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The Regional Municipality of Durham Report

To: Committee of the Whole
From: Chief Administrative Office
Report: #2026-COW-15
Date: March 11, 2026

Subject:

Durham Region named 2025 Community of the Year

Recommendation:

That the Committee of the Whole recommends:

That this report be received for information.

Report:

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to recognize Durham Region's designation as the 2025 Intelligent Community of the Year and to provide an overview of the collaborative initiatives, strategic alignment, and community-wide efforts that contributed to this achievement, as well as the opportunities to leverage this recognition moving forward.

2. Background

2.1 Since 2018, Durham Region has advanced a people centred approach to innovation focused on improving quality of life through collaboration, inclusion, and measurable outcomes. To support this work, the Region aligned with the Intelligent Community Forum (ICF) and its Community Accelerator Strategy, a third-party framework that assesses communities across six pillars: broadband connectivity, knowledge workforce, innovation, digital inclusion, engagement, and sustainability.

2.2 Through this international evaluation process, Durham Region has received five Smart21 recognitions and four Top7 Intelligent Community designations, providing independent benchmarking and guiding continuous improvement. This sustained performance across all six pillars laid the foundation for Durham’s recognition as the 2025 Intelligent Community of the Year.

3. Previous Reports and Decisions

3.1 In January 2023, Council received report #[2023-COW-4](#), Intelligent Communities Update and a [presentation](#) by Robert Bell, co-founder, Intelligent Community Forum.

3.2 In September 2024, Council received a [presentation](#) for information entitled Durham Region’s Intelligent Community Journey.

3.3 In May 2025, Council received #[2025-INFO-38](#), 2024 Intelligent Community Consortium Year-End Report.

4. 2025 Intelligent Community of the Year

4.1 Durham Region was named the 2025 Intelligent Community of the Year by the Intelligent Community Forum (ICF) following a competitive international selection process. Durham was chosen from the Top7 Intelligent Communities worldwide, alongside Assaí, Paraná (Brazil); Bursa Metropolitan Municipality (Türkiye); Fairfield/Jefferson County, Iowa (USA); Hilliard, Ohio (USA); Kingston, Ontario (Canada); and Las Rozas de Madrid (Spain).

4.2 After review by an independent international jury, Durham Region was recognized as the strongest overall performer among leading communities globally. This designation positions Durham as a global model for collaborative, inclusive, and future-ready community development.

4.3 This award provides independent, international assessment. The ICF process functions as a global audit—providing expert third party evaluation and benchmarking of Durham against the world’s leading communities. After a rigorous review, comparing leading communities worldwide an independent panel concluded that Durham Region is the best-performing community in 2025.

5. A Global Model for Intelligent Communities

5.1 Durham Region’s recognition as a global model for intelligent communities reflects the strength of its regional collaboration and its consistent performance across the six pillars of the Intelligent Community Forum’s Community Accelerator Strategy. Rather than advancing isolated projects, Durham has built an integrated ecosystem that connects infrastructure, talent, innovation, inclusion, engagement, and sustainability to deliver measurable community outcomes.

- 5.2 Strategic investment in broadband connectivity, including the implementation of Durham OneNet, is improving access, and economic competitiveness across urban and rural communities.
- 5.3 A strong knowledge workforce, supported by Durham's post-secondary institutions, provides industry-aligned talent and applied learning opportunities that contribute directly to the regional economy. This foundation supports a robust innovation ecosystem, including living labs and real-world test environments that enable solutions to be developed, tested, and scaled locally.
- 5.4 Durham's approach places equal emphasis on engagement and digital inclusion, ensuring residents, businesses, and community partners are connected, informed, and equipped to participate in a rapidly evolving digital environment. Through accessible engagement tools, digital literacy initiatives, and business supports, the Region is strengthening social cohesion and preparedness for future change. These efforts are complemented by a coordinated approach to sustainability, including programs such as Durham Greener Homes, which support energy efficiency, emissions reduction, and long-term community resilience.
- 5.5 Together, these interconnected efforts demonstrate how regional collaboration, guided by a clear framework and shared priorities, can strengthen economic resilience, improve quality of life, and position Durham as a leader among intelligent communities worldwide.

6. Intelligent Communities Consortium

- 6.1 The Durham Intelligent Communities Consortium is made up of members from municipal government, post-secondary education institutions, innovation groups, business organizations and community organizations.
- 6.2 Durham Region's success as an intelligent community is grounded in strong regional collaboration and a shared commitment to telling Durham's story. The 17-member Intelligent Communities Consortium provides the coordinating structure that brings together local area municipalities, post-secondary institutions, business organizations, and community partners to align initiatives, leverage the region's innovation ecosystem, and address shared challenges using the Intelligent Community Forum's framework.
- 6.3 Building on this collaborative foundation, the **Proud to Call Durham Home** campaign was launched to translate this work into a clear, accessible narrative for residents, businesses, and external audiences. The campaign highlights people, projects, and partnerships that reflect the six pillars of the Community Accelerator Strategy, helping build community pride, increase awareness of regional initiatives, and demonstrate how collaboration is improving quality of life across Durham.
- 6.4 Together, the consortium and the campaign ensure that Durham's intelligent community work is both strategically aligned and publicly understood—

strengthening internal collaboration while reinforcing Durham's reputation as a connected, inclusive, and future ready region.

- 6.5** By framing local achievements through the lens of connectivity, workforce, innovation, engagement, inclusion, and sustainability, the campaign strengthened community pride and demonstrated Durham's position as a leading intelligent region.
- 6.6** The campaign features 14 community-driven stories designed to spark pride, curiosity, and a deeper understanding of the initiatives shaping Durham's future. These stories are intentionally simple, relatable, and easy to digest—helping build positive sentiment over time by showing residents how regional efforts are directly improving quality of life. Together, they create a cohesive narrative of a region that is collaborative, future-focused, and proudly charting its path forward.
- 6.7** This represents the first layer of the Proud to Call Durham Home campaign. Over the next year, we will continue to build on this foundation with deeper community engagement, expanded storytelling, and initiatives designed to strengthen local pride and positive sentiment across Durham's communities—ensuring residents see themselves reflected in, and connected to, the region's story.

7. Relationship to Strategic Plan

7.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following Strategic Direction(s) and Pathway(s) in Durham Region's 2025-2035 Strategic Plan:

a. Resilient Local Economies

- R3. Develop, attract, and support a skilled and qualified workforce, including youth and newcomers.
- R5. Cultivate and promote local arts, culture, quality of place, and tourism that embrace urban excitement and country charm.

b. Strong Relationships

- S1. Enhance inclusive opportunities for community engagement and meaningful collaboration.
- S3. Collaborate across local area municipalities, with agencies, non-profits, and community partners to deliver co-ordinated and efficient services.

7.2 This report aligns with/addresses the following Foundation(s) in Durham Region's 2025-2035 Strategic Plan:

- a. People: Making the Region of Durham a great place to work, attracting, and retaining talent.**

8. Conclusion – Leveraging our win

- 8.1** Durham Region’s designation as the 2025 Intelligent Community of the Year presents an opportunity to strengthen global visibility, attract investment and talent, and reinforce community pride. Over the coming year, the Region will leverage this recognition to position Durham as a leader in innovation, sustainability, and inclusive growth—both locally and internationally.
- 8.2** Internationally, the designation elevates Durham’s reputation as a benchmark for intelligent communities, supporting investment attraction, talent recruitment, and global partnerships.
- 8.3** Locally, it provides an opportunity to increase awareness of Regional initiatives, strengthen positive perceptions, and reinforce Durham’s identity as a connected, collaborative, and future ready community.
- 8.4** Together, these efforts underscore what sets Durham apart. Through long term planning, strong partnerships, and intentional investment in infrastructure and people, Durham Region continues to deliver real prosperity, global impact, and a high quality of life for residents.

9. Attachments

Attachment #1: Proud to Call Durham Home

Prepared by: Lindsay Beyger, Manager Community Relations and Amanda Hobin, Policy Advisor.

Respectfully submitted,

Recommended for Presentation to Committee

Original signed by

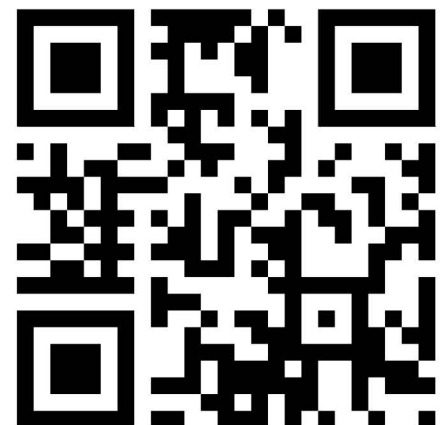
Elaine C. Baxter-Trahair
Chief Administrative Officer



I'm proud to call Durham home

It's inspiring to work in a community that collaborates closely on research, supports student achievement, and tackles complex problems for positive change in people's lives.
-Amber from Trent University
Durham GTA

See how we're working with students to shape a brighter future at durham.ca/LeadingTheWay.

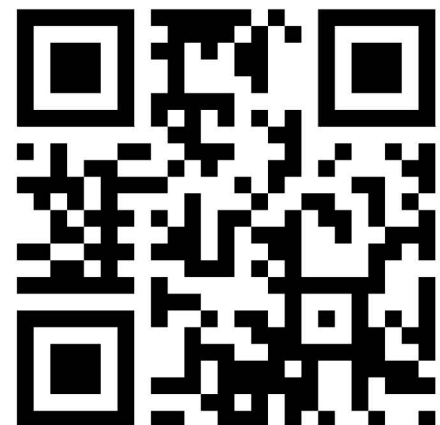




I'm proud to call Durham home

Working in Durham Region means keeping the lights on for 30 per cent of Ontario, through a reliable, sustainable energy supply.
-Allan from Ontario Power Generation

Come see why we're the Clean Energy Capital of Canada at durham.ca/LeadingTheWay.





I'm proud to call Durham home

It's rewarding to support Ontario Tech's 3,200+ work-integrated learning experiences, giving students real-world skills for the future.

-Shenelle from Ontario Tech University

From classroom to career, discover how Durham students are job-ready at durham.ca/LeadingTheWay.



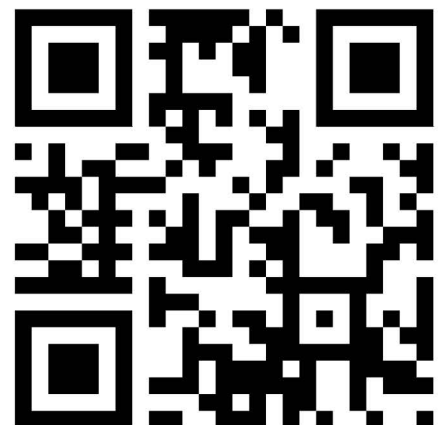


I'm proud to call Durham home

Here in Durham Region, sustainability isn't just about the environment, it's about our communities coming together. From supporting local food providers, to electric buses and clean energy, we're shaping a greener future, together.

-Muaz, a Durham Resident

From Durham Greener Homes to a battery collection world record—discover sustainability at durham.ca/LeadingTheWay.



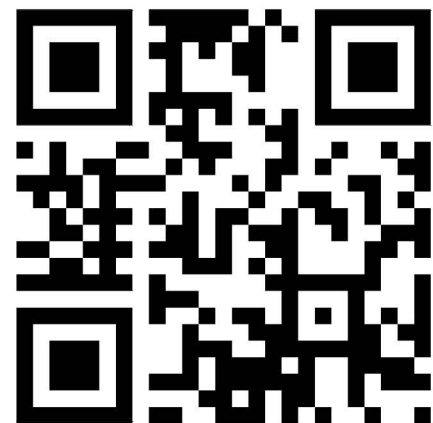


I'm proud to call Durham home

We are proud to partner with local organizations and industries, providing students opportunities to learn, contribute, and strengthen our community today and for the future.

**-Dr. Elaine Popp from
Durham College**

Learn how working together
drives student success and
economic growth at
durham.ca/LeadingTheWay.

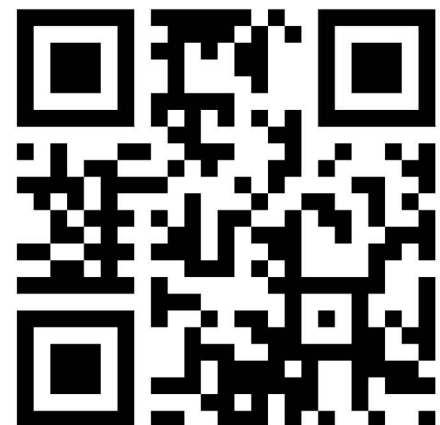




I'm proud to call Durham home

Our unfair advantage?
The opportunity to tap into top
talent from our local colleges,
enjoy an awesome work-life
balance just minutes from Lake
Ontario, and partner with clients,
all from downtown Whitby.
-Isaac from **geekspeak
Commerce**

See why businesses are
drawn to our growing,
connected community at
durham.ca/LeadingTheWay.





I'm proud to call Durham home

A place where green living thrives with free compost and mulch giveaways, and seed libraries that help gardeners grow sustainable communities.

-Kyla, a Durham Resident

Discover how we're creating a brighter future for everyone
durham.ca/LeadingTheWay.

