

# Town of Whitby

## Staff Report

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### Report Title: 2025 Economic Development Strategy Update

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**Report to:** Committee of the Whole

**Date of meeting:** June 9, 2025

**Report Number:** CAO 12-25

**Department(s) Responsible:**

Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

**Submitted by:**

Sarah Klein, Deputy CAO

<b>Acknowledged by M. Gaskell, Chief Administrative Officer</b>
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**For additional information, contact:**

Karol Murillo Corrigan, Senior Manager,  
Economic Development, x4312

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#### 1. Recommendation:

1. That Report CAO 12-25 be received for information; and,
2. That Council approve the recommended updates to the Economic Development Strategy.

#### 2. Highlights:

- As part of the 2022-2026 Economic Development Strategy (EDS), staff provides an 18-month review to indicate progress to date and completed actions.
- The report highlights a list of recommended updates to the strategy that would shift, add, or remove action items based on feedback mechanisms and changes to the economic development portfolio.
- Recommended additions include a tariff-focused initiative and the recent Invest Whitby launch. Staff are recommending removing the Action related to designating Whitby as a centre for government technology.
- With these modifications, the Economic Development Strategy would include 24 Actions: one-third of which are complete, one-quarter currently underway, and the remainder scheduled to be addressed over the next 18 months.

### **3. Background:**

In November 2021, the Town of Whitby adopted a 5-year Economic Development Strategy, “Shaping the Future: 2022 to 2026 Economic Development Strategy.” A Key Action in the plan recommended the establishment of an 18-month Economic Development Strategy Review. This review ensures that the Economic Development Strategy (outlined below) continues to meet the needs of the community and Council.

#### **Economic Development Strategy Overview**

The Economic Development team is responsible for the implementation and tracking of the EDS and consists of the following positions:

- Senior Manager, Economic Development
- Economic Development Officer (2 positions)
- Advertising and Sponsorship Sales Manager

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.”

#### ***Vision***

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

#### ***Sectors of Interest***

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

#### ***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

#### ***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. In the 2024 update, 11 actions from the Community Strategic Plan were incorporated into the Economic Development Strategy.

#### 4. Discussion:

##### 18-month Economic Development Strategy Review

The last 18-month Economic Development Strategy Review to Council was in January 2024. At the conclusion of that reporting period, significant progress was underway with 23 actions requiring support to move forward and be successfully implemented.

Over the past 18 months, progress has continued and both priorities and economic pressures have evolved. As a result, staff recommend adding two Actions and removing one Action from the Economic Development Strategy, as outlined below. Pending Council approval, this will bring the total number of Actions in the EDS to 24. This review provides an update on the progress of the Actions, highlights those completed over the past 18 months, and outlines future key areas of focus.

##### **Economic Development Strategy – Action Plan Progress Update – June 2025**

Total Actions:	24
Completed:	8 actions (33%)
In Progress:	6 actions (25%)
Outstanding:	10 actions (42%)

One-third of actions have been completed, reflecting significant progress in the strategy. An additional 25% are in progress with continued efforts to advance them with 10 actions remaining outstanding. To maintain momentum, staff will be focused on accelerating progress items and addressing outstanding actions to ensure the remaining 16 items are completed within the next 18-month period.

#### Completed Actions

Below are some of the highlights of the 2024/2025 accomplishments in the EDS to date:

##### 1.1 Develop an Advertising and Sponsorship Strategy

- The Advertising and Sponsorship Strategy was approved in January 2025 and focused on revenue generation opportunities related to the naming rights of the new and existing facilities and the opportunity to enhance operational experience.

**1.3 Develop a Business Crisis Response Protocol**

- In 2024, emergency information materials were developed and distributed to local businesses. Staff will work towards improving materials and revising any key information related to emergency information and protocols.

**1.4 Establish 18-month Economic Development Strategy Review**

- This is the second 18-month review completed as directed in the last review update in January 2024. This review enables staff to review, realign or make alterations to the EDS if needed and/or based on the changing economic climate.

**2.4 Establish a Local Business Week**

- Whitby Local Business Week was held from June 17-21, 2024 where 230 Whitby businesses were surveyed. Businesses were visited and surveys were conducted by Economic Development staff along with the Mayor and members of Council, representatives from Fire, Building, and Strategic Initiatives, as well as the Business Advisory Centre of Durham (BACD) and the Whitby Chamber of Commerce.
- Survey respondents rated Whitby as a place to do business positively, with an average score of 4.2 out of 5, reflecting general satisfaction with the local business environment. The state of individual businesses was rated at 3.9, indicating that most businesses consider themselves to be in stable or good condition. However, respondents expressed concerns about the broader Canadian economy, which received a much lower average score of 2.3, suggesting significant uncertainty or dissatisfaction at the national level. Public transit service to businesses was rated at 3.6, pointing to moderate satisfaction but also potential areas for improvement in transportation accessibility.

**3.1 Host Community Job Fairs**

- The Economic Development team, in partnership with the Whitby Chamber of Commerce, MP Turnbull's office, and the Durham Region Unemployed Help Centre, hosted a job fair on September 14, 2024 at the Abilities Centre. Over 500 job seekers attended with over 21 businesses from Whitby and Durham Region registered for this event.
- Due to the success of the event, staff will work with community partners to deliver and improve the second offering of a Whitby Job Fair as this initiative continues to strengthen relationship with local businesses and provide opportunities for job seekers.

**3.3 Develop tools to support collaborative workspaces and home-based businesses**

- Launched a home-based business toolkit with a dedicated [website](#) to help expand and support these businesses.

**Business Retention and Expansion Program**

The Whitby Business Retention & Expansion (BRE) Program helps local businesses looking to expand or relocate within the Town of Whitby. Since launching in 2022, the Economic Team met with over 107 local businesses to gain valuable insight and feedback from established local businesses to help shape economic development programs and services. The following highlights from 2024 include:

- 38 businesses met in 2024
- Launched our Business Webinar Series in response to feedback from businesses through BRE meetings
  - [Enbridge Webinar](#)
  - [Succession Planning Webinars](#)
- 40 connections to external organizations made

**Recommended Changes to Economic Development Strategy**

Staff are recommending the addition of the following two Actions to the Economic Development Strategy, in order to be responsive to current economic trends and the pressures faced by the business community. These two Actions will also be marked as completed.

**Tariff Initiatives**

In February 2025, the Economic Development team reoriented their work plans to ensure local businesses were supported in response to the tariffs imposed by the United States government on Canada, and the resulting impacts on trade, businesses, and the local economy. Economic Development launched a new business-focused Tariff webpage to share available funding and supports for impacted businesses. In addition, working with Mayor Roy, staff have worked to establish the Mayor's Tariffs Task Force to examine tariff-related issues affecting Whitby businesses and provide recommendations to ensure competitiveness and economic resilience. Task Force members include representatives from the Whitby Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Whitby BIA, non-profit and six Whitby business leaders from industry sectors affected by the tariffs. The Task Force has released the Whitby Tariff Business Survey and current efforts include advocacy efforts to ensure Whitby can withstand challenges brought on by the tariffs. Staff recommend adding Action 3.5: Launch Tariff Response Initiative.

## Launch of Invest Whitby

Previously, Economic Development's leading social platform was a dedicated X (formerly Twitter) channel, which was discontinued in March 2025. As a result, in late May, Economic Development launched the Invest Whitby LinkedIn social channel. This new channel will help reach a more relevant audience of entrepreneurs, business leaders, developers, and stakeholders. More importantly, it will enhance the ability to share timely information on business resources, supports, investment opportunities, market trends (e.g., impacts of U.S. tariffs), and local success stories. This new channel will grow a relevant economic audience, strengthen Whitby's competitive position, present a professional and cohesive brand, and deliver consistent, high-impact messaging. Staff recommend addition Action 2.5 Establish new social marketing channel – Invest Whitby.

Staff recommend removing one Action from the Economic Development Strategy to better align with current needs and economic trends, while also considering staffing capacity given the addition of two new Actions.

Action 4.1 Designate Whitby as a centre for government technology to be removed from the Economic Development Strategy. While positioning Whitby as a centre of government technology was once a prominent trend, aligning more closely with the region's broader messaging of innovation may resonate better with Whitby's growing technology firms and ecosystem.

## Areas of Focus

To continue to advance the Economic Development Strategy, several key areas of focus will guide efforts over the next 18 months. Priority initiatives include continued progress on attracting a hotel and conference centre, which will enhance Whitby's tourism and business travel capacity. Advancing the Intelligent Cities Strategy is also a central focus, aimed at leveraging technology and innovation to improve infrastructure, connectivity, and service delivery while boosting technology adoption in Whitby's local business community. In addition, physician recruitment remains a critical deliverable, supporting both economic growth and community well-being by helping to ensure access to essential healthcare services for residents and a strong quality of life that attracts and retains talent. The other key focus area is a review of municipal tools to attract high-value employment-generating businesses with a focus on industrial development. Attachment 1 provides detailed information on the 16 outstanding and in-progress EDS Actions.

These initiatives reflect a strategic approach to building a resilient, competitive, and future-ready economy.

## **Administrative Changes**

Attachment 1 outlines the EDS actions list with completed actions, actions in progress and the remaining outstanding action items. Once this report is approved, Action items will be added or removed from the existing list of action items. Staff will make the changes to the Strategy within six weeks of this report's adoption and then update and circulate to Council and will be uploaded to the Town's website.

### **5. Financial Considerations:**

To continue implementing the Economic Development strategy, any future budget requests to support the remaining actions of the EDS will be presented to the Council for their consideration as part of the 2026 budget process.

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

The 5-year Economic Development Strategy was developed with engagement from the Town of Whitby's business community. The work was led by a Steering Committee comprised of local businesses and support organizations. The 2024 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 has consulted with over 100 local businesses since its launch in 2022.

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 and partners.

With the recent addition of the Invest Whitby LinkedIn page, staff will be able to provide additional metrics on the delivery of programs and initiatives. This business-focused platform will enhance the Economic Development team's outreach efforts.

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

The economic development team continues to collaborate with internal teams to support the implementation of the 5-year Economic Development Strategy. Several key actions (e.g., Intelligent City Strategy) will work with an internal cross-functional team to evaluate and deliver priority projects. Other actions completed to date and/or in progress involve 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:**

The Economic Development Strategy is consistent with the Town of Whitby's Community Strategic Plan, specifically Strategic Pillar 3: Whitby's Economy. As identified in the previous update, key 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 centers on continuing to implement the Economic Development Strategy which focuses on the following sectors: information and communications technology, professional, scientific, and technical services, advanced manufacturing, and downtowns and lifestyle. This directly links to the implementation of the Town's 5-year Economic Development Strategy.

## **9. Attachments:**

Attachment 1: Economic Development Strategy Updated Action Items - June 2025