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The Regional Municipality of Durham Report

From: Elaine Baxter-Trahair, Chief Administrative Officer
Report: #2024-INFO-64
Date: October 9, 2024

Subject:

CityStudio Durham – Update

Recommendation:

That this progress report of the CityStudio Durham initiative be received for information.

Report:

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report provides an update on progress of the CityStudio Durham initiative since 2020. Specifically, this report will provide:
 - a. Information highlighting the success of the CityStudio Durham partnership between the Regional Municipality of Durham, Durham Regional Police Service (DRPS), the Towns of Ajax and Whitby, and Durham Region’s local post-secondary institutions (Durham College, Ontario Tech University, and Trent University Durham-GTA).

2. Background

- 2.1 Under a license agreement with [CityStudio Vancouver](#), staff from the CAO’s office run CityStudio Durham. The program gathers project ideas from municipal staff who would like to collaborate with postsecondary faculty and students. Project ideas are posted on a [public web portal](#) where they are advertised to local postsecondary students and faculty. The CityStudio Durham coordinator then connects staff and faculty/students with similar interests to support project initiation. At the conclusion of the winter academic semester, a live “Hubbub” event is held to showcase the successful collaborations.

3. Previous Reports and Decisions

- 3.1 The outcomes and impacts of CityStudio Durham projects have been highlighted in a variety of presentations and reports, including:
- a. [#2020-COW-22](#): CityStudio Durham was endorsed as part of the [Regional Recovery Framework and Action Plan](#).
 - b. [#2021-F-5](#): Expanding the CityStudio Durham initiative was endorsed as a strategic priority in the [2021 Durham Budget](#).
 - c. [#2021-INFO-55](#): The number of completed CityStudio Durham projects was highlighted in the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan Year One Progress Update.
 - d. The CityStudio Durham project “Barriers to Accessing Services for People with Disabilities” was mentioned at several Accessibility Advisory Committee meetings ([AAC 03232021](#), [AAC 01262021](#), [AAC 11242020](#), [AAC 10012020](#)).
 - e. The CityStudio Durham project “Trail Safety in Durham Region” was mentioned at the [DATC 03112021](#) Durham Active Transportation Committee meeting.
 - f. Other CityStudio Durham projects have been mentioned in previous Council Information Reports and in Committee meetings ([#2020-INFO-110](#), [#2020-INFO-84](#), [DEAC 11182021](#), [FAC 020822](#)), including a previous Council Information Report showing initial progress on the CityStudio Durham initiative ([#2021-INFO-69](#)).

4. Outcomes of CityStudio Durham

- 4.1 CityStudio Durham has been running for over four years, from Fall 2020 to the present. The program has supported over 90 projects, involving over 90 staff across all Regional Departments, Durham Regional Police Service and the Town of Ajax, 50 postsecondary faculty and staff, and 800 postsecondary students from all three of Durham’s local postsecondary institutions.
- 4.2 To evaluate the experience of participating in a CityStudio Durham project, staff, faculty and students were surveyed in the Fall of 2023 about their work with the program. Responses to the survey were overwhelmingly positive, with **89%** of participants indicating they would recommend CityStudio Durham to a colleague. Further information and metrics on the outcome of the CityStudio Durham feedback survey can be found in **Attachment #1**.

5. Other Accomplishments

- 5.1 Six funding applications to support research projects were submitted to Mitacs, a Canadian non-profit funding agency. All six applications were successful, bringing in \$127,500 to support research collaborations.

- 5.2 Regional staff have hosted seven virtual Hubbub events, one or twice per year at the conclusion of the fall and winter academic semesters. At these events students share the outcomes of their projects to an audience of municipal staff, postsecondary faculty and staff, and other postsecondary students. The first five of these events were held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the last two held in person at Durham College.
- 5.3 Project summaries have been posted on the [CityStudio Durham website](#), where the community can learn about past collaborations. Numerous news releases and social media posts [announced the start of the program](#) and have also celebrated successful projects.

6. Future Plans

- 6.1 Staff in the CAO's Office are actively looking for ways to improve the CityStudio Durham program and will work to leverage the program to support priorities identified in the new Strategic Plan.

7. Relationship to Strategic Plan

- 7.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following strategic goals and priorities in the Durham Region Strategic Plan:
- a. 5:1 Optimize resources and partnerships to deliver exceptional quality services and value
 - b. 5.2: Collaborate for a seamless service experience
 - c. 5.4: Drive organizational success through innovation, a skilled workforce, and modernized services

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 The first four years of the CityStudio Durham initiative have been a success, with high levels of engagement from Regional staff, postsecondary faculty, and students.
- 8.2 Over 90 projects were completed between September 2020 and April 2024, with more underway or planned to start in the Fall and Winter of 2024.

9. Attachments

Attachment #1: CityStudio Durham Evaluation Summary 2020-2023

Approved by: Sandra Austin, Executive Director, Strategic Initiatives, at 905-668-7711, extension 2449.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

Elaine Baxter-Trahair
Chief Administrative Officer



Evaluation Summary 2020 to 2023

We surveyed municipal staff, postsecondary faculty and students who participated in CityStudio Durham projects between September 2020 and September 2023 to obtain feedback on their experience working on a CityStudio Durham project.

This feedback will help us understand and enhance our program for future students, faculty and staff.

What is CityStudio Durham?

CityStudio Durham is partnership program involving Durham Region, Durham Regional Police Service, Durham College, Ontario Tech University, Trent University Durham-GTA, the Town of Ajax and Town of Whitby.



The programs seeks to strengthen and facilitate partnerships and collaboration between municipal government and Durham Region's postsecondary institutions through developing collaborative projects relevant to the Durham Region community.

Since it's launch in September 2020, over **80** collaborative projects have taken place through CityStudio Durham, involving over **600** students, over **50** faculty and over **90** municipal staff.

Key Outcomes

89% of participants indicated they would recommend CityStudio Durham to a fellow student, staff or faculty.

Diversity and collaboration

63% of projects brought together two or more areas of municipal/postsecondary expertise.

72% of participants made connections with two or more sectors outside of their own.

82% of faculty and students felt their CityStudio Durham collaboration helped strengthen their network of collaboration and interdisciplinary expertise.

"This was an exciting opportunity and was a fantastic experience for all involved. I would do it again, recommend it continue, and would recommend/encourage others to be involved." – **Postsecondary faculty**

Evaluation Summary 2020 to 2023

Support innovative projects

“Thank you for the opportunity to work on CityStudio Durham projects; I will continue to do so because this work gives me great satisfaction, knowing that I am helping not only the current, but future generations.”

– **Municipal staff**

94% of municipal staff felt that their CityStudio Durham collaboration provided them with resources to advance municipal goals and priorities.

88% of municipal staff felt that their CityStudio Durham collaboration added value to their innovation project.

Experiential learning in a municipal setting

89% of students felt that their CityStudio Durham collaboration:

- increased their interest in municipal government as a career path
- allowed them to apply what they learned in the classroom to a real-world problem

“City Studio Durham gave me the possibility of working in a municipality, something that as a Political Science student, provided me with the experience and knowledge for future roles”

– **Postsecondary student**

Project highlights

[Ready to Learn: Improving Children’s Development and Readiness for School \(Ontario Tech University\)](#)



The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is a tool used to stay informed about a child’s development and help determine their readiness for school. Students used EDI data to develop evidence-based communication and instructional products for the early learning and childcare community.

[Improving Municipal Customer Service \(Durham College\)](#)



The Service Durham group at Durham Region wanted to understand customer service expectations and demographic changes in Durham Region in the next 10 years. Students developed a customer service strategy by conducting surveys, analyzing data, and incorporating findings to help the Region meet the changing needs of the community.

[Human Trafficking project \(Trent Durham-GTA\)](#)



Students developed a screening tool to identify perpetrators who have themselves been victimized by human trafficking. The tool was designed to create a better understanding of victim-perpetrators and their experiences, to help women who face criminal charges to identify if they were victims of human trafficking.