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The Regional Municipality of Durham Report

To: Planning and Economic Development Committee
From: Commissioner of Planning and Economic Development
Report: #2023-EDT-11
Date: September 5, 2023

Subject:

Durham at the Collision Conference: Investment Attraction and Brand Awareness

Recommendation:

That the Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends:

That this report be received for information.

Report:

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of a collaborative investment promotion and attraction initiative at the recent Collision Conference in Toronto.

1.2 This report summarizes how the project was conceived, executed, and includes preliminary outcomes.

1.3 A presentation about this project will be provided at the September 2023 Planning and Economic Development Committee meeting.

2. Background

2.1 The Collision Conference (Collision) is an annual global technology (tech) and innovation conference. It is one of the world's largest and most highly regarded tech conferences.

- 2.2 Held at the Enercare Centre in Toronto, the 2023 event attracted more than 36,000 attendees, comprising 920 journalists, 1,490 start-up companies, 230 exhibiting partners, 865 investors and many thought leaders including elected officials, celebrities, senior global executives, venture capitalists, government officials, and others.
- 2.3 Collision presents an unmatched opportunity for Regional economic development staff to connect with the Canadian and global tech industry and ecosystem; hence, a decision was made among all the partners listed below to have a physical presence at the Conference, (referred to below as “the project”).
- 2.4 The project included the in-person presence of representatives from the partners listed below, with an associated marketing campaign referred to as “Durham at Collision”.
- 2.5 Economic Development and Tourism Division staff led the project. The Durham at Collision contributing partners included: Durham College, Ontario Tech University, Trent University Durham GTA, 1855 Accelerator, Spark Centre, the Automotive Parts Manufacturers Association (APMA) – Project Arrow, Ontario Power Generation (OPG) and the Durham Economic Development Partnership (DEDP) consisting of the Cities of Pickering and Oshawa, the Towns of Whitby and Ajax, the Municipality of Clarington, and the Townships of Brock, Scugog and Uxbridge (represented by Invest Durham).
- 2.6 Additional collaborative organizations included Ontario Vehicle Innovation Network (OVIN), Ontario Centre of Innovation (OCI) Access IO, Durham Regional Technology Development Site (Durham RTDS), Brilliant Catalyst at Ontario Tech University, and the Mixed Reality Capture Studio at Durham College.
- 2.7 The key audiences for Durham at Collision were:
 - a. Global and Canadian start-ups, high-growth potential, or established tech companies looking to grow their business by accessing a talented workforce, looking for land and office availability, or interested in supports such as incubators, accelerators, or post-secondary collaboration;
 - b. Economic development and business development professionals from other levels of government and investment attraction agencies;
 - c. Tech entrepreneurs and professionals currently residing in Durham Region who have low awareness of the opportunities for support offered by our innovation community.

2.8 Durham at Collision showcased three key messages:

- a. Innovation: Durham Region is where you can invent, engineer and test clean, connected and electric technologies.
- b. Support: Durham Region's Innovation Community is supported by three post-secondary schools, a tech incubator and accelerator.
- c. Location for Innovation: Durham Region, Ontario, Canada, is located within the Toronto Region to Waterloo Tech Corridor, which is the centre of Canada's tech ecosystem.

2.9 Together these messages created the campaign message, "Amp up your business in Canada's clean energy capital."

2.10 The Collision Conference took place from June 26 to 29, 2023, while the marketing campaign was executed primarily from May 22 to July 30, 2022.

3. Previous Reports and Decisions

3.1 Report [2022-EDT-12](#), "Durham at the 2022 Collision Conference".

3.2 Report [2023-EDT-5](#) introduced the 2023-2027 Invest Durham Five-Year Marketing Plan.

3.3 Report [2023-EDT-54](#) introduced the Durham Economic Development Partnership 2023-2026 Action Plan.

4. Durham at Collision

Project Development

4.1 Following a successful booth presence and positive outcomes at Collision 2022, it was determined through collaborative discussions with DEDP that Invest Durham along with DEDP would exhibit at the 2023 conference.

4.2 In preparation for the 2023 conference, Invest Durham staff secured partnership commitments from the APMA, Durham College, Ontario Tech University, Trent University Durham GTA, 1855 Accelerator, Spark Centre, and Ontario Power Generation (OPG). This represents two additional partners (APMA and OPG) over the prior year.

- 4.3 Additional event promotional collaborations were developed with Access IO, Brilliant Catalyst at Ontario Tech University, Durham Regional Technology Development Site (Durham RTDS), as well as Ontario Vehicle Innovation Network (OVIN) and staff from Ontario Centre of Innovation (OCI).
- 4.4 Meetings to plan and prepare for Durham at Collision were held between all partners leading up to the conference. These meetings ensured alignment on marketing messages, visual presentation, and goal setting, as well as providing cross training on value propositions for each of the partner groups, and collaborative networking to ensure Durham Region was represented in the most effective way at Collision.

On-Site Event

- 4.5 The Durham at Collision booth was twice as large in 2023 as it was in 2022. This year's space was a twelve metre by nine metre pavilion under the Invest Durham brand, with logo recognition for all event partners. See Attachment #1 for images of the pavilion. The pavilion included:
- a. Project Arrow, the first All-Canadian electric concept vehicle, which was provided by APMA and Ontario Tech University;
 - b. A fun and engaging slot car racing track and display screen provided by OPG to promote their plans to "electrify life in one generation";
 - c. An interactive mixed reality demonstration provided by Durham College's Mixed Reality Capture Studio;
 - d. A large proximity map featuring innovation assets and innovative companies across all of Durham Region, which told the story of Durham's innovation community and placed Durham's geographic location in context to the event location;
 - e. A welcoming seating area offering fresh apples sourced from Algoma Orchards;
 - f. Promotional materials and give-away items which included locally sourced custom notebooks and Invest Durham pens;
 - g. Table-tops branded for collaborators Access IO, Brilliant Catalyst, Durham RTDS, and OVIN; and
 - h. Copies of the The Spark Magazine, produced by Spark Centre.
- 4.6 The event was a digital and in-person event. The virtual component was app-based virtual platform where Invest Durham could host a profile. Durham's profile contained a link to a [landing page](#) with more detailed information about all partners.

- 4.7 The Durham at Collision team consisted of 133 attendees, including Regional CAO Elaine Baxter-Trahair. Booth representatives were made up of regional and area municipal staff, teams from the three post-secondary partners, 1855 Accelerator, Spark Centre, Brilliant Catalyst, Access IO, Durham RTDS, APMA, OPG, OVIN, and OCI. Additional tickets were provided to representatives in the Durham innovation community networks including National Research Council of Canada Industrial Research Assistance Program (NRC-IRAP), Business Advisory Centre of Durham (BACD), Lakeridge Health, Angel Investors, and select start-up founders, advisors, and collaborators.
- 4.8 The Durham at Collision pavilion hosted three exciting announcements and Invest Durham pitched these news stories to media in attendance in collaboration with announcement partners. These announcements included:
- a. [Tech Event Announcement by Access IO and OPG](#): Pitch your innovative tech for the future of energy at Access IO event in Durham Region;
 - b. [Challenge Statement Announcement by Durham RTDS](#): Durham RTDS Announces Call for Solutions for Mobile Air Quality Monitoring for Emergency Vehicles;
 - c. [Brilliant Catalyst Venture Fund Announcement](#): Ontario Tech University strengthens commitment to building entrepreneurship ecosystem of excellence.
- 4.9 Notable attendees to the Durham at Collision booth included MP François-Philippe Champagne (Federal Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry), MPP Victor Fedeli (Ontario Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade), MPP Patrice Barnes (Ajax), Trevor Dauphinee (CEO, Invest Ontario), Raed Kadri (Head of OVIN), Flavio Volpe (CEO, APMA), Pierre Boutin (President and CEO of Volkswagen Group Canada), Claudia Krywiak (President and CEO of Ontario Centre of Innovation), among many additional agents, trade commissioners, and others.
- 4.10 In addition to the on-site event, the Durham at Collision team, in partnership with the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade (MEDJCT), hosted a bus tour for international Collision attendees. 89 per cent of attendees noted they did not know anything about Durham prior to this tour. 33 per cent were from Europe, 17 per cent from the USA, 17 per cent from Asia, 11 per cent from Central America and the balance from Canada and Africa.

4.11 At least 1,300 connections were generated through the conference app. This is in addition to business cards exchanged, and LinkedIn connections made.

4.12 Of these 1,300 connections, 906 unique individuals were connected with, and 546 new subscribers to the Invest Durham e-news were generated.

Event Marketing

4.13 Pre-event marketing began in May. Invest Durham published social media content encouraging users to visit the Durham at Collision landing page, where they could learn about Durham Region, the Durham at Collision partners, and book a meeting with the Invest Durham team or submit inquires about the initiative. Social media assets were also prepared by staff for all partners to deploy.

4.14 11 in-event meetings were booked through marketing initiatives leading to the landing page prior to the event.

4.15 The Durham at Collision landing page included logo recognition for all partners, and facts about the innovation community in Durham Region. It referenced the Greater Toronto Area and Ontario, for international audiences.

4.16 The Region of Durham issued a news release prior to the event and published to the news wire for broad distribution. During the event, the three announcement news releases were published to the Invest Durham website news section. These four releases gathered 2,649 impressions.

4.17 During the event, marketing included social media coverage, releasing announcements to the web and on social channels, on-site networking with journalists, and a targeted digital campaign.

4.18 The targeted digital campaign was delivered through an event “geofence”. A geofence is a digital tool that allows geographic targeting. Event guests are delivered the campaign through their mobile devices during the event and additionally for up to 30 days following the event.

4.19 Before, during and after the event, a Mars Discovery District campaign “Portraits of Innovation” ran on the web, social, and in Pearson and Toronto Island Airports. The campaign included Invest Durham as a partner and featured two student engineers involved in the engineering and building of Project Arrow.

4.20 A post-event email campaign sent three emails over four weeks. These emails featured Durham at Collision partners, the announcements, and calls to action to learn more. These emails have been opened at a rate of 46 per cent, and at the time of this report have resulted in three direct inquiries for more information. Two of the three inquiries indicated interest in bringing their business to Canada.

Event Metrics and Outcomes

4.21 Selected digital metrics for this event are:

- a. A minimum of 312,000 paid and organic digital impressions;
- b. 4,755 deeper engagements such as landing page, blog post, news release, and announcement views on Invest Durham pages;
- c. 904 connections receiving three follow up email marketing campaigns;
- d. News release placements in Canadian Manufacturing, CleanTech Canada, Yahoo Finance, and Canadian Business Journal.

4.22 Earned media coverage as part of the Durham at Collision campaign include:

- a. [CP24: Live Event Interview;](#)
- b. [Yahoo Finance: Tech Founders leave Toronto and find wins in Smaller Cities;](#)
- c. [YorkRegion.com: Smaller Cities, bigger wins: Tech founders find success in Markham and beyond](#)
- d. [Autoweek: Toronto Collision Report;](#)
- e. [Siemens on LinkedIn \(6,320,653 followers\): Excited to see Project Arrow at Collision Conf](#)
- f. Two additional interviews requests (anticipated publishing in Fall 2023).

4.23 Selected concrete investment attraction outcomes for this event, reported to date, are as follows:

- a. 2 Investor Familiarization Tours completed;
- b. Over two dozen identified leads considered active opportunities with our Investment team;
- c. 1 lead already advanced to the site selection phase;
- d. 1 lead advanced to closed (won) phase, as they have moved their business address to Core21, City of Oshawa;
- e. FedDev Roundtable hosted with Federal Minister Filomena Tassi and MP Ryan Turnbull, and an additional FedDev tour request;
- f. Dozens of partnership opportunities in various stages of follow up;

- g. Many further meetings scheduled for partners, their contacts and leads, including various tech founders seeking support from the innovation community.

4.24 Selected legacy outcomes from this event are as follows:

- a. Strengthened connection and collaboration across Durham Region's innovation community;
- b. Higher understanding across partners of Durham's shared value proposition for investment, as well as each individual partner's value proposition;
- c. Improved brand recognition and awareness for Invest Durham and Durham Region within the global tech community.

4.25 Surveyed success measurement outcomes are as follows:

- a. 100 per cent of partner attendees surveyed said they felt the Invest Durham booth at Collision Conference was Very Effective or Effective at representing Durham Region as a whole;
- b. 80 per cent of partner attendees surveyed said they felt attending the Collision Conference was Very Valuable or Valuable to their organization's goals, with the balance 20 per cent indicating the event was Moderately Valuable;
- c. 93 per cent overall satisfaction rate on the MEDJCT Collision investor tour, with 100 per cent saying they would recommend the tour to future international delegations.

Comparison to Prior Year Event Participation

4.26 With a larger partner collaborator group, physical presence, and investment in comparison to 2022's event, the 2023 Durham at Collision project has achieved the following improvements:

- a. 260 per cent increase in deeper digital engagements with our marketing;
- b. 55 per cent increase in the number of unique connections gathered at the event;
- c. 250 per cent increase in the number of meetings booked pre-event.

5. Relationship to Strategic Plan

5.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following strategic goals and priorities in the Durham Region Strategic Plan:

- a. Goal 3 – Economic Prosperity. Priority 3.1 – Position Durham Region as the location of choice for business;
- b. Goal 3 – Economic Prosperity, Priority 3.2 Leverage Durham’s prime geography, social infrastructure and strong partnerships to foster economic growth;
- c. Goal 3 – Economic Prosperity, Priority 3.4 – Capitalize on Durham’s strengths in key economic sectors to attract high-quality jobs.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 Durham Region’s location, innovation community, and collaborative business community reflect that Durham is an ideal location to start or grow an innovative technology business.
- 6.2 Through the Durham at Collision project, Invest Durham and our partners are building awareness of, and attracting investment interest to, Durham Region as a place where innovative tech businesses can locate, grow, and thrive.
- 6.3 The 2024 Collision Conference will be held in Toronto from June 17 to 20, 2024. Discussions will be held with partners to assess the ongoing opportunity of event participation.

7. Attachments

Attachment #1: Images of the Invest Durham Activation at the Collision Conference June 26 to 29, 2023

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

Brian Bridgeman, MCIP, RPP, PLE
Commissioner of Planning and
Economic Development

Recommended for Presentation to Committee

Original signed by

Elaine C. Baxter-Trahair
Chief Administrative Officer

Images of the Invest Durham activation at Collision Conference, June 26-29, 2023











