

MEMO

To: Emergency Management Committee
From: Economic Recovery Task Force
Date: May 25, 2020
Subject: Orillia Online Initiative Update

Objective:

The Economic Recovery Task Force (ERTF) has reviewed significant consultation to date and have identified the need to assist local businesses in adapting their customer interface to include the online sale of products and services. This will not only allow these businesses to have a continued revenue stream during the current economic restrictions, but will also strengthen these businesses so that they can diversify their service delivery models on a long term, continued basis.

Proposal:

The Downtown Orillia Management Board, CDC and Chamber of Commerce have already quickly adapted their existing programs to offer online webinars, loans programs and one-on-one support. The ERTF had proposed the following proposal to complement these efforts through the following 6 components of a proposed “Orillia Online” initiative. The ERTF began implementing this initiative on March 6, 2020, and has provided updates on each component in red below:

1. Recommend that the Task Force submit a proposal to the CDC Board of Directors to update the terms of reference for their existing Digital Loan Fund to allow greater flexibility to address COVID-19 impacts. This Digital Loan Fund provides loans of up to \$10,000 for clients to digitally or technologically enhance their business.
 - a. **Timeframe:** Immediately
 - b. **Lead:** Wendy Timpano, Orillia Area CDC
 - c. **Budget requirements:** None
 - i. **Status: Complete.**
 - ii. **The CDC Board of Directors approved changes to the Digital Innovation and Transformation Loan Fund to allow for greater flexibility and better terms. This funding is now available for local businesses, up to \$10,000 per applicant depending on their needs, to offset costs related to bringing their businesses on line (photography, ecommerce sites, etc).**
2. Recommend that the Task Force prioritize the promotion of the upcoming 3-part CDC Business Series, “How to Take Your Business Online”. Since the series has reached maximum capacity (25 attendees), it is recommended that the Task

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Force provide funding for a second offering of the 3-part CDC Business Series for Orillia area businesses, to be coordinated and delivered by the CDC.

- a. **Timeframe:** Immediately, upon budget approval.
 - b. **Lead:** Wendy Timpano, Orillia Area CDC
 - c. **Budgetary requirements:** \$1,500
 - i. **Status: Complete.**
 - ii. **A second 3 part series is scheduled to begin on June 8, 2020, with marketing to roll out this week.**
3. Recommend that the Task Force support the development of new digital adaptation “how-to” guides specific to retail sales helping consumers become more familiar with online shopping.
- a. **Timeframe:** Within two weeks of EMC support
 - b. **Lead:** Lisa Thomson-Roop, Downtown Orillia Management Board
 - c. **Budgetary requirements:** None
 - i. **Status: Complete**
 - ii. **The “how-to” guides are now available on the DOMB webpage, and a new shopping guide for consumers who are new to online shopping will be posted on the DOMB webpage this week.**
4. Recommend that prior to May 15, the Task Force re-assess the need for one-on-one digital support and consider the extension and expansion of the Digital Main Street Program, by extending the Digital Service Squad’s contract for service of all Orillia businesses. Digital Main Street is an innovative program designed to help main street small businesses achieve digital transformation. The program is built around an online learning platform, structured training programs, grants and Digital Service Squads teams of street-level experts that help main street small businesses manage and grow their operations through technology adoption. Since the DOMB is delivering this program locally, they have noted that the Digital Main Street Resources are available on the Downtown Orillia Website under member services and in newsletters etc. All businesses can access these resources, however the Digital Service Squad (contract currently awarded to Mehreen Shahid) is currently only available to businesses within the BIA. If the EMC is supportive of exploring an extension of this service, this initiatives would include a brief 3-day survey of all Orillia businesses to understand if there is a City-wide demand for this service and/or further support. This should be facilitated through the promotion and sharing of partners, and the use of paid Facebook post “boosts”.
- a. **Timeframe:** Within two weeks of approval
 - b. **Lead:** Lisa Thomson-Roop, DOMB and Laura Thompson, City of Orillia
 - c. **Budgetary requirements:** \$100 to “boost” Facebook survey.*

**If it’s determined that the Digital Service Squad should be extended beyond May, and be available to all Orillia businesses this could have a*

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budgetary impact of approximately \$10,000. However, the ERTF would report back to the EMC/Council if this is recommended to proceed.

- 1. Status: Complete**
 - 2. A recent survey indicated that there is no longer a significant need for one-on-one support (only 7 businesses noted a need for this). The ERTF recommends that no further City funds are used to extend the Digital Service Squad's contract. However, the County of Simcoe has recently funded a similar program which is available to all businesses in the Orillia area, the DOMB is able to extend the Digital Service Squad for businesses within the BIA and those seeking more customized business support will have access to this through the CDC 3 part series.**

5. Recommend that the Task Force explore the creation of a grant program to be facilitated through the CDC to offset the costs of businesses' digital adaptation to online sales, similar to that of the Town of Blue Mountains.
 - a. **Timeframe:** Within 2 weeks of EMC support
 - b. **Lead:** Laura Thompson, City of Orillia
 - c. **Budgetary requirements:** TBD*

**If it's determined that a grant program is feasible within the confines of the Municipal Act, the Task Force would report back on the recommended grant values, overall budget and criteria for access.*

 - i. Status: Complete**
 - ii. The ERTF has explored the potential to offer grants and found that there are differing legal opinions regarding the legality of this in the context of the Municipal Act, Bonussing Provisions.**
 - iii. ERTF members also noted that the CDC has a Digital Innovation and Transformation Loan Fund for these types of expenditures and the Regional Relief and Recovery Fund which was recently launched through FedDev could also offset these costs at 0% and no payments until December 2022.**
 - 1. The ERTF will continue to monitor the uptake for these programs to determine if additional loan programs would be valuable in the future.**

6. Recommend that the Digital Service Squad explore the use of the Google 360 Camera to create a virtual tour/shopping experience of Downtown Orillia.
 - a. **Timeframe:** Within 1 month of approval
 - b. **Lead:** Lisa Thomson-Roop, Downtown Orillia Management Board
 - c. **Budgetary requirements:** None
 - i. Status: Complete.**
 - ii. Photos have been taken of the main street however, due to the current closures the photos are not reflective of the typical**

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vibrancy of downtown Orillia and therefore are not conducive to the City's marketing efforts.

- iii. The DOMB promoted to its members to have Google 360 photos taken within their stores, and many members have taken this opportunity to add a virtual tour to their Google business profile.**

Should Council approve this initiative, the no-cost elements of the program would be implemented immediately, and a press release would be distributed to inform the community of this initiative.

Accountability:

This initiative has been overseen by Laura Thompson who was accountable for all 6 components. These would be delivered by Task Force members Wendy Timpano, Lisa Thomson-Roop and Councillor David Campbell.

Anticipated outcomes:

Should EMC support this initiative, and the requested funds are approved, this initiative would have the impact of training up to 25 additional businesses on how to get their businesses online, a "how-to" guide would assist consumers who are not used to shopping online access Orillia's online products and services, and the EMC and Council would facilitate local businesses in accessing Digital Loans and potentially grants. The online resources provided through the Digital Main Street program would be promoted to all Orillia area businesses to further increase the number of businesses who are able to transition to offering online sales.

This initiative would assist businesses with their immediate needs for an ongoing revenue stream during the COVID-19 economic restrictions. In many cases, businesses which are still open but have transitioned to online sales or alternate methods of pick-up and delivery are continuing to sustain between 30%-70% of their pre-COVID income. This in turn lessens their reliance on loans and government assistance programs, and increases their chance of business survival in the short term.

Further, these efforts would allow businesses to expand their operations beyond their "brick and mortar" storefronts. Collectively this strengthens and adapts Orillia's economy to weather long term impacts by helping businesses adopt new and evolving technology.

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Actual Outcomes to date:

- 25 businesses signed up for the first 3-part webinar series through the CDC.
- 8 additional businesses are on the wait list and will be added to the second 3-part webinar series.
- There is capacity for an additional 17 businesses to take part in the second 3-part series.
- In total this initiative has allowed 50 new businesses to learn how to build their businesses online.
- Approximately 10 businesses have either already had Google 360 photos taken, or signed up for this service.
- 11 “How-to” guides have been made available on the DOMB webpage for use by all Orillia area businesses.
- Additional metrics (including uptake on the CDC Digital Innovation and Transformation Loan Program, will be shared with the ERTF as they become available.

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Reviewed by: Economic Recovery Task Force