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## **The Corporation of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake Information Report to Council**

**SUBJECT:** Tourism Business Retention & Expansion (BR&E) Program  
**DATE:** 2022-06-20  
**REPORT #:** CAO-22-008  
**PREPARED BY:** Kathy Weiss  
**DEPARTMENT:** Community & Development Services

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### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The economic well-being of Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL) is based on our existing businesses. As stated in the Phase 1 – Quantitative Analysis of the Economic Impact Analysis Report presented to Council on February 28, 2022, the size of the tourism sector in NOTL plays a significant role in the local and regional economies, accounting for 3,350 jobs.

While some industries have benefitted from the COVID-19 pandemic and economic shutdowns, the tourism sector has experienced a significant decline since the first lockdown in March 2020. As the pandemic fades, there is pent-up demand for leisure travel, and communities will most likely see strong year-over-year increases. Domestic short-haul travel will likely be the driver of this rebound due to consumers' wariness of booking long-haul trips (*Destination Canada*).

As a result, Staff applied for funding through the Rural Economic Development (RED) grant to implement a Tourism Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) program. The Tourism BR&E program is a way to communicate with local tourism businesses and identify needs and opportunities for future growth. The Town's Project Facilitator will lead this initiative.

### **About the Program**

The Tourism BR&E program will follow the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) BR&E model. This model utilizes volunteers (e.g., NOTL Chamber of Commerce President & CEO and board members, Lord Mayor's Economic Development Task Force, Municipal Staff) to conduct confidential in-person visits with local business owners, managers, and organization leaders to gather information and identify key challenges and opportunities for the sector growth.

## **Objectives:**

The overall objectives of the Tourism BR&E program are as follows:

- Identify the needs, concerns, and opportunities of existing local tourism businesses so that, where appropriate, local action can be taken to respond to these needs or development opportunities.
- Learn of plans that NOTL's tourism businesses have concerning expansion, relocation, and/or retention and assess where assistance can be provided.
- Demonstrate the Town's pro-business attitude and develop an effective means of communication with local businesses.

## **Goals:**

The short-term goals of implementing a BR&E program include:

- Build and improve relations with existing businesses
- Build capacity within the community and strengthen relationships between organizations
- Identify the positive and negative attributes of the community as a place to do business
- Identify and address immediate concerns and issues of individual businesses through an assessment and referral process
- Let existing businesses know how much they are valued in the community
- Collect business and market data to support economic development planning
- Establish and implement a strategic action plan to support existing businesses

The long-term goals of implementing a BR&E program include:

- Increase the competitiveness of existing businesses
- Enable business development, investment and job creation
- Foster and enhance the environment for business development

## **Project Schedule:**

The development and implementation of the BR&E program will take approximately nine months to complete, from inception to completion, as outlined in the chart below:

<b>PROJECT SCHEDULE</b>	
<b>Summary Milestones</b>	<b>Due Date</b>
Engage OMAFRA to start the program ( <i>Achieved</i> )	May 6, 2022
Meet with Chamber of Commerce – Seek Support ( <i>Achieved</i> )	May 12, 2022
Present Project Charter to Senior Management Team ( <i>Achieved</i> )	June 1, 2022
Finalize Project Charter ( <i>Achieved</i> )	June 6, 2022

Information Report to Council	June 20, 2022
Meet with the Chamber of Commerce – Volunteer Recruitment	Week of June 27, 2022
OMAFRA Training for Project Facilitator - Train Volunteers, Work with Software Platform	June 28, 2022
Preparation Period	May 26 to August 26, 2022
Collect and Analyze	September 2022 to January 2023
Goals and Action Plans	February to March 2023
Council Update	March 2023
Final Report	April 2023

### **Project Budget**

In February 2022, the Town was awarded \$44,500 from the Provincial Rural Economic Development (RED) Grant. Niagara Region also contributed \$15,000 towards the program through their 2022 LAM funding. The Town's contribution is \$21,700.

Funding and budget details are provided in the charts below.

### **Tourism BR&E Program Funding and Budget - April 11, 2022, to April 12, 2023**

<b>FUNDING SOURCES SUMMARY</b>	
<b>Source</b>	<b>Funding Amount</b>
Rural Economic Development (RED) Grant	\$ 44,500
Niagara Region	\$ 15,000
Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake	\$ 21,700
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$ 81,200</b>

<b>BUDGET SUMMARY</b>	
<b>Item</b>	<b>Estimated Amount</b>
Marketing	\$ 1,000
Volunteer Training	\$ 700
Volunteer Expenses (mileage)	\$ 5,000
Printing Expenses	\$ 500
Survey Results Analysis	\$ 4,000
Full-time Coordinator	\$ 70,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 81,200</b>

### **NEXT STEPS**

Through implementing the Tourism BR&E program, the Town will learn first-hand how its tourism sector is performing as a result of the pandemic.

This program will also help to:

- Support local businesses so they can grow, create jobs and stay in the community
- Write and implement an action plan to foster business development, investment, and job creation
- Collect business and market data to support economic development planning, such as the upcoming NOTL Tourism Strategy

The results of the BR&E survey will indicate the future plans and needs of local businesses and how they view the Town as a place to do business. In turn, the information collected will be incorporated into an action plan that can be integrated into the forthcoming Tourism Strategy.