



ECONOMIC AND CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT MEMORANDUM

TO: MAYOR J. LEHMAN AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: A. KELLY, SENIOR BUSINESS INNOVATION & ENTREPRENEURSHIP OFFICER

NOTED: D. HYDE, MANAGER, SMALL BUSINESS CENTRE

S. SCHLICHTER, DIRECTOR, ECONOMIC & CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

A. MILLER, RPP, GENERAL MANAGER, INFRASTRUCTURE & GROWTH MANAGEMENT

M. PROWSE, CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

RE: 2019/2020 DIGITAL MAIN STREET PROGRAM RESULTS & UPDATE

DATE: MONDAY, JULY 13TH, 2020

The purpose of this Memorandum is to provide members of Council with updates and results of the 2019-2020 Digital Service Squad program, following the press release circulated to Council in August 2019.

In July, 2019 the City received \$40,000 in grant funding from the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA) in partnership with the Province of Ontario to operate a Digital Service Squad through their Digital Main Street program. The Squad would deliver free one-on-one coaching on digital technologies to independent main street businesses, to help boost their online presence. Participating businesses could receive up to 10 hours of free coaching on website development, social media usage, ecommerce stores, and other digital technologies.

Barrie received four times the standard funding amount offered through this grant, in order to extend business eligibility to four areas: the Downtown Barrie BIA district, Bayfield Street (South of Highway 400), Dunlop Street West (East of Highway 400), or Essa Road (East of Highway 400). A map of selected areas is in Appendix A. Eligible participants were independently owned businesses with physical locations in these jurisdictions.

Supporting various stages of this project were partners from the Henry Bernick Entrepreneurship Centre at Georgian College, the Downtown Barrie BIA, the Sandbox Centre, and the Barrie Public Library.

Digital Service Squad Team

Granting requirements stipulated that Squad members be retained externally, and in August/September, 2019 three student entrepreneurs were contracted as independent service providers to deliver Squad services. The Squad operated through the Small Business Centre, and received coaching and support in building their own entrepreneurial firms throughout the program.

At time of launch, all three Digital Service Squad members were students at Georgian College, working as freelancers in their areas of expertise. At conclusion of the program, they have all successfully graduated and operate their own digital media firms full-time—an important success metric.

Results

The Digital Service Squad officially launched in October 2019 and concluded in May 2020. In seven months of operating, the three Squad members through the Small Business Centre made significant accomplishments:

280 businesses	Inquired with the program
170 businesses	Within Barrie contacted to participate; remaining 110 from Simcoe County were referred to alternate services



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123 businesses	Were eligible and received support from the Squad to increase digital skills
4.6 hours	Supporting each business, on average
\$35,000 Additional funding	Received directly by 14 businesses, through OBIAA Digital Transformation Grant
30 businesses on Dunlop Street	Received support during downtown streetscaping construction
256 people	Attended 4 online learning sessions, launched at beginning of pandemic isolation health measures
2 spin-off programs	Developed in COVID-19 response efforts: Going Digital (Barrie), and Digital Main Street & Beyond (Simcoe County)
100%	All Squad members became successfully established as full-time entrepreneurs

Many participating businesses shared they were better prepared to endure COVID-19 shut-downs because of their work with the Squad. In Recovery Plan consultations, one business stated that prior to meeting with the DSS they had zero online presence. Through the Squad's coaching and support, the business built a new website, small ecommerce shop, and active social media channels. These foundational pieces helped them act quickly when closures were mandated: the owner was immediately able to expand their ecommerce shop to sell all products online, and communicate updates with their loyal customer base through social media.

The DSS program also helped the City immediately launch COVID-19 economic response efforts, with the first business support program from the Economic Recovery Task Force: Going Digital. This spin-off program re-deployed the Squad members and utilized their expertise, network, and frontline visibility to connect businesses across the city with local digital agencies. With this program, 53 businesses received immediate support, with a total of \$4576 investment by the City.

Next Steps

A final report has been submitted to the granting agency at OBIAA outlining program results.

The OBIAA has received new funding from the Government of Canada to open a second round of the DSS program. Applications open in July 2020, and service delivery will conclude in February 2021. The Economic & Creative Development Department is preparing to submit a request, and will provide an update to Council if funding is successful.

APPENDIX A – DIGITAL MAIN STREET PROGRAM SERVICE AREAS

