



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor Bonnette and Members of Council

FROM: Graham Lowe, Senior Economic Development Officer

DATE: April 16, 2021

MEMORANDUM NO.: MEM-ADMIN-2021-0006

RE: 2020 Annual Report - Economic Development, Innovation and Culture

PURPOSE OF THE MEMORANDUM:

The purpose of this Memorandum is to provide Council with an overview of the many measures taken by the Town, with a focus on the Economic Development, Innovation and Culture division, in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, plus other workplan initiatives. These measures are highlighted via the appended 2020 Annual Report. The Annual Report includes hyperlinks to additional information.

BACKGROUND:

Since the onset of COVID-19, the Town has taken early, decisive and coordinated action to respond to the pandemic and support the local business community. Throughout 2020, and now into 2021, the pandemic has impacted both the global and local economies in unprecedented ways.

In response, the original 2020 (pre-COVID) Economic Development, Innovation and Culture workplan was adjusted to include several COVID-specific business supports. These new initiatives were supplemented by the modification of pre-existing initiatives. Over 25 new and modified initiatives were advanced and/or implemented by the Town in 2020. Many of these continue to be implemented into 2021. Multiple Town departments were and continue to be involved.

The initiatives undertaken consisted of short-term actions to respond to immediate business needs, as well as longer-term investment growth and resiliency actions which will help expedite and sustain local economic growth post-pandemic.

Where applicable, the business supports were informed by feedback received from surveys of the Halton Hills' business community.

The appended 2020 Annual Report provides a graphically-designed snapshot of the wide range of business supports and related initiatives implemented by the Town in 2020. This Annual Report is planned to be the first in a series of future annual reports.

COMMENTS:

1. Role of the Economic Development, Innovation and Culture division

Per the Town's Economic Development and Tourism Strategy, the Economic Development, Innovation and Culture division is focused on enhancing Halton Hills' economic prosperity through a diversified and resilient economy, with the overarching goal to (i) support existing businesses; (ii) attract new investment; and (iii) expand local job opportunities. Staff are focused on engaging, informing and supporting the economic interests and needs of existing and future residents, businesses and organizations.

The division provides a full suite of high-quality supports to the business community and continues to elevate Halton Hills' competitiveness in the regional and global marketplace. This in turn helps foster a more resilient and prosperous economy and enhances quality of life. Key supports and services offered include:

- Financial incentives/supports via the Community Improvement Plan (CIP) and the Manufacturing Expansion Fund (MEF);
- Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) programming;
- Investment attraction, expansion and relocation;
- Business Concierge service;
- Site selection assistance;
- Market research;
- Industry engagement;
- Workforce development;
- Supporting and advancing affordable housing projects and initiatives;
- Amplifying tourism's economic benefits; and
- Leveraging and supporting the arts and culture sector to raise quality of life and attract investment.

Halton Hills aims to be an economic development leader, attracting and supporting local, regional and international business opportunities. The Town offers existing and potential businesses a strategic platform for success, proximity to world-class markets, a distinct community with an ideal balance between urban and rural environments, and an outstanding quality of life.

2. 2020 Annual Report

The 2020 Annual Report highlights various Town initiatives and accomplishments, with a focus on business supports provided by the Economic Development, Innovation and Culture division. Cross-departmental/divisional collaboration (e.g. with Clerks, Climate

Change and Asset Management, Corporate Communications, Finance, Planning and Development, and Transportation and Public Works), stakeholder engagement, advocacy and sustained effort were the hallmarks of implementing economic development initiatives during a uniquely challenging year. The Annual Report is a brief snapshot in time of some of the key 2020 initiatives, rather than an exhaustive list and description of all initiatives. Implementation of some of the initiatives launched in 2020 continues into 2021.

A supplementary 'State of Culture' report will be presented to Council in the near future to showcase the many initiatives and supports implemented by Cultural Services as a way of continuing to engage, leverage and strengthen the local arts and culture sector.

The Annual Report is organized into the following nine sections, with key actions highlighted in each:

1. Economic Development, Innovation and Culture Overview
 - Provides a summary of the division's key goals, activities and supports.
2. COVID-19 Response
 - Outlines the new and modified pre-existing initiatives that the Town implemented in 2020.
3. Economic Development and Tourism Strategy
 - Summarizes the components and intended outcomes for the Town's new Economic Development and Tourism Strategy (2021-2026).
4. Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E)
 - Highlights the goals and actions of the BR&E program, established in 2020, to support local businesses.
5. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Strategy
 - Provides an overview of the progress made in implementing the FDI Strategy, including the development of Investment Business Cases (IBCs) and establishing a foundation for future trade missions and/or investment attraction initiatives.
6. Business Concierge
 - Outlines the goals, objectives and eligibility criteria for the Town's new Business Concierge program which was developed to expedite the realization of key economic development leads and investments.
7. Tourism
 - Summarizes the key highlights of the Town's tourism efforts in 2020, which shifted to strengthening business resiliency and preparing for an eventual recovery.
8. Cultural Services
 - Outlines Cultural Services' role in economic development programming pivots that were required in 2020 to support the arts and culture sector. A more comprehensive 'State of Culture' report will be presented to Council at a later date.

9. Affordable Housing

- Provides an overview of actions taken by the Town to support and advance local affordable housing initiatives.

Achievements highlighted in the Annual Report provide a solid foundation from which to pursue and advance 2021 economic development initiatives, programs and strategies, and to continue to deliver on Council's Strategic Plan priorities.

CONCLUSION:

Economic prosperity and the success of Halton Hills' businesses is key to the Town's ability to deliver the services that residents and businesses rely on. Throughout 2020, the Town implemented several new COVID-19 business supports. This was in addition to advancing a number of pre-existing initiatives that were modified in response to COVID-19. These actions were responsive to the needs of businesses, represent a considerable investment by the Town, and will help position Halton Hills for economic recovery. Town staff will continue to assess the most current economic data, and to take proactive, decisive and coordinated action to respond to COVID-19. Although significant progress has been made, much more remains to be accomplished in light of the ongoing challenges posed by the pandemic and the likely protracted and uneven economic recovery.

Reviewed and approved by,



Damian Szybalski, Director of Economic Development, Innovation & Culture



Chris Mills, Acting Chief Administrative Officer