

Town of Whitby Staff Report

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Report Title: 2023 Economic Development Strategy Update

Report to: Committee of the Whole

Date of meeting: January 15, 2024

Report Number: CAO 04-24

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 04-24 be received for information; and
2. That the updates described herein be consolidated into an updated Economic Development Strategy.

2. Highlights:

- As part of the 2022-2026 Economic Development Strategy, staff had included an action item to review the strategy every 18 months.
- This report provides that update and incorporates the economic development action items identified in the Town's Community Strategic Plan.
- The report highlights a list of recommended updates to the strategy that would discontinue, shift or add action items based on feedback mechanisms.
- The proposed updates include the addition of an action item to develop a Business Webinar Series to support community learning as identified as a key theme across multiple Business Retention and Expansion Surveys.

3. Background:

In November 2021, the Town of Whitby adopted a new 5-year Economic Development Strategy, "Shaping the Future: 2022 to 2026 Economic Development Strategy". As part of this strategy, action item 15 under Pillar 1: Strengthening Economic Development Capacity recommended the establish of an 18-month Economic Development Strategy review. This review is undertaken to ensure that the strategy continues to meet the needs of the community and Council. This report constitutes the Economic Development Strategy Review.

4. Discussion:

Strategy Review

Developed over the course of 2021, the Town of Whitby's Economic Development Strategy identified the following Mission, Vision, Sectors of Interest, and Strategic Pillars for the work undertaken by the economic development team.

Mission

"To Inspire a strong local economy and economic growth which is vibrant, sustainable, diverse and inclusive."

It is not contemplated that the Mission be changed at this time. It continues to be reflective of the work undertaken by the economic development team.

Vision

"The Town of Whitby will create a strong local economy through collaboration to facilitate innovation, productivity, inclusion and balanced economic growth."

It is not contemplated that the Vision be changed at this time. It continues to identify an aspirational community that the economic development team will work towards.

Sectors of Interest

- Information and Communications Technology (ICT);
- Professional and Technical Services;
- Advanced Manufacturing; and
- Downtowns and Lifestyle.

A minor administrative change is being recommended to rename Professional and Technical Services to Professional, Scientific and Technical Services to better align with the established nomenclature used by Statistics Canada.

Strategic Pillars

- PILLAR 1: Strengthen Economic Development Capacity
- PILLAR 2: Become Storytellers
- PILLAR 3: Embrace and Inspire Community Economic Development
- PILLAR 4: Foster Municipal Innovation

No changes are being contemplated with regards to the Strategic Pillars identified in the strategy.

Action Items

The 18-month review primarily focuses on the Action Items contained within the Economic Development Strategy. This work was driven by three key feedback mechanisms: the Town of Whitby's 2023 Community Strategic Plan, Council interviews and Business Retention and Expansion surveys administered by Economic Development staff. In addition, staff are recommending some administrative changes to the strategy described below. The final consolidated changes are included in Attachment 1: Economic Development Action Plan Update.

Town of Whitby's 2023 Community Strategic Plan (CSP)

The development of a Community Strategic Plan was identified as a top priority for Whitby Council. The CSP provides a roadmap for how Town Council and staff work together to deliver on community priorities over the next four years. It was developed with feedback provided by over 3,000 individuals both online and in person. Identified in the Community Strategic Plan are 11 actions which fall primarily within "*Pillar 3: Whitby's Economy – Innovative & Competitive*". Below is an overview of the action items, and where they will be incorporated within the updated Economic Development Strategy.

CSP Action Item	Recommended updates in Economic Development Strategy	Economic Development Strategy Language
3.1.2 Expand Whitby's commercial and industrial tax base	Will be added to a new list of ongoing initiatives under Pillar 1: Strengthen Economic Development Capacity	Expand Whitby's commercial and industrial tax base
3.1.4 Support green economy, agriculture and agri-business	Will be included under Pillar 3: Embrace and Inspire Community Economic Development	Launch programming to support green economy, agriculture and agri-business
3.2.1 Attract investment for hotel and convention centre	Will be included under Pillar 1: Strengthen Economic Development Capacity	Attract a hotel and convention centre to Whitby by 2026.
3.2.2 Develop tools to support collaborative workspaces and home-based businesses	Will be included under Pillar 3: Embrace and Inspire Community Economic Development	Develop tools to support collaborative workspaces and home-based businesses

3.2.3 Expand the business retention and expansion program	Will be added to a new list of ongoing initiatives under Pillar 1: Strengthen Economic Development Capacity	Expand the business retention and expansion program to include at least 50 meetings a year
3.2.4 Implement and streamline municipal tools and processes to attract high-value, employment-generating businesses	Will be included under Pillar 1: Strengthen Economic Development Capacity	Implement and streamline municipal tools and processes to attract high-value, employment-generating businesses
3.3.1 Develop and implement Intelligent City Strategy and Action Plan that leverages collaboration and technology to support innovative solutions	Will be included under Pillar 4: Foster Municipal Innovation replacing the existing Pillar 4 action item “Develop a Smart Cities Strategy”	Develop and implement Intelligent City Strategy and Action Plan that leverages collaboration and technology to support innovative solutions
3.3.2 Increase supports offered to tech-based businesses in partnership with Whitby's technology accelerator (1855 Whitby)	Will be included under Pillar 4: Foster Municipal Innovation	Increase supports offered to tech-based businesses in partnership with Whitby's technology accelerator (1855 Whitby)
3.3.3 Leverage grant funding to support broadband and Smart City initiatives	Will be included under Pillar 4: Foster Municipal Innovation	Leverage grant funding to support broadband and Smart City initiatives
1.1.6 Work with partners to increase access to family physicians	Will be included under Pillar 3: Embrace and Inspire Community Economic Development	Work with partners to increase access to family physicians

It should be noted that the Community Strategic Plan Action item 3.1.1 “Continue to implement the Economic Development Strategy that focuses on the following sectors: information and communications technology, professional and technical services, advanced manufacturing, and downtowns and lifestyle” will not be added to the economic development strategy as its implementation is inherent in the strategy.

Business Retention and Expansion Surveys

Since launching in June 2022, the economic development team has met with over 70 local businesses as part of the formalized Business Retention and Expansion Survey

program. These meetings reinforced many of the findings of the original Economic Development Strategy and provided an additional action item for the update.

Many businesses shared that they were looking for additional networking opportunities. This provided the staff with an opportunity to invite local businesses to attend upcoming sector-based meetups (Action Item 2.7) and discuss shared challenges. In addition, it provides additional justification to continue building a community around the Whitby Professionals and Entrepreneurs Newcomers club (Action Item 3.2).

Another challenge that was identified related to the difficulty of attracting and retaining both skilled and unskilled labour. Identified in the Strategy (Action Item 3.5) is the development of community job fairs within the municipality. This initiative was identified for completion in 2024, and funding for this action item has been identified in the 2024 budget.

Enhanced learning opportunities

Throughout the Business Retention and Expansion meetings, staff heard a recurring theme from our business community that there was a need for more knowledge. Topics included municipal procurement, business succession planning, and keys to starting a business in Whitby. Staff believe there is an opportunity to create a webinar series on these topics, which could be expanded over time. Staff are proposing the creation of a webinar series in 2024 as part of the updated Economic Development Strategy.

Action Item	Recommended updates in Economic Development Strategy	Economic Development Strategy Language
Develop Business Webinar Series	Will be included under Pillar 2: Become Story Tellers	Develop Business Webinar Series

Action Items to be removed from the Economic Development Strategy

Based on shifting priorities, budget constraints, feedback received from Council and in order to offset the new action items being implemented in the updated strategy, staff are recommending the removal of the following action items:

- Investigate and establish an in-kind sponsorship program
- Establish a Whitby Bus Rapid Transit business support strategy
- Define, brand and market industrial/employment areas with signage, gateways and profiles
- Develop social media and public relations strategy
- Establish an Economic Development Fund
- BIPOC fellowship program pilot
- Develop a Resident Attraction Strategy

- Investigate the feasibility of a BIPOC Business Incubator or Accelerator
- Develop bicycle/scooter share program
- Crowdfund business opportunities for pop-up shops

Administrative Changes

Action items that have been implemented will be removed from the existing list of actions items and will be moved to a new list for completed action items. This is included as Attachment 2: Completed Initiatives List. Where an action item has been implemented, but requires ongoing work, it will be removed from the existing lists of action items and will instead be moved to a new list specific to ongoing initiatives. These action items will be renamed to demonstrate an ongoing approach. This is included as Attachment 3: Ongoing Initiatives List and Action Items will be updated as a result of these changes.

Timelines will be amended where a project is delayed, or where funding is not anticipated to be available in the anticipated budget year. Updates will be made to the Mayoral introduction and lists of members of Council and Municipal staff.

Within six weeks of the adoption of this report, staff will make the changes to the Strategy. Once updated, it will be circulated to Council via the Council Information Index, and uploaded to the Town's website.

5. Financial Considerations:

To continue to implement the Economic Development strategy in 2024, a number of Decision Items have been included for Council consideration as part of the 2024 budget process, including:

- \$10,000 to support the ongoing implementation of the Town's Economic Indicators page (found at <https://www.whitby.ca/en/work/why-whitby.aspx>)
- \$5,000 to support the launch of a Local Business Week in Whitby,
- \$5,000 to support the launch of a Community Job Fair in Whitby, and
- \$122,563 which reflects the conversion of the Temporary Economic Development Officer to a permanent position.

Moving forward with any of the above initiatives is subject to Council approval of the funding in the 2024 budget.

6. Communication and Public Engagement:

The 5-year Economic Development Strategy was developed with engagement from the Town of Whitby's business community. Staff utilized a third party to lead workshops, 1-on-1 interviews as well as on-line surveys with external partners. The work was led by a Steering Committee comprised of local businesses and support organizations.

The strategy update was influenced by the Town's 2023 Community Strategic Plan which was developed with feedback provided by over 3,000 individuals as well as the

Business Retention and Expansion survey which consulted over 70 local businesses since its launch.

Economic Development continues to collaborate with external teams to support the implementation of the 5-year Economic Development Strategy. Further, the development of the e-newsletter was supported by content provided by the Whitby Chamber of Commerce, the Business Advisory Centre of Durham, as well as other local post-secondary institutions.

7. Input from Departments/Sources:

Economic Development continues to collaborate with internal teams to support the implementation of the 5-year Economic Development Strategy. This work includes partnerships with Planning and Development, Creative Communities, Recreation, Facilities, and the Whitby Public Library. In addition, Economic Development staff will continue to work with external organizations such as the Whitby Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Whitby BIA, 1855 Accelerator, the Region of Durham, and the Business Advisory Centre of Durham to implement the strategy.

8. Strategic Priorities:

This initiative is consistent with the Town's Community Strategic Plan, specifically Strategic Pillar 3: Whitby's Economy. Elements of Economic Development touch upon each of the three Objectives:

- 3.1 Accelerate progress, create jobs, and drive local economy
- 3.2 Attract and retain businesses and industry
- 3.3 Promote innovation and build competitive advantage.

Action 3.1.1 Continue to implement the Economic Development Strategy that focuses on the following sectors: information and communications technology, professional and technical services, advanced manufacturing, and downtowns and lifestyle directly links to the implementation of the Town's 5-year Economic Development Strategy.

All work undertaken by the Economic Development Division endeavours to be completed meeting accessibility and sustainability standards.

9. Attachments:

Attachment 1: Economic Development Action Plan Update

Attachment 2: Completed Initiatives List

Attachment 3: Ongoing Initiatives List