

Town of Whitby

Staff Report

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Report Title: Ready Set Future: Durham Region's Five-Year Economic Development and Tourism Strategy and Action Plan

Report to: Committee of the Whole

Date of meeting: March 6, 2023

Report Number: CAO 08-23

Department(s) Responsible:

Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

Submitted by:

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Acknowledged by M. Gaskell, Chief Administrative Officer

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1. Recommendation:

1. That Report CAO 08–23 be received for information.

2. Highlights:

- On December 21, 2022, Durham Region approved a new five-year Economic Development and Tourism Strategy and Action Plan, 2023-2027 Ready Set Future: A PLACE Blueprint for Durham.
- The Town of Whitby's 2022-2026 Economic Development Strategy aligns with and complements the goals and objectives of the Region's Strategy and Action Plan, and the Economic Development teams from the Town and Region will continue to collaborate to grow the local economy.

3. Background:

The Region's prior Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan, endorsed by Regional Council in 2017, reached the end of its five-year timeframe. It is outdated, and much has changed in the past five years. The global pandemic has permanently altered the nature of work, the pace of innovation globally is accelerating, and Durham's demographics and economy are evolving rapidly. Good news stories consistently emerge of the incredible advancements

throughout Durham's economy. A new bold, transformative, and forward-looking strategy was needed to set the course of regional economic development for the coming five years.

A comprehensive analysis was commissioned to review and consider economic and demographic data, local economic reports, and research and to explore the most impactful global drivers of change. This research and analysis were used to identify high-value opportunities to grow the regional economy.

The data analysis and global drivers of change were used to frame the challenge: "What does economic success look like in the near term (five years) and the long term (30 years)?" Collaborative sessions were held to identify and develop shared economic aspirations, which included over 80 of the Region's economic partners. The Region collaborated with economic development staff from Durham's area municipalities of Ajax, Brock, Clarington, Oshawa, Pickering, Scugog, Uxbridge, and Whitby, as well as post-secondary institutions; major employers; entrepreneurs; the Chambers of Commerce and Boards of Trade; Durham Workforce Authority; the Mississaugas of Scugog Island; BACD; the Arts, Cultural, and Creative Industries; BIAs; the Innovation Community (including Spark Centre, 1855 Accelerator and OPEN.Innovate); Central Counties Tourism; and other internal Regional Departments.

In collaboration with these partners, four long-term aspirations for Durham's economic future were formed, and measures of success were identified. The new strategy places Durham residents at its centre, with activities aligned with the overall goal of improving the long-term economic prosperity of Durham residents.

The Steering Committee met throughout the strategy development process and created goals for each long-term aspiration. For each goal area, action items were generated to be undertaken by the Economic Development and Tourism Division over the coming five years. These actions will send the Region confidently toward achieving its economic development aspirations.

4. Discussion:

Ready Set Future endeavours to support the creation of economic opportunities for people of diverse backgrounds, identities, abilities, lifestyles, and life stages while aiming to create an inclusive, prosperous future for everyone. The strategy places Durham's residents at its centre.

The Strategic Vision is that "Durham's distinct cultural identity and its vibrant and diverse downtowns will be magnets for talent and investment, and the region's innovation community will be known for solving global challenges."

The 'PLACE'-based economic aspirations for Durham, 30 years in the future, are:

- a) PEOPLE: Durham will be a leader in Ontario for workforce skill and education attainment
- b) LOCATION: Durham will capitalize on the potential for strong intensification and renewal in urban cores and grow vibrancy and diversity in the downtowns

- c) ACCELERATION: Durham's innovative businesses will continue to solve global challenges
- d) CREATIVITY: Durham will have a distinct, creative, and cultural identity for its vibrant base of creative businesses, cultural institutions, galleries, entertainment venues, and homegrown talent
- e) ENABLERS: Collaboration, resourcing, and metrics will enable success

Local Alignment

The Town of Whitby's 2022-2026 Economic Development Strategy and the Destination Whitby Tourism Strategy 2022-2025 were developed a full calendar year prior to the completion of the Region's Ready Set Future Economic Development strategy. The Region of Durham considered opportunities for alignment and coordination with area municipal strategies, and therefore, the strategies align well. From a policy context, Ready Set Future aims to create an environment that contributes to the success of the lower-tier municipalities.

Many goals identified in Ready Set Future align with or support the Town of Whitby's economic development and tourism activities. The following summary highlights goals in the Region's Ready Set Future Economic Development Strategy and explains how these align with the Town of Whitby's current Economic Development Strategy and Tourism Strategy.

Goal 1.1 Identify future talent requirements of Durham businesses and skills gaps in key priority sectors.

Throughout the execution of the Town of Whitby's Business Retention and Expansion surveys in 2022, a common theme from local businesses was the difficulty they were facing in hiring skilled talent. This goal would support local businesses in creating talent pipelines that can support local businesses.

Goal 1.2: Unlock the potential of women in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Trades/Technical (STEMT) and foster workforce diversity. Encourage inclusive talent development to enable underrepresented groups to invest in skills and education.

Whitby's Economic Development section embraces the concept of Local Economic Development that focuses on empowering traditionally underrepresented groups. This Goal aligns with local goals to develop a BIPOC fellowship program pilot, develop a Whitby professionals and entrepreneurs newcomers club, and host local community job fairs.

Goal 1.4: Attract and retain talent: Develop programs to attract skilled workers into Durham.

It is planned that Whitby's Economic Development team will develop a local resident attraction strategy in 2025.

Goal 2.3: Magnetic downtowns: Cultivate vibrant and diverse downtowns, to create magnets for talent and creative businesses.

Downtowns and Lifestyle has been identified as one of the key sectors within the Town of Whitby. Whitby Economic Development will be working to support the sector by developing sector meetups and planned vacant storefront animations. The Town's Creative Communities section also supports work undertaken in Downtowns and Tourism more generally through placemaking, cultural activations, and culinary tourism opportunities.

Goal 3.1: Strengthen the innovation community: Support the creation of flexible workspace and tailored programs to encourage start-ups tackling global challenges.

Goal 3.3: Build Durham's reputation for innovation to solve global challenges.

The work in Goals 3.1 and 3.3 is strongly aligned with Pillar 4: Foster Municipal Innovation of the Town's Economic Development Strategy which focuses on strengthening the local innovation ecosystem. This work includes designating Whitby as a Centre for Government Technology and implementing programs to support the Centre.

Goal 3.4: Attract domestic and international inward investment into Durham's priority sectors.

The Town of Whitby currently works with Invest Durham to respond to investment inquiries as they arise. The Town has developed a response protocol that utilizes branded sector profiles and general information. In addition, this protocol ensures that we follow up with prospective investors at 3-, 6-, and 12-month intervals.

Goal 4.1: Urban excitement and country charm: Build the Durham Tourism brand by promoting attractions and experiences that align with brand principles.

The Town of Whitby is developing a tourism microsite that will further build upon and support Durham Tourism promotions and storytelling. This website will build out Whitby's six key tourism sectors (Nautical, Sports, Family, Culinary, Wellness, and Cultural tourism) and create tourism itineraries for destination development. In addition, the Town aims to raise the profile of Whitby's tourism sector by leveraging travel and blog influencers to generate local content.

Goal 4.2: Strengthen Quality of Place: Undertake activities that improve Durham's Quality of Place metrics.

The Town is working with Central Counties Tourism to expand upon the 2019 tourism metrics through visitor data for key sectors. This information can be shared with the Region and tourism partners and businesses to help expand promotional opportunities and measure future market growth. Furthermore, a tourism asset gap analysis will be undertaken to identify opportunities for products/experiences and infrastructure enhancements in

the community (i.e., signage, visitor centre). The Town will also partner in a First Impressions Community Exchange program to discover how well Whitby serves its visitors.

Goal 4.3 Champion inclusive tourism: Pursue tourism initiatives which are diverse, accessible, and inclusive.

The Town will help local businesses and stakeholders become 'tourism ready' through online resources and training workshops such as the Safe Travels Stamp. The Town is also investing in photos and video assets to capture diverse imagery that promotes an inclusive and inviting tourism landscape.

Goal 4.4: Drive prosperity through local love: Prioritize activities with high potential to drive spending to locally owned and operated businesses and increase overnight stays.

This goal aligns well with work undertaken through the Town's Culture Plan 2021-2031 and Tourism Strategy such as the new [Arts and Culture](#) microsite, which showcases local artists, galleries, cultural spaces, and the [Whitby Arts Trail](#) as well as the launch of the [Digital Food Guide](#) in 2022 to promote Whitby's culinary and brewery scene.

5. Financial Considerations:

None

6. Communication and Public Engagement:

Both the Town of Whitby and the Region of Durham undertook extensive community consultation to develop their Economic Development Strategies, including establishing Steering Committees with representatives from businesses to guide the development of the Strategies.

7. Input from Departments/Sources:

None

8. Strategic Priorities:

At a Regional level, Ready Set Future is the primary Regional strategy and action plan to deliver on 'Goal 3: Economic Prosperity' of the Durham Region Strategic Plan 2020-2024, which is "To build a strong and resilient economy that maximizes opportunities for business and employment growth, innovation and partnership."

Specifically, the priorities of Goal 3 are:

3.1 Position Durham Region as the location of choice for business

3.2 Leverage Durham's prime geography, social infrastructure, and strong partnerships to foster economic growth

3.3 Enhance communication and transportation networks to better connect people and move goods more effectively

3.4 Capitalize on Durham's strengths in key economic sectors to attract high-quality jobs

3.5 Provide a supportive environment for agriculture and agri-food industries

9. Attachments:

Attachment 1 - Durham Region 2023-2027 Economic Development and Tourism Strategy and Action Plan