

# Town of Whitby

## Staff Report

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### Report Title: Economic Development Overview

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**Report to:** Council

**Date of meeting:** May 13, 2024

**Report Number:** CAO 29-24

**Department(s) Responsible:**  
Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

**Submitted by:**  
Sarah Klein, Director, Strategic Initiatives

**Acknowledged by M. Gaskell,  
Chief Administrative Officer**

**For additional information, contact:**  
Paul Pirri, Senior Manager, Economic  
Development

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### 1. Recommendation:

1. That Report CAO 29-24 be received for information.

### 2. Highlights:

- This report provides an overview of the Economic Development portfolio at the Town of Whitby and provides an account of the various work projects and initiatives undertaken by the team.

### 3. Background:

The work of the Economic Development team is driven by the Community Strategic Plan which includes 11 of the 62 action items that are led by the Economic Development team. The implementation of the Economic Development Strategy is one of the actions identified in the Community Strategic Plan. The Town of Whitby's Economic Development team is responsible for two portfolios: Advertising and Sponsorship, and Economic Development. The Economic Development portfolio can be subdivided into three sub portfolios: Business Support and Advocacy, Investor, and Community Relations. Below is an overview of each portfolio, current projects, and outcomes of this work.

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## Advertising and Sponsorship

Economic Development staff are responsible for administering the entire Advertising and Sponsorship portfolio across the municipality. This work is supported by the Town's Advertising and Sponsorship Sales Manager role. This includes the entire sales cycle from prospecting, proposal development, negotiation, project management, production/installation of signage, business retention and relationship management. Advertising and Sponsorship focuses on Paid Facility Advertising and Special Event Sponsorship.

**Paid Facility Advertising:** The Town engages in Paid Facility Advertising to offset the costs of recreational programming. Paid Facility Advertising represents the sale of capital assets within municipal facilities such as rink board and digital advertising, backlit signage and naming rights sponsorships. Currently, all arenas within each location have been sold. At Iroquois Park Sports Centre, these include Scotiabank Rink 1, Whitby Orthodontics Arena 2, Owasco Arena 3, CUPE Arena 5 and Booster Juice Arena 6. At McKinney Centre, these include Canadian Tire Arena 1, Thermo Fisher Arena 2, Whitby Toyota Arena 3 and McKinney Youth Room powered by Booster Juice.

**Special Event Sponsorship:** This includes the sale of sponsorship to offset the costs of municipally run events and initiatives. This includes the Annual Mayor & Council Golf Classic which provides funds to support the Mayor's Community Development Fund. Examples of Special Events include: Canada Day, Movies in the Park, Music in the Park, Harvest Festival, Whitby Lights the Night, and the Mayor & Council Golf Classic. Other smaller items that fall within this category include youth events (Youth Week: Art Attack, Celebrating Youth Awards), 55+ events (Seniors Month), and sustainability sponsorships (EV Charging Stations, Community Plantings).

For the period 2023 to April 2024, Advertising and Sponsorship generated sales of approximately \$610,000 with \$335,000 from facilities contracts and \$275,000 from special events contracts.

## Economic Development – Business Support and Advocacy

The Business Support and Advocacy portfolio is supported by a contract Economic Development Officer (EDO) role. The mandate of this work is to engage in relationship building with existing businesses to better support and advocate for local businesses.

In June of 2022, Economic Development launched the Town's first formal Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) program. To date, staff have met with over 80 local businesses to discuss opportunities and challenges related to operating a business in Whitby. This work enables Economic Development to:

- a. gain direct feedback from business owners in Whitby on how we can improve policies and programs to better support the business community,
- b. collect and track vital local business data, and
- c. provide or connect businesses with resources that could help their business grow.

This work has helped Economic Development staff advocate for a new transit stop to support local businesses, identified new locations for businesses whose leases are up for renewal, or made introductions to other municipal programs such as the Business Spotlight program. As a result of this work, staff have launched a webinar series (more information below) to provide additional resources identified as a need to the business community. The following are testimonials that have arisen from these meetings.

*“We appreciate your support and following up to ensure we are well looked after, and we are happy to be able to keep our offices in Whitby.”*

- Andrea Holland, GHD

*“At the beginning I was a little skeptical about being part of the of the Business Retention and Expansion program. However, the experience I’ve had following my meeting with Ahsan has been exceptional. Ahsan has been exceptional facilitating communication with key players within the Town of Whitby and other businesses. Having that open line of communication is usually very hard to develop due to the high volume of requests that the Town receives. I strongly suggest being part of this program, it will be beneficial for your business and will help build relationship with other companies.”*

- Antonio Murillo, North American Steel Equipment Inc.

### **Economic Development – Investor Relations**

The Investor Relations portfolio is supported by a full-time Economic Development Officer (EDO) role. The mandate of this work is to track and respond to investment inquiries across the municipality. It requires the incumbent to build relationships with various realtors, investment organizations and other levels of government.

#### **Investment Inquiry Servicing**

Economic Development Staff respond to inbound investment inquiries regularly. Typically, investment inquiries are made directly to Staff, or sourced through Invest Durham (Region of Durham Planning & Economic Development – Business Development Team), Invest Ontario, the Mayor and Council’s Office, and Whitby Planning & Development. Investment leads are also generated through Whitby’s BRE program where we can identify and support local businesses looking to expand within the community.

Some examples of recent investment inquiries include:

- Life sciences company looking to purchase or lease 175,000 – 200,000 Sq Ft of industrial space. \$370 million capex with an estimate of 120 jobs.
- European manufacturing company looking to establish operations in Southern Ontario. Looking to purchase or develop 230,000 Sq Ft of industrial space.
- Logistics company looking for 15-18 acres to develop a new cold storage facility. Preference for HWY 401 corridor.
- Local financial services company looking for 10,000 – 15,000 Sq Ft office space. Ideally close to amenities and public transit routes.

For each investment inquiry, Staff provide a detailed location package that includes available sites, location features, contact information and photos. To further support the investment decision and when a location is shortlisted, Staff host a familiarization tour (FAM tour) to showcase Whitby including the available sites, tours of post-secondary institutions, and facilitate connections to local companies within supply chains.

### Investor Relations

Economic Development Staff actively work to build relationships with the investor community to understand the various factors influencing an investment decision and increasing the likelihood of securing future investment in our community. Staff also work with the Invest Durham business development team to help position Whitby as a destination for investment. Some examples of investor relations include:

- 3-6-12 Month Investment Tracking: Staff follow-up on a 3-6-12 month basis to offer continued site selection support. This allows Staff to maintain active dialogue with the prospective investor and understand decision criteria.
- Development Memos: Staff provide comments on all non-residential development proposals with the goal of connecting potential investors or local businesses to development projects.
- Proactive Investor Outreach: Staff attend trade shows (i.e. Collision Conference) and support inbound investor delegations to the Region (i.e. United Kingdom, Pakistan). The majority of proactive investor outreach is done in collaboration with Invest Durham.

### Investor Tools

From the availability of data and statistics, to investment ready lands, to the trust of having a project advocate at the municipal level, there are many differing factors that affect the decisions of investors. To support Whitby's investment attraction efforts and increase the prospect of securing investment, Staff have developed a series of publicly accessible and internal tools. Some examples of our investor tools include:

- Why Whitby Application: a web-based application that provides business owners and investors with economic data to support investment decisions and conduct market research analysis.
- Employment Land Investment Readiness Application: an interactive platform for prospective investors to browse available employment sites. The platform won a national marketing excellence award through the Economic Development Association of Canada (EDAC).
- Industrial Development Pipeline (internal tool): an internal tracking system for industrial development projects planned or underway. Allows Staff to monitor key industrial projects within a central database.
- Concierge Program: priority development stream for qualifying non-residential development projects that offer a significant economic opportunity for the community.

### Investor Relations Outcomes

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- Responded to 62 Investment Inquiries since Jan 2023
  - Successfully retained 3 companies within key economic sectors; GHD, Deighton & Associates, 4Sight Utilities Inc.
  - Supported 2 international delegations with Invest Durham – United Kingdom and Pakistan
  - Over 9 million square-feet of new industrial space planned or under construction
  - Actively working with several local and international companies considering the Town of Whitby as an investment location

### **Economic Development – Community Relations**

The Community Relations portfolio is supported by a full-time Economic Development Coordinator (EDC) role. The mandate of this role is to work to promote and support the local economic ecosystem. This role is heavily focused on relationship management and community building.

#### **Community Relations Key Projects**

**Economic Development e-Newsletter:** Launched in 2022, the Town's award-winning Economic Development e-Newsletter is focused on telling stories, and providing tools and support to build the local economic ecosystem. To ensure Canada's anti-spam legislation (CASL) compliance, old contact lists were deleted, and a new mailing list was built from the ground up. Over the last two years, the contact list has grown to over 770 contacts. Each newsletter utilizes the same concise format, a local business profile, 3-4 announcements that are valuable to business owners (i.e. Grant and other program announcements), and 4 local entrepreneurship focused events. Staff hold a monthly call for content which ensures that local support organizations have the opportunity to contribute content to the newsletter.

The Economic Development e-Newsletter continues to see metrics that far outweigh industry averages. These include:

- Open Rate: 65.4% (2023 avg.) vs. 37.7% average for all industries (Constant Contact, 2024).
- Click Rate: 10% (2023 avg.) – vs 2% average for all industries (Constant Contact, 2024).

**Business Spotlight Program:** In conjunction with the newsletter, the Economic Development team launched the Business Spotlight Program in May 2022. The program is focused on promoting and highlighting local businesses at all sizes and stages. At the start of the program, the articles were written exclusively by staff, however, staff have recently partnered with post-secondary institutions to have students interview and write the profiles. This has the benefit of providing marketing students with additional exposure and an opportunity to create a portfolio of work. Students who complete the profiles receive writing credits in the news articles. To date, 25 local businesses have had their stories shared through Business Spotlights which are shared

on both the Town's website (Whitby.ca/BusinessSpotlight) and Economic Development e-Newsletter.

These spotlights can be compiled together and reshared as part of a series or initiative. As an example, staff recently compiled previously written spotlights featuring women-owned businesses to create an article titled Breaking Barriers, Building Dream: Stories from Whitby's Women in Business. Staff currently have a waitlist of 24 businesses interested in participating and are working with post-secondary institutions to secure two co-op students to help work through this list. With increased capacity, staff hope to increase the number of spotlights in the monthly e-newsletter from one to two.

Web and Social: The Economic Development social media initiatives aim to foster community engagement and showcase the Town's diverse offerings to both residents and potential investors. The Economic Development team is currently on X (Twitter) at @WhitbyEcDev and the Town's Economic Development account has over 1,000 followers. It has garnered 54,444 impressions in 2023 and over 169 total organic posts.

In early 2024, the Economic Development team was given access to both the corporate LinkedIn and Facebook accounts which has enabled Economic Development to communicate with and engage a wider audience.

#### Community Relations Outcomes

Launched in 2022, the Town's award-winning Economic Development newsletter has now been distributed 25 times. It's included more than 75 local news stories and 100 events.

*"When your community stands behind you, supports you and acknowledges you- amazing things can happen! Through the Town of Whitby's Business Spotlight Program, I received unexpected recognition from RBC's Canadian Women Entrepreneur Awards. What shocked me most wasn't just the honour itself, but discovering that someone from our community, whom I've never met, took the time to read the article about me, and then nominate me for RBC's Women of Influence 2024. This individual's decision, sparked by our Town of Whitby Business Spotlight, underscores the program's ability to shine a giant spotlight on local businesses which not only helps a business be discovered but connects people together within our local community and beyond. It's a testament to the power of this program & how it can elevate & empower entrepreneurs & businesses by building a supportive network that goes beyond the local Whitby business community. I am so grateful for the opportunities that continue to unfold through the Town of Whitby's Business Spotlight Program. I highly encourage all business owners to participate in this outstanding program."*

- Melanie Pangan, RainSpark Media Group Inc.

#### Other Economic Development Programs

In addition to the regular and ongoing work highlighted above, the Economic Development team is also responsible for the management of special projects. These initiatives fall within the scope of the Senior Manager, Economic Development.

Project Planning, Management and Administration: The Senior Manager, Economic Development is responsible for overall project planning and administration for the team ensuring work plans align to complete the initiatives identified in both the Town of Whitby's Community Strategic Plan and Economic Development Strategy. The Senior Manager also supports all the initiatives outlined above when dealing with major investments, challenges or roadblocks. Economic Development is responsible for completing 11 of the 62 action items contained in the Community Strategic Plan.

Chamber of Commerce Liaison: A representative from Economic Development sits as an ex-officio member of the board of directors for the Whitby Chamber of Commerce. In addition, Economic Development staff have served as representatives on both the ConnXGEN (under 30) and Advocacy Committees.

#### 4. Discussion:

Economic Development is undertaking several new initiatives in 2024. These include:

**Advertising and Sponsorship Asset Strategy:** The Town has engaged a consultant to develop an Advertising and Sponsorship Asset Inventory and Valuation Strategy to guide future work. In short, this valuation will ensure that the municipality is selling the appropriate assets at comparable market value. The consultants have engaged in a review of existing municipal advertising and sponsorship assets, conducted benchmarking analysis and provided best practices and early recommendations. Staff are currently reviewing this work, with a presentation planned to be provided to Council in June 2024.

At the completion of the Advertising and Sponsorship Asset Strategy, the Town will identify new fair market pricing for existing assets as well as asset valuations for the new Whitby Sports Complex. This will provide assurance that the municipality will be maximizing sponsorship funding moving forward.

**Local Employment Week:** This new initiative will take place the week of June 17. The goal of the week is to engage in over 120 meetings with local businesses to thank them for operating their business in Whitby and gain insights on how we can continue to support them. Economic Development will be inviting municipal staff, Council and other representatives from the business community (Chamber, BIA, BACD) to participate in the process to better understand the needs of the business community. In teams of two, municipal and community representatives will be asking questions from a shortened version of the business visitations survey with a specific focused on general economy, labour concerns and transit infrastructure. These meetings will:

- a. build relationships with the existing business community, and enable staff to quickly recommend programs and services that could support the business community;
- b. identify candidates for future BRE surveys where more in-depth support is needed; and,
- c. identify trends within Whitby's employment ecosystem.

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The work will culminate in a report that outlines current economic challenges and supports needed. It will also enable the creation of data points that can be tracked from one year to the next.

**Employment Fair:** Staff are in the process of planning an employment fair to take place in the fall of 2024. This event was initially planned for the summer of 2024, however during the planning phase for the event it was identified that both the Whitby Chamber of Commerce, and the local MPs office were both envisioning similar events. To ensure a high likelihood of success, staff will be partnering with both groups to create a single event. Staff are happy to engage with any other partners who are interested in supporting this event.

**Webinars:** As a response to feedback provided through visits with local businesses, the Economic Development team began developing a webinar series. The first webinar took place in March of 2024 focusing on grant programs offered through Enbridge. A second webinar is planned on business succession planning. This training will be delivered by ImpactON (formerly the Cooperation Council of Ontario) and will focus both on traditional models of business succession planning, as well as more innovative approaches including the development of Employee Owned Trusts.

**Hotel and Banquet Centre:** Action 3.2.1 of Whitby's Community Strategic Plan outlines the action to *attract investment for a hotel and convention centre*. To date, staff have met with representatives from various hospitality groups to discuss their decision making process and interest in building in Whitby and have also developed marketing materials that support these conversations. As a result of these conversations, Town staff have been able to refine the vision for the event space. In the industry, a Convention Centre represents spaces like Metro Toronto Convention Centre, or the Palais de Congrès in Montreal. The vision for the space that the Town is looking to attract represents a banquet centre which would be a venue that could accommodate anywhere from 120-1,500 people. Staff are currently seeking quotes to develop a Hotel and Banquet centre feasibility study which could be used to identify the demand for this type of space. This document will be used to market opportunities within the Town. It is expected that this feasibility study will be completed by the fall.

**Physician Recruitment:** Action 1.1.6 of the Community Strategic Plan outlines the action to *work with partners to increase access to family physicians*. The Town has entered into a formal partnership with the Oshawa Clinic Group (OCG) to support hiring new family physicians to their new facility in Whitby. To this end, staff members have joined representatives from the OCG while attending employment fairs at post-secondary institutions (University of Toronto, Queen's University), as well as at industry trade shows (2023 Family Medicine Forum). In addition, staff are working with the Region of Durham on the implementation of the Durham Family Physician Recruitment Strategy. This has included engaging with students from the Queen's-Lakeridge Health MD Family Medicine Program.

## 5. Financial Considerations:



The Economic Development division has an approved staff complement of four (4). For the last several years, the Economic Development program has benefited from a contract Economic Development Officer that was not funded from the tax base (and is not included in the approved complement of 4 staff noted above). A budget Decision Item to convert the position to a permanent full-time position was not approved in the 2024 budget. For 2024, the position will be funded from other operating budget savings. If this position is not approved in future budgets, the division will phase-out the following projects from the Economic Development program:

- Business visitations (Business Retention and Expansion Program);
- Local business week;
- Employment fair; and,
- Newcomers and Professionals Club.

#### **6. Communication and Public Engagement:**

Both the Community Strategic Plan and the Economic Development Strategy were developed with extensive consultation with both the general public and business community.

Economic Development staff continue to engage regularly with the business community through business visitations, sector meetings and through social media and newsletter communications. Staff continue to engage with investors and community groups seeking to improve Whitby's economic landscape.

#### **7. Input from Departments/Sources:**

None.

#### **8. Strategic Priorities:**

The Work of the Economic Development Team contributes to Pillar 1: Whitby's Neighbourhoods – Safe, Healthy and Inclusive, and Pillar 3: Whitby's Economy - Innovative and Competitive of the Town's Community Strategic Plan. It further meets the following Objectives as outlined in the Community Strategic Plan:

- Objective 1.1: Improve community safety, health and well-being.
- Objective 3.1: Accelerate progress, create jobs, and drive local economic growth
- Objective 3.2: Attract and retain businesses and industry
- Objective 3.3: Promote innovation and build competitive advantage

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

#### **9. Attachments:**

None