not simply on foreign direct investment given how much investment originates from Canadian based investors. As part of the process, staff plan to undertake some introductory regional investment training, with hopes of a more formal county-wide training program in 2022 once the strategy is complete.

Staff are currently supporting two key investment opportunities through studies and assessment: Wiarton Keppel International Airport and Talisman Resort.

The Regional Airport Study is underway with funding from RT07, Georgian Bluffs and Grey County. The study will be completed by March 31 and will identify the role and market positioning, management structure, efficiencies and investment opportunities for the Wiarton Keppel International Airport (CYVV). The study will also consider other regional airports and what synergies and roles might exist among them.

Grey County continues to assist Grey Highlands in the marketing and assessment of Talisman Resorts and downtown Markdale. The lessons learned through this process will be shared with member municipalities to help guide investment attraction efforts.

Staff are also beginning the business mix analysis project, beginning with West Grey. Meaford and Owen Sound have also indicated interest in the process. The goal is to understand the business mix in downtowns in order to develop a focus and marketing plan that builds on recently approved Community Improvement Plans (CIP).

In addition to these priority items, staff continues to field and research potential investment inquiries from investors and provincial advisors, as well as support on-going requests for assistance from local business and industry. Currently, there is interest from tourism based businesses, food processing, and manufacturing.

Attraction & Retention

This year the regional job fair has expanded and gone virtual. The Grey Bruce Virtual Job Fair will be hosted on March 10th, 2021 on the Brazen platform. With Bruce County and VPI Working solutions joining the team, staff can broaden reach to support employers and job seekers across County lines. Sponsorship from Communtech, Digital Main Street and FedDev enabled the organizers to waive booth fees for employers, while sponsorship from Regional Tourism Marketing Organization 7 covered costs of a digital marketing campaign. Employer registration was capped at 125 and filled one week after launch, which reinforces that despite the pandemic, employers continue to seek support in addressing labour market shortages. Top sectors represented include Hospitality/Tourism, Construction/Trades and Health Care and job seeker registration is currently underway. Through the virtual platform, employers and job seekers are safely connected and event reports will provide analysis of the effectiveness and success rates of these connections.

In partnership with Georgian College, the Welcoming Communities Grey Bruce and the Grey Bruce Local Immigration Partnership, Grey County is leading an International Student project to identify gaps and make recommendations for clear pathways to retain international students in the region. The study is currently underway and will be completed by March 31.

Attraction and retention efforts continue to address workforce challenges and opportunities in this region. Staff are currently working in partnership with Ontario

Works, YMCA Employment Services, Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program, Georgian College, Four County Labour Market Planning Board and other service providers on three distinct workforce projects to pool resources and target funding opportunities aligned to mutual priorities.

Grey Bruce Local Immigration Partnership

The Grey Bruce Local Immigration Partnership has been using this first fiscal year (ending March 31, 2021) to establish the foundation for the initiative through partnership building, developing a brand identity and conducting community research to develop a Settlement Strategy and Action Plan.

To date, the Partnership Council has evolved to connect 52 partners in the collective effort of fostering welcoming communities. Many of these stakeholders have been actively engaged in the research phase of the Settlement Strategy & Action Plan and will continue to provide support to the action plan as local priorities and actionable items are identified. Meetings of the Partnership Council will continue to take place four times a year, with additional sub-committee meetings taking place once local priorities are identified.

BC Hughes was retained to create a brand identity for the Grey Bruce Local Immigration Partnership ([link to toolkit](#)). The brand includes not only a logo that demonstrates the collaboration of the Counties (branding colours) and community partners (building blocks) but also messaging that demonstrates the connection and coordination of stakeholders to foster welcoming communities together. Ongoing work will include promoting the initiatives of the partnership, stakeholders and organizations and increasing community awareness.

To further support this work, funding was also received to develop a website, which will promote the goals of the LIP, activities of the Partnership Council and act as a shared community resources. Staff are currently working with a developer to complete this tool by the end of April, with a public launch expected soon after.

The Settlement Strategy and Action Plan is nearing completion and will be delivered to Council for consideration in March. The document will identify key local priorities and guide the work of the Partnership Council for the years ahead. Facilitated sessions with Partnership Council, community focus groups and key informant interviews took place November through January. Stakeholders represented a cross-section of sectors in both Grey and Bruce counties including business, government, non-profit, health care, education, social services, and community services as well as diverse representation from newcomers. The Settlement Strategy and Action Plan will include key priorities for action that will strengthen the ability of the community to be more welcoming and inclusive of newcomers; providing community stakeholders with a roadmap to guide and

align opportunities for coordination, connection and collaboration through a comprehensive action plan to be implemented over years two through five.

Entrepreneurship

In the fall of 2020, the Business Enterprise Centre (BEC) ran a Covid Recovery Program which provided local businesses with mentorship, training, and financial assistance in the form of a \$2500 grant. Upon completion of the program, the feedback received from the businesses was overwhelmingly positive with many businesses commenting on how valuable they found the mentorship component of the program. In response to this feedback, in January 2021, staff partnered with Catapult Grey Bruce to launch a mentorship pilot.

To date 15 established Grey and Bruce businesses have been matched with experienced local mentors. Over the next six months, the businesses will meet monthly with their mentors to discuss and create actionable steps to assist them in achieving their business goals. The mentees will also participate in three networking events, which will provide them with peer to peer support opportunities as well as topic-specific training. Staff heard loud and clear from the businesses who participated in fall programming that there is a need locally for more mentorship and peer to peer connection opportunities. Upon completion of this six-month pilot, staff hope to develop an ongoing mentorship program in partnership with Catapult Grey Bruce.

In January the BEC also participated in the first meeting of the Grey Bruce Entrepreneur Ecosystem. This group comprised of various entrepreneurial support agencies, aims to meet quarterly to discuss work plans and possible partnership opportunities. Ongoing communication between these groups is important to best serve clients. It also provides staff with the knowledge needed to develop work plans which offer complimentary programming rather than duplication.

Finally, BEC continues to offer one on one consultation services, which despite the January lockdown, continue to be very busy with new business consultations. Staff will be launching the Starter Company Plus program in April, providing an opportunity for new and expanding businesses to receive additional support in the form of business plan training and grant funding to assist with start-up and expansion costs. Summer Company will also return in 2021 with already notable interest among students.

Legal and Legislated Requirements

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

Financial and Resource Implications

There are no financial or resource implications relating to this report. All items have been included in the 2021 Budget.

Relevant Consultation

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

Appendices and Attachments

[Q1 Workplan Priorities Update](#)