

**Explorers' Edge Board of Directors Meeting Minutes**  
**Tuesday, April 5, 2016**  
**Sherwood Inn, Port Carling**

**Present:** Dympna Hayes, Nicole Saulnier, Drew Racher, Jackie Leung, Gary McMullen, Jerry Feltis, Jeff Suddaby

**Regrets:** Kim Loader, Anthony Rizzo, John Miller

**Via Conference Call:** Hilary Chambers, Curt Dunlop, Andy Vitch

**Resource:** Laura Hernando - MTCS

**Staff:** James Murphy, Erin Smit

**Welcome and Introductions:** Jackie Leung called the meeting to order at 9:40am

**Approval of Agenda – April 5, 2016**

**Motion:** Nicole Saulnier

**Seconded:** Jeff Suddaby

**Discussion:** n/a

**Carried.**

**Approval of Minutes – January 19, 2016**

**Motion:** Jerry Feltis

**Seconded:** Drew Racher

**Discussion:** n/a

**Carried.**

**Director Round Table**

Gary McMullen: action packed season with the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Muskoka Brewery; event happening to celebrate on June 25<sup>th</sup>. Working on four collaboration brews this year with other breweries. A lot happening on the retail end with their business in regards to grocery stores carrying beer; doesn't necessarily affect Muskoka as they are already in LCBO supply chain. Discussed the government taking a hands off approach and the effect of that on small brewers.

Jerry Feltis: with Esa Paltanen's departure from Sherwood Inn, a shuffle took place internally to unite the four Muskoka Clublink properties under one staff member and Jerry took on that role, now the Regional Director of Clublink for Muskoka as a whole; encompasses Sherwood Inn, Grandview, Lake Joe Club, and Rocky Crest. Lots of internal promotion happened for staff as well, exciting for Clublink Muskoka properties. Rocky Crest – 2016 is leading up to be a fantastic year, open May-October. Mill on Main – the new Huntsville bandstand being built in Huntsville directly behind the restaurant is expected to draw more visitors to the location as well.

Drew Racher: season shaping up well, presales have been good. Christmas presales up over last year, corporate sales up as well. Added another stay and play option, picked up a rental cottage on their lake. Course wintered well compared to last year with minimal damage. A few course improvements taking place, bridges, etc. Focus continues to be social media marketing for attracting visitors.

Jeff Suddaby: restaurant had a good winter, was concerned due to the weather. Still saw people in the restaurant, guests still travelled to the region, with winter activities sometimes non-operational due to the weather people still had to eat. In regards to Huntsville Chamber of Commerce, they are on a solid rebound, really tackling marketing and events in Huntsville and talking to private business to initiate. Drafted letter for potential partnerships; Town of Huntsville has committed \$50k to project if they can raise \$25k from the private sector. If this is profitable for the private member, thinks the money will be raised and will become an example of how we deal with communities within the RTO. Thinks this is the perfect model that starts with the private business.

Laura Hernando: lots happening; no TPA or allocation available currently. Rush and then wait is the nature of the business. Waiting on the Minister to confirm funding allocations; has been a decrease in RTO funding across all RTOs of 5%, not a reflection of performance. Discussed waiting on Celebrate Ontario announcements as well. In terms of update; program and ministry priorities – cycling. MTO has released a strategy, includes RTOs, supporting product development and marketing. Strategic framework sessions; one taking place in Muskoka on April 21<sup>st</sup> at JW Marriott; is a facilitated session to develop a cohesive framework for Ontario for positive change; came as a result of TIAO. Series of questions will be sent to anyone registered in package; link has been sent out for operators to register. Input will be gathered by a third party facilitator and go into the development of the framework. Webinar option happens in May if you cannot attend. Other projects; Georgian Bay Coastal Route, stepping back from that role and being taken over by colleague in Simcoe County. Looking to incorporate, hiring a staff manager, and shifting from developing product experiences to supporting the development of product experiences. Tourism Excellence North; focus on workforce development, program has launched, website is now live, tools are available for download.

Nicole Saulnier: Georgian Bay Airways is looking at a good season, lots of training coming up in the spring and their flight school is very busy, some senior pilots have moved on so they will be doing a lot of flying this year. Seeing a lot of Americans phone with inquiries and to make bookings. Concerns in the Parry Sound area are accommodations; Grand Tappatoo is fully booked for the summer with a film crew, availability of places to stay is shrinking in the area. GBA is working on developing new partnerships with area operators and developing packages with them; more to promote when working together. Parry Sound Chamber is very strong again, getting traction. Focused on business, but not necessarily dabbling in the tourism side.

Dympna Hayes: OSKC is growing, first year that Dympna and her husband James on working on the business side instead of primarily as instructors. Discussed events; Women on the Water and Paddlepalooza. OSKC biggest school in Canada for sea kayak instruction, and has now expanded to SUP instruction; looking to do more local paddles, partnerships with local resorts, private trips, etc. Harmony Outdoor Inn grew organically, has 6 glamping tents, added 3 B&B rooms, hired first full time staffer to

run the Inn. HOI will have free yoga every morning, use of SUP boards and private instruction; also working with cycling, very much an outdoor centre. OSKC and HOI are also looking at creating packages with area operators.

Hilary Chambers: one of the best winter seasons for them, snowmobile trails were great her area of the region which led to increased business. Concerns for her for spring tourism in regards to their roads; lost a one km stretch coming into town, detours are now in place but will take time to repair. Discussed the LRBA and service board; working together to move tourism forward. B&B renovations are complete, will open for the May long weekend. Chalet at Pine Grove is undergoing renovation, will be completed by June. Has been selling a lot of Native art through the gallery over the winter months; is usually closed so this is great. June is looking slow in regards to bookings at the resort, Fall will be very busy.

Andy Vitch: increased rates at Sunny Point this year, last year was best revenue year, looking to replicate that this year. Notices trend of last minute bookings, people waiting longer and longer to make plans. Has some vacancies in June he is hoping to fill.

Jackie Leung: expected a soft winter based on the weather, but had best winter yet up 5%. Focuses on snowshoeing, skating trail, cross country skiing, etc; heard from other B&B owners of a good winter season as well. Summer is looking good, does not generally book up in advance so too soon to tell. Discussed looking at options for controlling expenses; also concentrating on revamping packages and itineraries for her guests.

**Financial Presentation – Andy Vitch**  
*for period ending March 31, 2016*

Discussed income statement; actual vs. budget. Partnership revenue is slightly off showing a difference of \$777; with 22 partnerships this is simply a matter of HST recording. Spoke to the total revenue from OTMPC which came from a fishing video they approached us to do. This is also noted under the image bank as program development of \$35k spent vs \$25 budgeted; also in regards to the fishing video. Discussed less redemption than expected during Fuel & Fun for transacting which explains the discrepancy there with monies left over, as well as Tyler Francis saved some of the budget by taking over some aspects of the JackRabbit system in house. Also discussed the difference in the salaries and benefits line item; 27 pay periods vs 26 normally for the leap year. Auditor will now come in and review statements.

**Approval of Financials**  
*for period ending March 31, 2016*

**Motion:** Nicole Saulnier

**Seconded:** Jeff Suddaby

**Discussion:** n/a

**Carried.**

**2016/2017 Business and Operational Plan Update & Presentation**

ED Murphy discussed the provincial budget and 5% program cuts for RTO model; three main areas are Core, Proportional and Partnership; cuts will come from core and proportional funding. Operational Plan was couriered to board to review. ED Murphy discussed the changes to the Operational Plan budget as previously discussed; cuts to make up \$75k budget cut will be spread out over various budget lines, they include:

- Administration and overhead (travel, office equipment, meeting costs)
- Governance and industry relations (Destination Development Plan outreach and engagement to be pushed back; waiting on new research makes this feasible)
- Marketing programs (Spring Fuel & Fun)
- Investment attraction
- Product development (non-motorized inventory will be done in house)
- Research

#### **Motion to Accept the Updated 2016-2017 Operational Plan as Presented on April 5, 2016**

**Motion:** Drew Racher

**Seconded:** Dympna Hayes

**Discussion:** n/a

**Carried.**

Laura Hernando discussed MTCS internal staffing changes at OTMPC. ED Murphy discussed TPA, final report due May 2, 2016; that will trigger a payment. Also mentioned again the Tourism Strategy Framework session taking place on April 21, 2016 at the JW Marriott The Rosseau Muskoka Resort & Spa in Minett from 5-7pm.

Gary McMullen asked about an RTO wide initiative to lobby for the cut funds to be reinstated. ED Murphy mentioned TIAOs role in those discussions. ED Murphy will draft a letter on behalf of the board once the TPA is dispersed and the cuts are public knowledge to bring attention to the issue; tourism as an economic driver. Board agreed this was needed.

#### **Executive Director Update – James Murphy**

ED Murphy discussed the Parry Sound/REDAC partnership. Presentation was made at Parry Sound Area Tourism Summit, lots of talk on leaning on REDAC and the municipalities for support in regards to tourism. Heard about operators wanting to network more with each other and perhaps have a guest speaker come in; RTO will encourage more dialogue between those area operators. ED Murphy brought to the board proposal by Lynn Middaugh requesting a satellite EE office in Parry Sound; she will be writing a letter to the board of directors. Jackie Leung spoke to this setting a precedent that would be hard to maintain; need to be fair and equal across all playing fields, and this would not be. Dympna Hayes thinks support from EE in regards to promotion and collaboration is enough without a staff member present in the community through the week. Nicole Saulnier agrees that this would not be a solution, collaboratively supporting tourism between all partners is necessary. Andy Vitich mentioned EE

is not the social safety net, limited budget should be used properly; when Tyler is needed he's always there and travels to the area quite a bit already.

ED Murphy discussed the airport consultation as part of the partnership fund. Consultation sessions are happening and communication is being done through an online survey and questionnaire, as well as work with Moose FM and on LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter. Industry outreach is also happening with Huntsville, Bracebridge, and the Gravenhurst Rotary Club. RTO is not looking to solve the problems of the Muskoka Airport; we are here from a tourism standpoint to net new visitors to the region with packaging beginning with a summer program only to mitigate risk. Nicole Saulnier asked about when we will know where Transport Canada stands; need a letter of intent from an airline that they are intending to fly in, as well as a number of requirements that must be met. Year one for 12 week service will be approximately \$160k, covers upfront costs which will come down year by year over time. Conversations are taking place about how to alleviate some of these costs associated with security screening, etc.

ED Murphy discussed the Ministry of Tourism Strategic Framework development in Ontario. Spoke to the facilitated focus sessions; series of exercises designed to seek input on the development of the framework and to clarify roles and responsibilities for industry and government; the framework is currently being guided by 2012 statistics. A session is being held on April 21, 2016 from 5-7pm at JW Marriott The Rosseau Muskoka Resort & Spa in Minett; all are encouraged to attend. ED Murphy also discussed the closing of the Nipissing University Muskoka campus in Bracebridge; attended a community information session and suggested using the building as a Tourism Centre for Excellence in order to brand this region as a leading destination to work in hospitality (workforce development).

ED Murphy spoke to committee restructuring and the current member search. This is ongoing, will be a presentation at the May board meeting. Looking for members for Marketing and Community Relations committee, more regional representation required. The Community Relations Committee is potentially the most important committee; will no longer be waiting for Chambers and DMOs to come to the table with plans, RTO progressive as it relates to a destination development model.

ED Murphy discussed human resources and contracts upcoming. Job postings are currently available, not as many resumes coming in as hoped; Tourism Administration Coordinator and Communications Coordinator, will involve hiring and on-boarding of new staff. Also discussed year end performance reviews for Director of Communications, Tourism Administrator and Tourism Operator Relations staff. Also discussed contracts and current RFPs; package and itinerary, US/UK marketing program, paddling, MTMA winter projects, and craft beer; 30+ proposals have been reviewed and follow up calls are in the works.

ED Murphy also spoke to the governance of Golf Muskoka being taken on by Tyler Francis on a weekly basis at 5 hours per week devoted. Discussed Tourism Excellence North; talks with Karen Tait-Peacock, will be at the May board meeting and breakout sessions will be facilitated at the AGM. Greg Klassen and Oliver Martin, formerly of the Canadian Tourism Commission, to talk about itineraries and packages; they feel there is a massive opportunity for this region based on the idea of our branding (accessible wilderness north of Toronto), will be helping us navigate opportunities within the CTC as well. Greg and

Oliver are extremely knowledgeable consultants in regards to Canadian and International tourism who are a great asset at helping EE elevate our game.

As far as year-end is concerned, finishing up and closing out projects is happening as well as processing outstanding invoices and balancing the budgets. Final report is being developed, and ED Murphy is working on piloting a new reporting structure.

ED Murphy discussed product development initiatives; cycling mobile tour and craft beer tour. Cycling MT website is ready; currently tweaking some aspects as a result of unforeseen issues. Staff member attended the Cycle Tourism Conference in Toronto and nothing similar is being done; Butterfield & Robinson just introduced self-guided mobile tours, we are in good company and ahead of the game. The Craft Beer tour has wire frames developed and operators loaded; project update, will delay launch due to brewery facilitation. This project was extended to a collaboration with RTO11 and their Haliburton based breweries. This specific tour was trickier in building as the breweries don't have differentiated tourism product (tastings and tours can be found anywhere in Ontario); OCTA has been selected via a competitive process to facilitate with the breweries. As far as the Paddling product development, the regional inventory and strategic recommendations are complete (worked with Kevin Callan 'The Happy Camper' on this inventory, will be important for US/UK marketing in particular and for the 2017 celebrations). For the research aspect, brand research has been executed and data is collected; will now be taken back to the research committee for presentation. Discussed how some additional questions were included based on new knowledge after five years in business, particularly around product.

Discussed marketing initiatives in the year end final report; Peter Coish of Kuration, our strategist, will present at the Board of Directors meeting in May with final numbers. ED Murphy spoke to current analytics; 900k website visits, 240 outbound links resulting in 1/3 of the traffic to operator sites. We saw an increase in organic traffic over the year, and grew to 102k Facebook fans and 100 followers were recently added to Instagram. Use of HubSpot program has seen segmenting of email recipients make conversions significantly higher. A HubSpot developer has been engaged to create a high quality template that showcases the brand and aligns with our website; and we also hit our target of 4000 new email sign ups.

ED Murphy discussed transacting programs; pilot project of Cottage Country Bike Bucks as rebrand of Spring Fuel & Fun for our visit to the Toronto International Bicycle Show that took place in March. The booth saw a lot of interaction with visitors and had 120 of those visitors offer up their email address to be corresponded with in regards to the Cottage Country Bike Bucks offer; this resulted in 5 conversions after the booking period ended. Low signup numbers a result of similar issues when Fuel & Fun was first rolled out, visitors assume the offer is too good to be true and don't take advantage. Take away would be that although trade shows allow you to communicate with a niche market, they still need to be travel-inclined in order to pick up on offers and programs, harder sell. Discussed interest in continuing with attending trade shows that align with product in attempts to net new visitors to the region (golf show to push stay and play packages as well at the Outdoor Adventure Show where a large number of travel destinations are presented), will take recommendation back to the committee.

Discussed partnerships; becoming more of an 'in-house agency' to create most effective use of partnership dollars. This will create more work for staff but allows for a better oversight, better alignment, and hopefully better results; James, Peter and Kate to work with partners. Also discussed the partnership pillars we will work under moving forward; International Market Development, International Travel Development, Workforce Development, Content Marketing, and Event & Festival Marketing.

ED Murphy let the board know about all upcoming meetings and facilitated sessions:

**Motion to Adjourn**

**Motion:** Jerry Feltis

**Seconded:** Jeff Suddaby

**Discussion:** n/a

**Carried.**