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The Regional Municipality of Durham Report

To: Community Growth and Economic Development Committee
From: Commissioner of Community Growth and Economic Development
Report: #2025-EDT-6
Date: March 4, 2025

Subject:

Growing North Durham Plan Annual Activity Report

Recommendation:

That the Community Growth 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 an annual report on the implementation of the [Growing North Durham: Rural Economic Development Action Plan](#).
- 1.2 The report will be accompanied by a staff presentation from Lori Talling, Acting Manager of Agriculture and Rural Economic Development.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Growing North Durham Plan was endorsed by Regional Council as well as the Councils in the Townships of Brock, Scugog and Uxbridge in early 2023. It sets out goals and actions to support economic growth across north Durham to 2027.

3. Previous Reports and Decisions

- 3.1 The 2023-2027 Growing North Durham: Rural Economic Development Action Plan was received by Planning and Economic Development Committee on February 7, 2023 ([#2023-EDT-2](#)).

- 3.2 The Growing North Durham Annual Activity Report was received by Planning and Economic Development Committee on February 6, 2024 ([#2024-EDT-4](#)).

4. Implementation Update

- 4.1 The delivery of economic development programming in north Durham relies on collaboration between Durham Region (Economic Development and Tourism staff), the Townships of Brock, Scugog and Uxbridge, and various business support organizations such as the Brock Board of Trade, North Durham Chamber of Commerce, Scugog Economic Development Advisory Committee, Business Improvement Associations (BIAs), and more.
- 4.2 This collaborative approach encourages community stakeholders to take part in identifying opportunities and solutions to economic challenges and has been integral in the implementation of the Growth North Durham Plan so far.
- 4.3 The Growing North Durham Plan (the Plan) is structured under three pillars: People, Places and Prosperity. Each pillar contains goal areas and actions that support a community-driven approach to economic development. Identified below are some of the key activities that are either underway or were completed within each pillar over the past year:
- a. **People:** This pillar recognizes the strong correlation between human capital and economic growth.
- Hosted the North Durham Building Business Forum on October 22, 2024 ([#2025-EDT-1](#)). Sessions on Artificial Intelligence for small and medium-sized businesses and leading with inclusion in the workplace aligned with goal areas and actions in the Plan.
 - A North Durham Labour Force Study to examine and highlight key factors contributing to labour market dynamics was completed. An action plan to support labour force development and address workforce needs is being developed. Actions to address some of the factors impacting the labour market are already underway such as exploration of solutions to workforce transportation challenges in collaboration with partners. Staff continue to engage with Durham College Community Employment Services and Durham Workforce Authority on actions to support this goal area.
 - In mid-2024, Agriculture and Rural Economic Development e-newsletter and social media channels shifted to agri-food focused content. Rural economic development content is now shared through the Invest Durham e-newsletter and social media channels, and Durham Tourism channels when relevant.

Invest Durham and Durham Tourism continue to grow their online presence which benefits entrepreneurs and small business owners in North Durham. Throughout 2024, staff continued to share relevant information with north Durham entrepreneurs and small business owners through these platforms, as well as one-on-one meetings.

- North Durham innovation success stories were featured through Invest Durham social channels and other marketing.
- The Agri-Food Gateway Pilot Program ([#2024-INFO-85](#)), which also supports the Growing Agri-Food Durham Plan, was developed and delivered to provide small to medium sized technology companies with agricultural training to help them adapt their technologies to fill needs and gaps in the agri-tech and agri-food industry. This program was a partnership between National Research Council of Canada Industrial Research Assistance Program (NRC IRAP), Durham College and the Economic Development and Tourism Agriculture and Rural program. Five companies completed the training, and three of those companies are actively pursuing an agri-tech product offering. Continuation of the program in 2025 is being explored.

b. **Places:** This pillar highlights and strengthens north Durham's unique qualities of place that stimulate meaningful connections with the community.

- Staff partnered with the Durham College photography program to capture images of north Durham businesses to be used in future marketing campaigns and materials. Nine businesses participated.
- Several initiatives and campaigns led by the Division's Marketing, Tourism and Rural Tourism staff have been delivered over the last year with strong north Durham content or focus, including Gather at the Farm, Rural Routes, Out of Office, Durham Region Signature Sites, and #ShopinDurham Week. More than 40 blog posts published across the Invest Durham and Durham Tourism channels, and on the Downtowns of Durham website, have focused on or included north Durham content.
- Staff continued to support development of the Scugog Economic Development Advisory Committee-led Home Sweet Scugog Welcome Wagon program set to launch in early 2025.
- Staff attended selected business openings and celebrations and connected with new businesses to make them aware of support available. One-on-one support was provided to more than 30 current or prospective north Durham businesses in 2024. This support included activities such as providing letters of support, identifying funding opportunities, assisting with site selection,

facilitating connections to industry partners, and sharing relevant information and data.

- Staff continued to support implementation of Uxbridge Downtown Revitalization initiatives, including representation on the Uxbridge Downtown Revitalization Committee.
- Working closely with Township staff, a Rural Economic Development (RED) grant was secured for Uxbridge downtown revitalization.
- Staff reviewed and provided input on the Township of Brock Downtown Community Improvement Plan (CIP) updates and promotional campaign plans and participate on the CIP Application Review Panel.

c. Prosperity: The prosperity pillar is about business retention and making informed decisions to encourage and enable economic growth.

- Staff worked closely with the Township of Scugog to support hiring a consultant to facilitate the development of the Scugog Business Program (SBP) Final Report and Action Plan, led stakeholder sessions to develop a 2025 work plan, and are supporting the development of a SBP promotional video. Regional Economic Development and Tourism staff will continue to support implementation activities in 2025.
- Using the SBP as a model, staff are developing options for a standardized approach to ongoing business visitations across north Durham to effectively deliver business retention programming.
- In coordination with Development Services staff from across north Durham, Regional Economic Development and Tourism staff respond to investment inquiries on an ongoing basis. Most investment inquiries are generated through the Region's Business Development and Investment Team who undertake investment attraction work on behalf of all Durham municipalities. In other cases, investment leads are received directly by Regional Economic Development staff and Township staff. Of the 33 investment inquiries circulated to the Durham Economic Development Partnership (DEDP) in 2024, at least one north Durham site was deemed suitable and was submitted on 19 occasions.
- Building, Business and Parcel inventories were developed for key areas of economic interest across North Durham (downtowns and employment lands). These are valuable for responding to investment inquiries, tracking potential opportunities for investment/new business, targeting businesses for selected promotional activities, and providing data for grant applications and/or reporting.
- Township-specific Business Toolkits were updated and promoted.

- Township-specific community profiles were updated and expanded, including a full content refresh, the addition of interactive data tools, and improved linkages between township websites and the Invest Durham website, where these pages are hosted ([#2024-INFO-54](#)).
- Staff researched and consulted with Development Services staff in the three north Durham Townships to provide north Durham updates to the [Invest Durham Signature Sites](#) document and represented north Durham at the DEDP Commercial & Industrial Realtor/Developer Social event in May 2024.
- Staff continued to develop relationships with owners or representatives of developable employment and commercial land parcels across north Durham, share servicing information and discuss opportunities with potential investors and partners.
- Staff continue to engage in discussions and request progress updates from Regional Works on pre-servicing North Durham employment lands, highlighting the importance of servicing for economic growth.
- Discussions with Durham OneNet and Vianet related to business broadband connectivity challenges and opportunities are ongoing.

5. Relationship to Strategic Plan

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

Goal 3: Economic Prosperity

- Item 3.1: Position Durham Region as the location of choice for business
- Item 3.2: Leverage Durham's prime geography, social infrastructure, and strong partnerships to foster economic growth.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The Growing North Durham Plan represents an ongoing commitment for a collaborative north Durham-wide approach to the delivery of economic development programming in the Townships of Brock, Scugog and Uxbridge. Updates have been scheduled and/or delivered to each Council in north Durham to update the Townships on progress implementing the Growing North Durham Plan, and scheduled activities for 2025.
- 6.2 Plans are underway to support, advance, or launch several key initiatives that will continue to advance goals of the Plan. Areas of focus include North Durham Labour Force Action Plan development and implementation of selected actions, development of

a standardized business visitation program, targeted CIP promotion and targeted downtown business attraction.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

Brian Bridgeman, MCIP, RPP, PLE
Commissioner of Community Growth and
Economic Development

Recommended for Presentation to Committee

Original signed by

Nancy Taylor for
Elaine C. Baxter-Trahair
Chief Administrative Officer