

## Case Study: Northumberland Economic Recovery Task Force



### Interview Summary - July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020

#### 1. Participants:

- [Brendan Cunneen](#) and [Dan Borowec](#), Co-chairs for the Northumberland Economic Recovery Task Force.

#### 2. Northumberland's Economic Context

##### Key Sectors in Northumberland's economy

- |                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Micro and small businesses      | 4. Tourism – significant component of economy |
| 2. Agriculture and food processing | 5. Professional services                      |
| 3. Development and construction    | 6. Manufacturing                              |

##### Main Impacts from Covid-19 in Northumberland's Economy

- Across the County there were areas that did not have access to high speed internet. For example in the manufacturing sector, 25% of the workforce was sent home but half of them ended up going back to work because they couldn't connect to internet.
- People were not feeling safe with face to face interactions. The clients wanted to shop on line. Businesses, especially the small ones, were not online. Or they needed to enhance their online and social media presence.
- Issues related to child care for people re-integration to work and workers' mental health.



### **3. About the Task Force**

**Vision:** Private sector driven initiative facilitated through Economic Development.

**Model:** 2 tier structure

**Task Force:**

- Two co-chairs: private and public sectors.
- Representatives of each of the six key economic sectors, business associations (e.g. Chamber of Commerce), key community stakeholders, Northumberland’s Ward.

**Working groups:**

- Six working groups representing the key sectors in the region.
- 63 business owners representing around 250 businesses.
- Representatives from the public sector, non-for-profits and community stakeholders.
- The working groups provided information up to the Task Force.

**Outcomes:** Six recommendations

1. Tackle broadband deficits
2. Power the transition to online
3. Fuel consumer confidence
4. Enhance the PPE supply chain
5. Invest in workforce mental health
6. Develop targeted economic recovery actions



**Next steps:**

Although the stakeholders do not think the Task Force will continue to exist as a formal group, the private sector wants to keep engaging to provide comments and recommendations as local economic recovery moves forward.

### **4. Learnings and Recommendations:**

**Challenges:**

- Individual organizations might have different priorities, potentially competing agendas but when context was provided and explanations were heard, the stakeholders came along.
- There was concern from some stakeholders that not all the key points suggested by them were taken into account by the Task Force. The stakeholders were informed that the recommendations were drafts, the term “living document” was used.
- In a crisis situation, time is not our friend; we needed to move things along.
- There is Zoom fatigue after a while. Many of us recognize the value of human contact.

**Benefits of multi-stakeholder engagement:**

- The recommendations were addressing similar issues across sectors.
- The presence of the Ward provided a linkage to the political world.
- Opportunity for leveraging dollars.
- Support from municipal staff helped to identify problems in specific communities very quickly.

**Value of having a private sector driven initiative**

- The voices of the businesses were heard.
- The recommendations were directly targeted at the needs of businesses.
- The business community is taking ownership of the implementation of the recommendations to help the County come out of the pandemic.
- The process was fast (from mid-April to end of June) as opposed to a Council led initiative that might move slower.
- The private sector agreeing to come back if needed was a validation of the process.

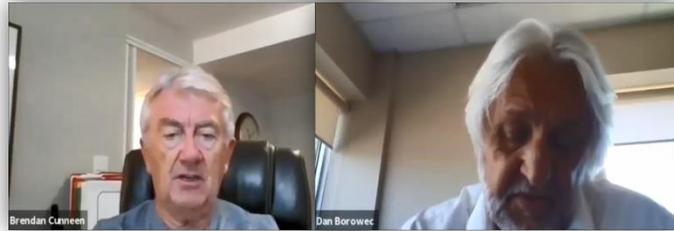


**Learnings/Recommendations:**

- Making it a private sector driven initiative was key to get the level of involvement that we got and getting the level of commitment in the implementation of the recommendations.
- The ultimate beneficiary has to be the business community because they are the ones that are employing the people and unless we have those people back to work, you are not going to have your economy recovered.
- The participants were happy to present an opinion, review some ideas, and move forward with an actionable item as opposed to get caught up in a heavily bureaucratic process.
- We didn't need to re-invent the wheel. There are already programs that are available to address many of the identified needs but sometimes people are not aware of them or they don't know where to go to get them.
- People put their community first; they said *how can I help?* People left their personal agendas and egos at the door and we had the job done.

**For more information:**

[Watch the complete interview here](#)



Visit the [Northumberland Economic Recovery Task Force Website](#)

Read the [Task Force Recommendations Final Report](#)

**Other resources on Rural Economic Recovery from Covid-19:**

[ON Regional Economic Development - Examples of Economic Recovery Teams](#)

[CRRF Rural Insight Series: Supporting Rural Economic Recovery and Resilience after Covid-19](#)

**About the Rural Rebound Initiative:**

In order to accelerate a rural renaissance from Covid-19, the [Rural Ontario Institute](#) is collecting, curating and sharing stories featuring positive examples of innovations drawn from across rural Ontario.

The [Rural Rebound](#) section of the ROI website showcases these stories and provides links to other useful resources and tools.

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**\*Photo credit:** <https://www.northumberlandtourism.com/en/index.aspx>