



Report to Council

Department: Development Services
Division: Economic Development
Date: June 15, 2020
Prepared by: Nelson Silveira, Economic Development Officer
Report Number: Economic Development-2020-06
Subject: Business Support during COVID-19 Emergency
Number of Pages: 9

Recommendation(s)

That Economic Development -2020-06 entitled Business Support during COVID-19 Emergency prepared by Nelson Silveira, Economic Development Officer dated June 15, 2020 be received for information, and

That Council approve \$15,000.00 in COVID-19 related funding to support the Town of Essex Digital Growth Grant in 2020.

Purpose

To provide Council with an overview of Town of Essex business support to-date during the COVID-19 emergency. This report will also provide Council with a detailed outline of the proposed Town of Essex Digital Growth Grant intended to provide businesses with up to \$1,000.00 of one-time, non-repayable funding to allow a business to better focus on digital activities and strategies for a stronger online presence. In addition, Administration has also looked to the BIA and Chamber for additional ways the Town can further support local businesses during this pandemic.

Background and Discussion

Since the start of the COVID-19 Emergency, the Town of Essex has taken several steps to ensuring our business community has the support it needs to offset the impact. The following are examples of how Administration is assisting our local businesses:

Existing Assistance

1. Ongoing Communication with Partner Organizations and Individual Businesses

Administration continues to provide our community business organizations (Essex Centre BIA, Harrow and Colchester South Chamber of Commerce, Explore the Shore Committee) with information about changing government support programs to share with their members. Being knowledgeable on the rapidly-evolving available programs at all levels of government and ensuring our businesses have access to this information is critical.

Administration has also been in contact with over 40 individual businesses since the start of the emergency to assist with access to funding, making the shift to digital, and understanding the issues that our local businesses are facing. Providing businesses with an outlet for one on one dialogue has been helpful in steering our businesses through this uncharted territory.

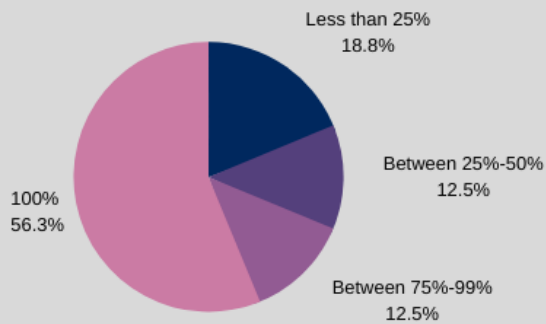
2. Business Impact Survey

On March 30, 2020, the Town of Essex initiated an online survey to grasp the impacts of the COVID-19 Emergency on the local business community and to understand the resources and support required to address the challenges being faced. Overall, 30 surveys were completed as summarized below:

COVID-19 BUSINESS IMPACT

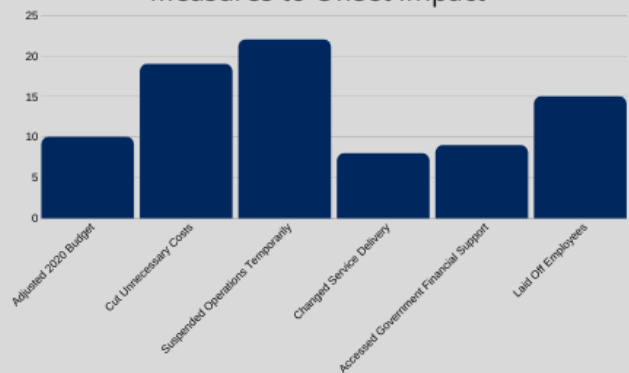
WORKFORCE

Percentage of Employees Laid Off



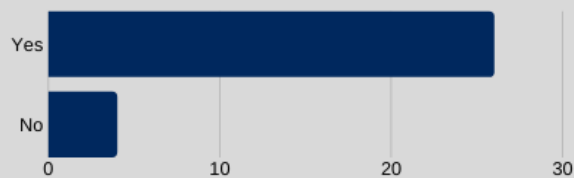
OPERATION CHANGE

Measures to Offset Impact



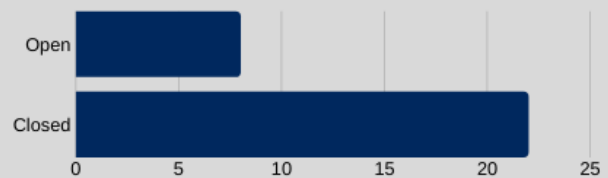
FINANCIAL IMPACT

Loss of Business



BUSINESS STATUS

Temporary Change in Operation



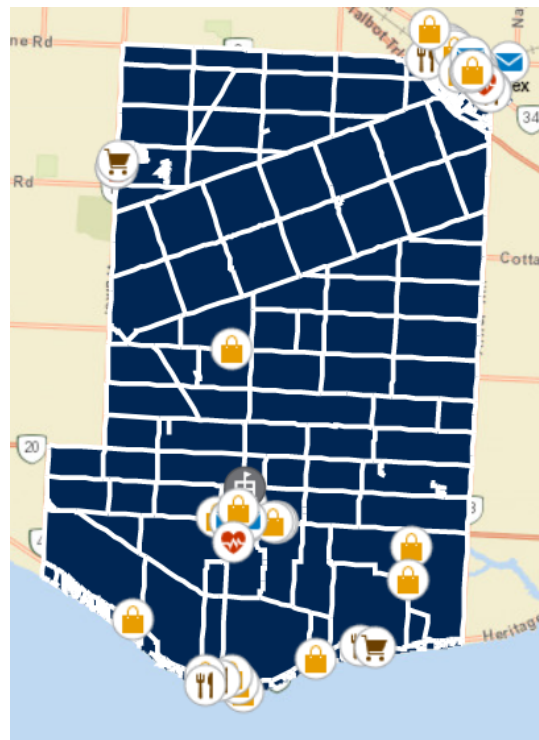
3. Shop Local Initiatives

Promotion of shopping local through social media campaigns and unique online giveaways has brought attention to many of our local businesses that are open to the public in some capacity. In April 2020, Administration launched a 12 Days of Giveaways where residents and visitors were able to win \$25.00 gift cards to local businesses that were still operating through curbside pick-up or delivery. New spring and summer Shop Local campaigns are also in the works.

4. Open for Business Interactive Map

Many of our local businesses continue to provide goods and services with modified operations to ensure the safety of our citizens and community. To assist residents and visitors with understanding what businesses are open and under what changes, Administration developed a mapping tool to provide an interactive platform of those changes.

The businesses and service providers on the map are broken down into the following categories: Grocery, Restaurant, Healthcare, Pharmacy, Social Services, Food Bank, Professional Services and Retail. The map also notes the changes each has undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some businesses in the community, for example, have introduced curb-side pickup to reduce person-to-person contact. Others have added additional in-store shopping hours for senior citizens and frontline medical workers. Users can click on each business or service providers' icon to view operational changes, as well as contact and location information. The Open for Business Map is also kept up to date as the current situation changes and businesses begin to reopen with restrictions.



Proposed Assistance

Town of Essex Digital Growth Grant

Main Street businesses that have traditionally relied on foot traffic in order to generate sales and attract new customers have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 Emergency. As a result, Administration is proposing a one-time digital grant program in 2020 that would support businesses during- and post-COVID-19 Emergency. The fund would provide businesses access up to \$1,000.00 each and will focus on activities and strategies directly related to creating or developing a stronger online presence.

Eligible businesses must meet the following criteria in order to receive funding:

Business Criteria:

- Storefront located in the Town of Essex;
- Pays commercial property tax (directly or indirectly);
- Has 1-99 employees;
- Registered or incorporated for-profit business; and
- Business must not be a franchise, distributorship, pay-per-click, commissioned sales, multi-level marketing, single event or part-time/seasonal.

Business Owner Criteria:

- Over 18 years of age;
- Not a full-time student and not returning to school full-time; and
- A resident of Ontario.

Whether this is the first time a business has taken the steps to going digital, or they already have an online strategy, this grant can be utilized in many unique ways such as:

- Setting up an online store;
- Creating tools to provide services online (ie video classes);
- Subscription costs for online tools or services;

- Staff training for digital technology;
- Digital marketing (ie social media ads); or
- Other digital growth needs.

In order to help make this program a greater success, Administration has partnered with the Small Business Centre (SBC) and the Essex Centre Business Improvement Area (BIA). The SBC will provide administrative support in reviewing grant applications and approving the distribution of funds to eligible businesses. Furthermore, the SBC will provide eligible businesses with access to their Digital Service Squad, a team of highly trained recent graduates who help Main Street businesses grow and manage their business through the adoption of digital tools and technology.

The Essex Centre BIA has contributed financially to be a partner in the Town of Essex Digital Growth Grant program. Administration also reached out to the Harrow and Colchester South Chamber of Commerce to partner on this grant program, however, the organization was unable to support a financial contribution at this time. Administration will continue to work with both organizations to ensure that information about this new program is provided to their members.

The grant would be available on a first-come, first-serve basis, allowing up to 20 eligible businesses to receive a grant of \$1,000.00 each. Submissions for the Town of Essex Digital Growth Grant would commence upon Council approval and would be made available until August 31, 2020, or when all funds have been committed.

Additional Support

In follow up to the June 1, 2020 Regular Council Meeting, Administration has reached out to the Essex Centre Business Improvement Area and the Harrow & Colchester South Chamber of Commerce to obtain information from their memberships on other unique projects or proposals that the Town of Essex could support in providing safe and accessible shopping opportunities for visitors to both downtown centres. We have requested that the BIA and

Chamber provide us with this information by June 12, 2020 with internal review and technical evaluation to take place prior to a follow up report to Council in July 2020.

In the meantime, we offer the following preliminary information on examples of unique projects or proposals:

- **Encroaching Outdoor Cafés:** Encroachment of potential outdoor cafes into municipal sidewalks or parking spaces would require a thorough technical and legal review, as well as financial analysis should businesses request the waiver of encroachment fees. A proposal of this nature would require preparation of a Streetscape Social Distancing Plan to ensure proper physical distance separation between storefronts, outdoor seating, and pedestrian traffic as depicted in the image below from the City of Hamilton. A review of financial impacts would also be required should businesses request the waiver of encroachment fees.



- **Temporary Closure of Roads:** Should the BIA and/or Chamber propose to temporarily close main streets to provide additional pedestrian movement, a review of traffic impacts would be required, as well as insight into liability and/or costs incurred to the

Town. Application and consultation with the Administration and the Special Events Resource Team would be required.

- Sanitizer Product Distribution: Should businesses have difficulty in obtaining the necessary disinfectant products required to operate, the Town could consider partnering with local manufacturers and distributing to small businesses.

Financial Impact

The total pool of funding for the Town of Essex Digital Growth Grant is \$20,000.00 with the grant funding proposed as follows:

Town of Essex: \$15,000.00

Essex Centre BIA: \$5,000.00

In response to the impacts of the COVID-19 Emergency, Administration is recommending \$15,000 in COVID-19 related funding to support the Town of Essex Digital Growth Grant.

This will allow us to track the expense under the COVID-19 cost centre that was created so that we can quickly and easily identify in the case of other level future government funding.

Consultations

Lori Chadwick, Director, Development Services

Jeffrey Morrison, Director, Corporate Services

Kevin Girard, Director, Infrastructure Services

Doug Sweet, Director, Community Services/ Deputy CAO

Chris Nepszy, Chief Administrative Officer

Link to Strategic Priorities

- ☐ Manage, invest and plan for sustainable municipal infrastructure which meets current and future needs of the municipality and its citizens.
- ☐ Create a safe, friendly and inclusive community which encourages healthy, active living for people of all ages and abilities.
- ☒ Provide a fiscal stewardship and value for tax dollars to ensure long-term financial health to the municipality.
- ☒ Manage responsible and viable growth while preserving and enhancing the unique rural and small town character of the community.
- ☐ Improve the experiences of individuals, as both citizens and customers, in their interactions with the Town of Essex.

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	Business Support during COVID-19 Emergency - Economic Development-2020-06.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Jun 10, 2020

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:



Lori Chadwick, Director, Development Services - Jun 9, 2020 - 9:58 AM



Chris Nepszy, Chief Administrative Officer - Jun 10, 2020 - 9:34 AM