

PANDEMIC RECOVERY STRATEGY

Economic Development and Tourism Services

MAY 2020



St. Catharines

INTRODUCTION

A New Economic Reality

The global COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the economic engines of our community. With businesses closed, events cancelled, and the movement of people and goods significantly slowed, the pandemic has widened social and economic divisions, further deepening the consequences of inequality.

The St. Catharines Economic Development and Tourism Services department has begun the process of recovery planning by identifying key initiatives, actions, and outcomes as the city prepares for a period of adjustment and explores areas of this new normalcy. By redefining how to utilize corporate expertise, existing assets, capacities, partnerships, strengths and resources, change can be directed in a way that will ensure the economy is more resilient and adaptive to future challenges.

Although the COVID-19 crisis has undoubtedly shifted the direction of the department's activities identified in the 2017-2022 Economic Development Strategy, this new recovery strategy seeks to build on that vision in a new comprehensive context. As described in its preamble, the strategy remains a living, breathing document that may require periodic refinements to reflect unforeseen challenges, whether global, national, regional or local. The wealth, well-being and success of the community has always depended on residents, community partners, schools and businesses working together.

Sincerely,



Brian York
Director of Economic Development & Government Relations



St. Catharines has had an essential resilience dating back to its incorporation in 1876.

Together we will continue this tradition of adaptation, innovation and perseverance for the next 144 years.

OBJECTIVE

Long-Term Economic Recovery

The objective of this document is to develop a long-term economic recovery strategy for St. Catharines in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis that will inform and direct efforts to support the transition of business, employees, and other community organizations and assets into a post-pandemic recovery phase.

Staff will work with a number of partners and agencies to implement key outcomes, initiatives and actions. To ensure that there is alignment with the upper levels of government, the plan is colour-coded to coordinate departmental efforts with a staged reopening based on directives from the Federal and Provincial Governments.

Implementation Staging Key



1ST STAGE OF REOPENING

- select businesses open
- some outdoor spaces open
- essential gatherings only



2ND STAGE OF REOPENING

- more business open
- more public spaces opening
- some gatherings allowed



3RD STAGE OF REOPENING

- all workplaces open responsibly
- less restrictions on public gatherings



4TH STAGE OF REOPENING

- low to no risk of transmission
- all gatherings allowed

Glossary:

CBC: Community Benefit Charge
CIP: Community Improvement Plan
CRCS: Community, Recreation and Culture Services
DC: Development Charge
DMS: Digital Main Street
DTA: St. Catharines Downtown Association
EFES: Engineering, Facilities and Environmental Services
FAM: Familiarization Tour
LAM: Local Area Municipality
LNA: Land Needs Assessment
MAT: Municipal Accommodation Tax
MOU: Memorandum of Understanding
NIA: Niagara Industrial Association
OBIAA: Ontario Business Improvement Area Association
PBS: Planning and Building Services
RTO: Regional Tourism Organization
TPN: Tourism Partnership of Niagara

Industry associations including but not limited to:

Agriculture and Environmental Technology Innovation Centre, area Banks and Credit Unions, Brock LINC, Brock University, Business Development Bank of Canada, Canadian Food and Wine Institute, Employment Ontario service providers, Facer District Merchants and Residents Association, Grape Growers of Ontario, Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce, Innovate Niagara, Niagara College, McMaster University, Niagara Construction Association, Niagara Development Corridor, Niagara Federation of Agriculture, Niagara Folk Arts Multicultural Centre, Niagara Home Builders Association, Niagara Industrial Association, Niagara Native Centre, Niagara Wine Festival, Niagara Workforce Planning Board, Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Quest Community Health Centre, Open Streets St. Catharines, South Niagara Chambers of Commerce, Spark Niagara, Tourism Partnership of Niagara, Twenty Valley Tourism Association, Venture Niagara, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, Walker Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre, Wine Marketing Association of Ontario



O: Grow STC business community's economic resilience and diversity

I: A Diversified and balanced economy.



A: Promote the federal and provincial calls to action for local businesses to retool and supply the health care industry with front-line defense solutions.



A: Recognize and promote STC businesses that have responded and retooled to service the healthcare industry.



A: DonateSTC: Establish a network to encourage STC businesses to provide complimentary services to support other sector and community efforts, (i.e. PPE, business support, volunteer opportunities).



A: Continue to develop and promote a b2b 'shop-local' strategy, where possible.

I: Reshoring and Supply Chain Development.



A: Work with the NIA to target reshoring opportunities and market STC / Niagara for new, repatriated investment.

I: Win this Space.



A: Work with DTA to identify public / private opportunities and relaunch the program.



O: Cross-protection between successive waves

I: Develop a business crisis protocol for future waves of closures, social distancing, potential shut downs to the economy.



A: Work with local chambers of commerce (GNCC) and business associations to develop and share a crisis plan / play book for each sector.



A: Business crisis protocol training: businesses should consider permanently adopting some of the strategies implemented during the pandemic, such as: online shopping, delivery and pickup.



A: Maintain a comprehensive database of municipal digital business offerings.



O: Infrastructure creates economic growth

I: Champion and expedite public and private investment using data driven decision-making.



A: Identify top public / private investments delayed by COVID-19 that will have the most impact on the community.



A: Identify grant and stimulus funding opportunities that can help ensure investments continue.



A: Work with local businesses to ensure their employee transit needs are well-aligned with necessary alterations to work environments and schedules.



A: Proactively target big-box retail properties for mixed-use intensification opportunities.

KEY OUTCOMES | INITIATIVES | ACTIONS



O: A financially stable recovery for STC businesses and residents

I: Update and maintain a comprehensive database of financial resources for business. Engage provincial and federal governments in further recovery investment programs.



A: Leverage the Region's Rapid Response Team (RRT) partnership to continue data collection and reporting on economic impact of the pandemic on economic impacts.



A: Update COVID-19 business resources webpage on www.investinstc.ca outlining current and upcoming funding and loan programs.



A: Proactively share information about government policy and programs that assist with recovery and growth.



A: Advocate for a universal child care plan aimed at addressing the gender wage gap, protecting employment and families.



A: Leverage local partnerships to address gender gaps in economic recovery (i.e. workforce re-entry, childcare services for returning workers).



A: Advocate for rapid re-training and skills development funds for the hospitality, tourism and retail sector employees.



A: Ensure strategy alignment / input for policy initiatives at all levels of government.

Municipal policy initiatives:

- CIP
- LNA
- DC by-law and CBC
- MAT



O: Hyperlocal governance

I: Invest in placemaking strategies to restore confidence in public spaces, and neighbourhoods.



A: CurbsideSTC: work with internal departments, EFES, PBS to establish temporary parking pick-up zones, curb lane pedestrian zones to adapt to pickup and social distancing requirements.



A: Initiate an educational awareness campaign to promote the message that “social distancing does not mean social disintegration.”



A: Reimagine public space for pedestrians and businesses including street closures and lane reductions, where possible, as a practical tool for public health risk reduction.

I: Restoring public confidence in municipal recreation assets.



A: Work with CRCS to build key messaging around outdoor and recreational assets.



A: Develop a discovery program encouraging (when safe to do so) the use of outdoor space, connection of paths and parks in neighbourhoods, hiking and cycling trails.



O: Restore Downtown STC as Niagara's urban playground

I: Support the downtown for the staged re-engagement of visitors.



A: Work in partnership with the DTA to source tools, support and infrastructure to equip downtown businesses with the ability to safely conduct business.



A: Continue to support CRCS on the safe re-introduction and marketing of the St. Catharines Farmer's Market.



A: Survey downtown businesses to measure impact and compare results to previous information provided in the downtown indicators report to gauge change.



A: Engage the DTA and other business districts on direct marketing to encourage consumers to shop in a safe and responsible manner.



A: Assist in the preparation for the re-opening of large scale civic assets:

- First Ontario Performing Arts Centre
- Meridian Centre
- Brock University main campus and the Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts



A: Partner with the First Ontario Performing Arts Centre and Meridian Centre on a public awareness campaign about safety procedures related to events / performances.



A: Partner with the DTA and explore the opportunity to host a Christmas market downtown.



A: Work with the local arts and culture organizations to animate the downtown.



O: Widespread digital adaptability

I: Help more businesses enhance their online presence.



A: Evolve the Digital Main Street program into a permanent fixture of Economic Development services.



A: Continue to offer webinars and individual digital training provision through the St. Catharines Enterprise Centre: e-commerce, social media, remote work, alternative methods of business.



A: Explore partnering with Brock University and Niagara College student co-op programs to establish a digital services squad to provide businesses with digital support.

I: Remote working continuity.



A: Create a remote working best practice guide and marketing campaign for local businesses aimed at attracting and retaining talent.



A: Explore and promote flexible work schedule models that respect social distancing requirements.

I: Bridging the digital divide.



A: Explore options to provide additional public WIFI in urban areas.



O: Widespread digital adaptability (continued)

I: Monitor, measure and report strategy deliverables.



A: Develop a recovery dashboard.

I: Virtual vendor market.



A: Provide online digital showrooms for local businesses using Instagram Live / Facebook Live stories.



O: Tech-enabled post-pandemic STC

I: Explore and test smart city technologies and applications for future emergencies.



A: Source and beta-test with partners engaged in sensor technologies (ie: traffic, pedestrian measurement and monitoring).



A: Expand the use of the PingStreet App as a public awareness and engagement tool.



A: Monitor Google mobility reports.



A: Encourage localized app development tracking retail wait times related to essential services.



A: Engage local private sector on potential partnership opportunities for IT / service solutions.

KEY OUTCOMES | INITIATIVES | ACTIONS



O: Stable housing creates a stable workforce

I: Prioritize all affordable housing development projects in STC.



A: Update Housing Action Plan initiatives:

- Review status of initiatives and update action items table.
- Explore new options, ideas, funding opportunities.



O: STC safe to live, safe to visit

I: Restore civic confidence and pride.



A: Build on the OurHomeSTC and YOU ARE HERE campaigns.



A: Create video campaign promoting support, recovery and resilience of local business.



A: 1876 campaign storytelling 144 years of resiliency in our city highlighting local businesses.



A: Partner with local post secondary institutions to develop a digital welcome package for new and returning students, and faculty.



A: Explore creation of a STC Handbook containing information about transit, local businesses, downtown, market, PickUpSTC, virtual entertainment options, and off-campus hiking and cycling trails.



A: Create an on-line IGTV series geared to incoming students about the city to run during "Welcome Week". Each episode will highlight an element of life in STC and will include a line-up of alumni guest cohosts.

KEY OUTCOMES | INITIATIVES | ACTIONS



O: STC safe to live, safe to visit (continued)

I: Media and Public Relations initiatives.



A: Outreach to TV and radio talk shows to arrange appearances and placement of print media stories / earned media through existing and new media contacts / blogger FAM tours.



O: Bring leisure tourists back to STC

I: Develop new branding and marketing campaigns.



A: Monitor all immediate markets that affect domestic, national, international arrival gateways including YHM, GTA and NY state).



A: Create an STC Festival and Event working group to review new festival practices and reintroduce to the community.



A: Continue to support modified programming for festivals and events through digital and social platforms.



A: Execute a three-part campaign targeting local “*Explore your own backyard*,” Hamilton / GTA for “*Down the road trip*” and US border states “*Welcome back*.”



A: Continue to collaborate with area wineries and breweries to develop strategies to market their outdoor spaces / vineyards (ie: outdoor tasting bars, picnics, picnic and bike ride).



A: Develop a Next-Gen digital-only City Guide.



O: Bring leisure tourists back to STC (continued)

I: Develop new branding and marketing campaigns (Continued).



A: Expand seasonal City Guide to all PickUpSTC participants.



A: Targeted “PlayInSTC guides” offering discount deals / incentives.



A: Leverage the TPN / RTO partnership and expertise.



A: Market the STC recovery assets locally through the provision of transit media buys.



A: Work with the regional GO Implementation team to create “Niagara-cars” co-marketing STC assets, including the opportunity to wrap cars with STC visuals.



A: Procure a booking system allowing consumers to purchase pre-built packages or build their own (ie: accommodation and show tickets or winery picnic and bicycle rental).



O: Hospitality space recovery

I: Attract new business, rebook lost business.



A: Work with local hoteliers to reimagine the meeting, convention and incentive travel business in STC. Target smaller regional corporate meetings marketing larger venues and rooms to maintain social distancing.



A: Identify new ways to market hotel availability (ie: marketing hotels to employers for temporary lodging, construction crews).



A: Work with area restaurant, hospitality, and accommodation partners and public health professionals to initiate accredited environmental sanitation processes.



A: Align hotel and culinary partners to build a strong partnership for in-room food delivery (for those without restaurants on site) driven by PickUpSTC.



O: Ensure STC business needs are represented

I: Follow advocacy strategy for all levels of government using data gathered from local surveying and corporate communication.



A: Facilitate coordinated advocacy approach (cooperation with region, other LAMs).



A: Rank advocacy priorities.



A: Continue letter, advocacy and meeting campaign to relevant ministers reflecting STC needs.



O: Leveraging partners, leveraging assets

I: Formalize sub-regional tourism marketing partnerships with neighbouring municipalities via MOU.



A: Combine the urban and rural experience through shared marketing resources, messaging.



A: Share staff expertise.

I: Film industry attraction.



A: Market and promote STC as a location destination for film, TV and commercial production.

I: Strengthen STC's position as a destination for higher learning.



A: Continue to market the benefits of STC through the existing partnership with the Ontario Airport Welcome Committee for international student arrivals.



A: Work with the DTA and downtown business to strategize on marketing downtown to Brock University and Niagara College students in anticipation of reduced presence due to studies shifting from in-class to online.



A: Work with DTA and downtown and city-wide student housing partners on reimagining use of student housing in anticipation of post-secondary studies shifting online.



[InvestInSTC.ca](https://www.investinstc.ca)

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