

2020

ANNUAL REPORT



TOWN OF HALTON HILLS
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
INNOVATION & CULTURE

A MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR



Despite the challenges of the past year, I am proud to say that the Town remained 'open for business', implementing programs and services to support local employers and encourage spending in our community. Throughout 2020 and since the onset of COVID-19, Halton Hills took early, decisive and coordinated action to support existing businesses and continue to market our town as a prime investment destination.

Our 2020 economic development workplan began with a continued focus on strengthening and diversifying the local business community, growing employment and further enhancing the quality of life in Halton Hills. However, the pandemic quickly affected both global and local economies in extraordinary and unprecedented ways, and the Town pivoted to execute strategies to mitigate the local impact.

Despite COVID-19, significant advancements were made on major projects within the Town's Economic Development, Innovation and Culture division. By working collaboratively across departments, over 25 new or modified initiatives were implemented in 2020 to position Halton Hills for an expedited recovery and continued economic prosperity.

This annual report highlights various Town initiatives and accomplishments, with a focus on those of the Economic Development, Innovation and Culture division, over the course of a uniquely challenging and tumultuous year. We have made substantial progress, but there is still more to be done.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rick Bonnette". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rick" and last name "Bonnette" clearly legible.

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Note: Some of the photographs in this document were taken pre-COVID-19

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, INNOVATION & CULTURE OVERVIEW

Halton Hills' 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 support existing businesses, attract new investment and expand local job opportunities.

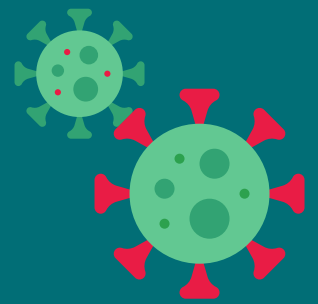
Economic development staff are focused on engaging, informing and supporting the economic interests and needs of existing and future residents, businesses and organizations located in Halton Hills.

The division provides a full suite of high-quality supports to the business community that in turn foster a prosperous economy and enhance quality of life. These include:

- **Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) programming;**
- **Elevating and promoting Halton Hills' competitiveness in the global marketplace;**
- **Delivering a comprehensive Business Concierge program;**
- **Site selection assistance;**
- **Market research;**
- **Industry engagement;**
- **Implementation of the Community Improvement Plan (CIP) and the Manufacturing Expansion Fund (MEF);**
- **Amplifying tourism's economic benefits; and**
- **Leveraging the arts and culture sector to raise quality of life.**

Halton Hills strives to be an economic development leader, actively attracting and supporting local 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 living, and an outstanding quality of life.

COVID-19 RESPONSE



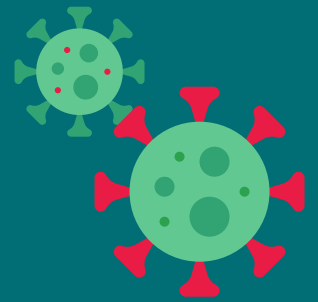
Since the onset of COVID-19 in March 2020, Halton Hills has taken early, decisive and coordinated action with close collaboration across Town departments and key community stakeholders. This work is ongoing, as staff continues to respond to the pandemic and support the local business community.

The Town has implemented several COVID-specific business supports, as well as advanced and modified other important initiatives already underway. Over 25 new and modified initiatives have been implemented to position Halton Hills for an expedited economic recovery.

Many of the support and recovery initiatives that the Town has implemented were largely informed by feedback received from administering two surveys of the Halton Hills business community. The initiatives are comprised of short-term actions to support immediate recovery efforts, as well as longer-term investment growth actions which will help sustain local economic growth post-pandemic. The new initiatives included:

- Establishing the Economic Support and Recovery Task Force to coordinate the local COVID-19 response;
- Launching the 'Al Fresco in the Hills' temporary patio program to help supplement local restaurant revenues;
- Launching the new Visit Halton Hills website to amplify tourism's local economic benefits;
- Coordinating a Business Improvement Area (BIA) Levy Reduction Program;
- Supporting the expansion of online and E-commerce presence for 67 local businesses by administering the Digital Main Street program. 23 local businesses were also approved for \$2,500 Digital Transformation Grants through the program;
- Launching a new Invest Halton Hills marketing video that showcases Halton Hills to attract new investment;
- Participating in the GTA Economic Development Alliance – a group of over 20 municipal economic development offices coordinating economic supports across the Greater Toronto Area;
- Expanding marketing and business engagement to gather data on local COVID-19 impacts and provide timely and relevant information to assist businesses in responding to COVID-19;
- Advocating on behalf of local businesses to the federal and provincial government on key issues via the Mayor's Office;

COVID-19 RESPONSE



- Supporting local businesses through the re-launch of a renewed 'Shop Local' campaign;
- Hosting two Halton Hills COVID-19 Arts & Culture Forums for the arts and culture sector to share their experiences, identify their needs and provide details on the recovery and support programs offered by the Town;
- Creating a new commissioning project, 'The Artist Next Door', for artists and arts and cultural groups to create new work in any artistic discipline that engages the residents of Halton Hills; and
- Launching, 'Artrepreneur', a new professional development program for artists, creative entrepreneurs, and cultural not-for-profit staff and board members, to help equip them with vital business skills needed to grow creative businesses.

These new initiatives supplement a number of pre-existing actions highlighted throughout this document that were also amended to respond to COVID-19.

Combined, the actions taken represent a considerable investment by the Town and help position Halton Hills for accelerated economic recovery. Collaboration, advocacy and sustained effort have been the hallmarks of advancing Halton Hills' COVID-19 economic recovery actions and initiatives.

25+

**NEW & MODIFIED
INITIATIVES**

500+

**BUSINESSES
CONTACTED**

COVID-19 RESPONSE SMALL BUSINESS HIGHLIGHTS

AL FRESCO IN THE HILLS

In June 2020, the Town launched Phase One of the outdoor dining initiative 'Al Fresco in the Hills' to help local food and drink establishments reduce revenue losses caused by necessary compliance with COVID-19 regulations. The program, developed by the Town in collaboration with the Economic Support and Recovery Task Force, provided eligible establishments the opportunity for additional outdoor dining capacity.

In the Fall, Phase Two of the program extended the agreements for patios on private property to January 1, 2021, and added warming options such as tents or heaters to help during the cooler months.



DIGITAL MAIN STREET PROGRAM

The Town applied and successfully received funding to support the local business community by working with main street businesses to expand and improve their online presence:



67 Businesses Supported



29 Businesses Started/Updated Online Stores



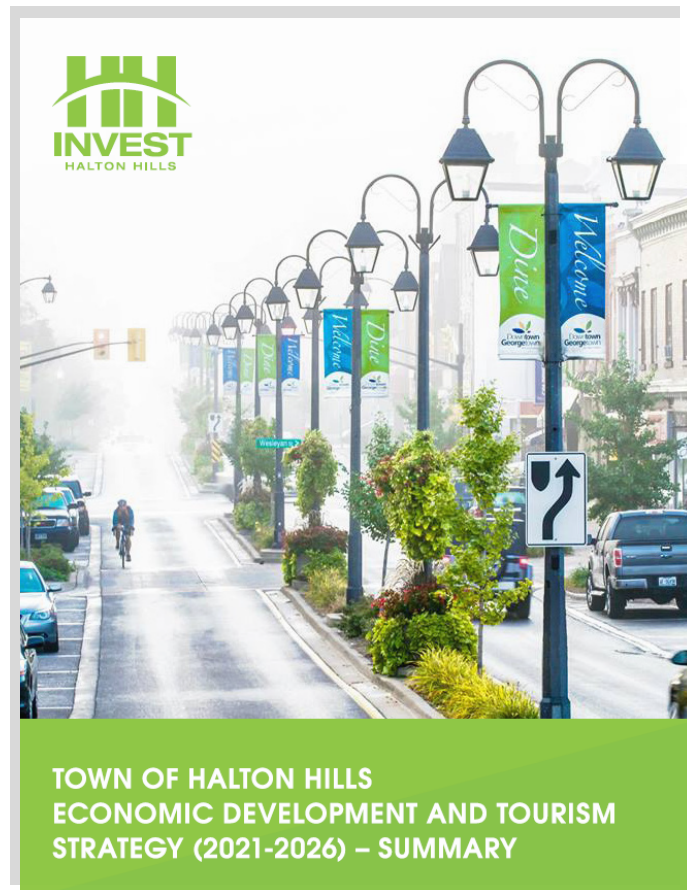
23 Businesses Approved for \$2,500 Grant

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM STRATEGY

Over the past three years, the Town's approach to economic development and job creation has shifted substantially. It is now more strategic, focused, impactful and proactive. By implementing a robust work plan, the focus has been on supporting existing businesses, attracting new investment, and marketing Halton Hills as a prime investment destination.

Since the Town's previous Economic Development Strategy was approved in 2012 and Tourism Strategy was approved in 2014, many demographic, technological and economic changes have taken place. In mid-2019, development of an updated and consolidated five-year Economic Development and Tourism Strategy was undertaken to help ensure Halton Hills' long-term economic prosperity, support strategic decision-making, and grow local investment, jobs and non-residential assessment.

The updated Economic Development and Tourism Strategy continues to focus on enhancing Halton Hills' economic prosperity through a diversified and resilient economy.



The Strategy is actionable, comprehensive and leverages many successes achieved to date, as well as actions that are ongoing. It is comprised of 26 Goals and 137 recommended Actions, and it is a flexible and living document so that the Town can respond to changing market conditions in the wake of COVID-19 and any other major economic disruptions.

The new Economic Development and Tourism Strategy (2021-2026) was approved by Town Council in February 2021.

STRATEGY COMPONENTS & OUTCOMES

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM STRATEGY



- Builds on and leverages extensive cross-departmental and external stakeholder successes;
- Includes actions tailored for Halton Hills to address remaining gaps;
- Provides an actionable roadmap for strategic decision-making on economic development matters;
- Maintains and enhances the Town's economic competitiveness;
- Strengthens an 'open for business' approach;
- Supports local job growth and economic diversification;
- Maximizes the economic benefits from the tourism sector;
- Increases local investment, non-residential assessment, and improves the non-residential to residential assessment ratio;
- Improves job quality (i.e. more professional/technical jobs offering competitive compensation); and
- Confirms key sectors of focus.

STRATEGY BY THE NUMBERS

GOALS / OBJECTIVES

26

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

137

PREPARATION PROCESS



BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION

The updated Economic Development and Tourism Strategy and the Foreign Direct Investment Attraction Strategy both established a roadmap of actionable items for the effective implementation of specific objectives to ensure the continued success of balanced assessment, new investment, job growth and tourism.

To support and complement these strategies, a comprehensive Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) Program was established in 2020 to ensure that local businesses are supported through customer service excellence, expansion tools, connections and resources to remove barriers to growth and remain competitive in both local and global markets.

WHAT IS BR&E?

BR&E is a structured, action-oriented and community-based approach to business and economic development. It promotes job growth by taking a proactive approach to identifying issues as well as opportunities for local businesses, and sets priorities for projects to address these needs.

ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY BENEFITS



JOB GROWTH

The vast majority of new jobs come from existing businesses



BUSINESS EXPANSION

Provides business resources and supports



ISSUE REMEDIATION

Proactive supports to identify and address concerns and issues



AMBASSADOR CREATION

Supports networking connections, builds resources and advocates for the Town



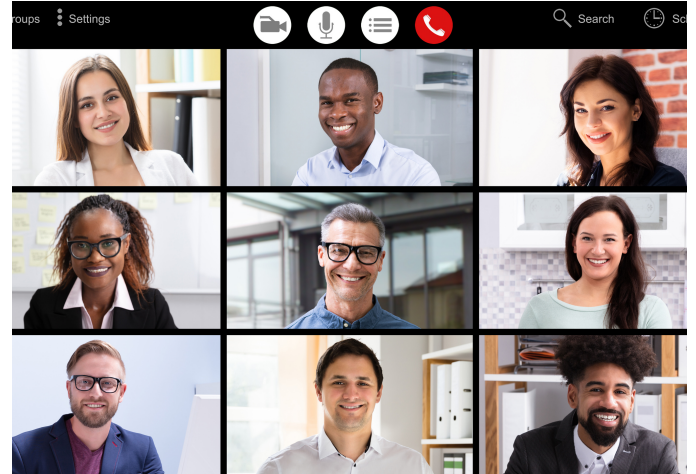
BUSINESS CLIMATE IMPROVEMENT

Develops programs and initiatives to support and react to industry challenges and economic changes

BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION

The Town of Halton Hills' BR&E Program leverages and builds on current initiatives, plans, connections and relationships. The success of previous initiatives provided a positive business climate which produced a solid foundation from which to pursue a comprehensive and robust BR&E program.

In 2020, four key goals with 11 actionable objectives were identified as the basis for the BR&E Program. They will guide efforts and resources over the next two years.



GOALS

Encourage & Support Economic Growth:

- Provide opportunities for networking, external connections, partnerships, and business improvements to grow and innovate.

Business Engagement & Outreach:

- Build and maintain relationships with local Halton Hills businesses through customer service excellence.

Foster an Innovative Business Community:

- Ensure the Town is providing the tools and resources needed for business and employment growth.

Promote Halton Hills:

- Support the local economy through business and employment attraction and tourism initiatives.

ACTIONS

- - Corporate Calling Program
 - Contact Database
 - Data Resources
- - Community Improvement Plan
 - Manufacturing Expansion Fund
 - Business Concierge Program
- - Small Business Supports
 - Sector Innovation
 - Collaborative Connections
- - Promote Tourism
 - InvestHaltonHills.com
 - VisitHaltonHills.ca
 - Marketing Campaigns



COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Town's current Community Improvement Plan (CIP) was approved in 2010 and has been successful in stimulating private sector investment, specifically for small businesses through building and façade improvements grants; as well as business support through landscape improvements and environmental site assessment grants. After 10 years, the Town is looking to build upon the existing program's strengths and successes, while exploring additional tools and incentives to stimulate broader community improvement.

The main areas for consideration as part of the CIP update include:

- Affordable Housing;
- Brownfield Redevelopment;
- Storefront/Main Street Revitalization;
- Agriculture/Agri-business;
- Heritage;
- Arts and Culture;
- Climate Change;
- Accessibility; and
- An Economic Assistance Program.

The review and update will result in a CIP that is modern, more universal, flexible and streamlined in its implementation. It will also allow for the potential inclusion of new and 'non-traditional' CIP programs including arts and culture, climate change, and the consideration of an Economic Assistance Program. The new Economic Assistance Program will examine best practices, opportunities and the feasibility of introducing supports and tools to assist businesses during periods of significant economic hardship, including additional COVID-19-related supports.

The CIP update project launched in Fall 2020 and is expected to be completed by late 2021.

FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT STRATEGY

In 2019, Halton Hills began development of a five-year Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Attraction Strategy, accompanied by a three-year Action Plan in order to elevate the Town's global competitiveness. In March 2020, Halton Hills' first FDI Strategy was approved by Council.

The Town's FDI Strategy:

- Provides an actionable and business case-based roadmap for Halton Hills to be competitive and grow its local economy;
- Augments and aligns with regional, provincial and national FDI efforts;
- Recommends how best to raise awareness of Halton Hills' Unique Value Proposition in foreign markets; and
- Identifies and builds on strengths of the existing local business community.

FDI is part of the Town's comprehensive economic development efforts, and part of the broader Economic Development and Tourism Strategy. FDI activities benefit local businesses, create quality local jobs and attract net new investment. FDI is a key part of the Town's business continuity and investment attraction activities, as well as economic recovery initiatives post-COVID-19, with the goal to:

- Enhance Halton Hills' presence in the global marketplace;
- Ensure economic competitiveness;
- Increase the flow of foreign investment into Halton Hills;
- Grow local jobs and increase economic diversification;
- Create a more balanced assessment ratio; and
- Develop international partnerships with key stakeholders that will strengthen the Town's investment readiness and economy.

FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of the FDI Strategy began in Spring 2020 with the planning of two in-market trade missions, as well as the research and preparation of four industry-specific Investment Business Cases (IBCs) to highlight Halton Hills' investment opportunities for companies looking to expand internationally. Although COVID-19 caused in-market activities and physical trade missions to be delayed, implementation of the FDI Strategy continued throughout 2020.

In 2020, Town staff:



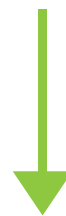
**Completed 4 IBCs
(Advanced Manufacturing,
Agri-business, Food
Processing & Clean
Technology)**



**Developed a list
of over 50 pre-
qualified foreign
company leads**



**Participated in two
international
virtual trade fairs**



These actions have allowed Town staff to develop a solid foundation for future in-person trade missions.

In 2021, there will be continued focus on investment lead generation and pre-qualification, attending virtual tradeshows and building relationships that will strengthen future in-market activities.

There is much global uncertainty regarding COVID-19's impact on FDI. However, at the appropriate time, the Town will plan for FDI delegations/trade missions to its target markets of Germany and Netherlands.

BUSINESS CONCIERGE

To stay competitive, maintain an 'open for business' approach, grow non-residential assessment and attract local jobs, the Town has developed a formal Business Concierge program to expedite the realization of key economic development leads and investments. Council approved the launch of this program in March 2021.

In today's competitive economic environment, the Business Concierge program will contribute to the Town's long-term financial health. The Program is a complimentary service offered by the Economic Development division. It will assist projects from their conceptual beginnings and site selection, to completion and beyond. It will also support and supplement implementation of related strategies, including the Economic Development and Tourism Strategy and the Foreign Direct Investment Strategy.

GOALS

- Provide business owners, major investors and/or developers with a formal service that offers simplified, customized and time-sensitive development process facilitation.
- Provide rapid and coordinated issue resolution through the convenience of a single point of contact.



OBJECTIVES

- Continue to expedite the Town's development review process;
- Collaborate with external agencies in ensuring that key files are expedited;
- Provide a white-glove customer service experience;
- Enhance the Town's 'open for business' approach and economic competitiveness;
- Continue to leverage and strengthen inter-departmental and inter-agency collaboration;
- Grow and diversify the economy by attracting top-tier businesses; and
- Identify and implement innovative solutions to issues.

BUSINESS CONCIERGE PROCESS



1
Initial
Concept



2
Preliminary
Discussions



3
Pre-Application
Support



4
Application
Submission



5
Application
Review /
Expedited
Service



6
Project
Completion &
Continuous
Support

To be eligible for the Business Concierge stream a project must typically meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Large non-residential development in the Premier Gateway, Georgetown and/or Acton Employment Areas;
- Minimum of 100,000 sq. ft. of gross floor area;
- High profile and complex proposal;
- Major employment generator and assessment generator;
- Major office, commercial/retail use, mixed-use and/or tourism generator;
- Large monetary investment;
- Key sector aligned with the Town's priority sectors (i.e. advanced manufacturing, agri-business, food processing and clean technology); and
- Project facing very urgent timelines.

"From the moment we contacted the Town, staff were engaged, enthusiastic and genuinely interested in helping us succeed with our property procurement. The assistance of the Business Concierge, as well as other Town staff, was paramount in overcoming some of the significant hurdles we faced. Staff assisted in coordination with external agencies and in obtaining information that was required to move forward with the purchase – all this during extremely tight due diligence timelines."
- Conestoga Cold Storage



TOURISM

Tourism is a major component of Halton Hills' economy. 2020 presented a challenging year with COVID-19 significantly impacting the tourism sector. Events were cancelled, minimal outdoor activities were permitted and indoor capacity limits had many small businesses trying to navigate a new world of E-commerce and developing curbside options for customers.

In response to the negative effects of COVID-19 and the need for businesses to implement new safety protocols, the Town's efforts shifted to strengthening business resiliency and preparing for eventual recovery.

Key highlights of these efforts included:

- Identifying key tourism assets and confirming the value proposition of Halton Hills' tourism sector;
- Launching the new VisitHaltonHills.ca website;
- Creating an interactive online events calendar;
- Enhancing the local tourism business directory; and
- Collaborating with the Regional Tourism Organization (RTO3) to enhance the promotion of local tourism.



Visit HaltonHills

TOURISM BY THE NUMBERS

8,440

Total site visits since the soft launch of VisitHaltonHills.ca in June 2020. Despite no active promotion of the website due to the pandemic, the new site attracted visitors from over 10 countries.

**7,500
JOBS**

Locally, approximately 7,500 jobs contribute to the tourism industry, meaning that about 30% of all jobs in Halton Hills relate to tourism. This includes retail, accommodation and food services, and the arts and culture sector.

**500+ NEW
FOLLOWERS**

A new tourism-specific Instagram account was launched in 2020 to better connect customers and local businesses during COVID-19. With regular posts directed at Halton region viewers, the account grew to over 500 followers in four months.

Visit HaltonHills

[Play & Explore](#)

[Sip & Savour](#)

[About Halton Hills](#)

[Plan Your Visit](#)



Culturally Connected

Halton Hills is a culturally vibrant community where culture is integrated with our economic, social and environmental lives.

[Learn More](#)

CULTURAL SERVICES

ARTS & CULTURE

Halton Hills is a culturally vibrant community that offers a wide range of opportunities for fulfillment through access to arts and culture.

The Town recognizes the important role that culture plays in building communities, improving quality of life and contributing to economic development by attracting investment and cultural tourism.

Cultural Services supports economic development and the growth of Halton Hills' creative capital through:

- **Cultural Programming**
- **Marketing & Promotion**
- **Professional Development (for the creative sector)**
- **Cultural Tourism**

2020 saw the Town's Cultural Services team pivot to adapt its existing in-person programming to DIY, self-led and virtual options, as well as creating new responsive programming to provide residents with continued access to arts and culture activities.

New programs developed to support cultural businesses, not-for-profits and artists included funding, education and professional development opportunities. More details on these accomplishments will be highlighted in Cultural Services' forthcoming State of Culture report.



AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Increasing the availability of affordable housing in Halton Hills is one of Council's top Strategic Plan priorities. Recognizing the shortage of affordable options, the Town is actively working to ensure that housing is accessible to all residents at any age or stage of life.

Expanded local affordable housing options for current and future residents will be key to maintaining a high quality of life, allowing existing residents to remain in the community, attracting and retaining businesses, and supporting a high-quality workforce.

Access to affordable housing is a challenge caused by a variety of complex factors. By collaborating with key stakeholders, including Halton Region, the Town is taking meaningful action to address this situation at the local level.

Throughout 2020, the Town advanced the following actions to support the provision of affordable housing:

- **Allocating dedicated staff resources to lead affordable housing initiatives;**
- **Launching a comprehensive communications plan, in collaboration with the Town's Corporate Communications department, to raise awareness and engage the community in affordable housing discussions;**
- **Increasing permissions, access and awareness for two-unit house creation;**
- **Completing the collection and analysis of housing data to establish a baseline understanding of local housing affordability issues;**
- **Building relationships with public, private and non-profit sector partners to identify and partner on affordable housing opportunities;**
- **Providing financial supports through the waiving or deferral of Town fees and/or charges for eligible projects;**
- **Assessing and advancing Town-owned properties to facilitate the provision of additional affordable housing; and**
- **Incorporating affordable housing as a focus area in the update of the Town's Community Improvement Plan.**

AFFORDABLE HOUSING ACTIONS UNDERWAY

‘What Does Affordable Housing Mean to You?’ Campaign

The Town launched a multi-tiered communications plan to generate awareness of local housing challenges and to engage the community in meaningful discussions around affordable housing solutions.

Affordable Housing Working Group

The Town formed an Affordable Housing Working Group to develop and recommend actions that address the Town’s affordable housing needs. The working group collaborates in the research and development of practical, affordable, evidence-based, coordinated and effective actions to address the affordable housing needs of current and future residents of Halton Hills.

17 Guelph Street

Envisioned as a mixed-income rental housing development in the heart of Georgetown, the Town received a \$40,000 CMHC Seed Contribution to undertake environmental and other ancillary work for the site. This funding enabled the Town to undertake pre-development work in a timely manner, with the goal of providing a shovel-ready site.



CONCLUSION

2020 brought forth unprecedented changes to both global and local economies: threatening public health, disrupting trade, hurting labour markets and affecting personal well-being.

Despite the uncertainty that COVID-19 has caused, with cross-departmental collaboration, Halton Hills' Economic Development, Innovation and Culture division continued to provide a full suite of high-quality supports to the business community with the overarching goal to support existing businesses, attract new investment and expand local job opportunities.

The achievements highlighted in this Annual Report provide a solid foundation from which to pursue the next stage of economic development initiatives, programs and strategies in Halton Hills.

Moving forward, the Town will continue to purposefully shift its economic development efforts to be more strategic, coordinated and impactful, which will in turn foster a more prosperous economy and enhanced quality of life. Town staff will continue to assess the most current economic data available, and continue to take proactive, decisive and coordinated action to respond to COVID-19 and support the local business community.

Halton Hills' economic prosperity makes it possible for the Town to continue to deliver the services upon which residents and businesses rely. Halton Hills enjoys a diverse and multi-sector economy. Businesses in Halton Hills have access to a comprehensive suite of economic development supports and a competitive business environment. The prosperity and COVID-19 recovery of the local business community remains a key economic development priority for the Town.





TOWN OF HALTON HILLS
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
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