



TOWN OF
HALTON HILLS
Working Together Working for You!

REPORT

TO: Mayor Bonnette and Members of Council

FROM: Erin Kaiser, Senior Economic Development Officer

DATE: June 22, 2021

REPORT NO.: ADMIN-2021-0034

SUBJECT: Award of Single-Source Contract for the Invest Halton Hills Economic Development Website

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report No. ADMIN-2021-0034, dated June 22, 2021, regarding the Award of Single-Source Contract for the Invest Halton Hills (InvestHaltonHills.com) Economic Development Website, be received;

AND FURTHER THAT Council approve the award of contract for the website renewal to eSolutions Group, Ltd. 455 Phillip Street, Waterloo ON N2L 3X2 to an upset limit of \$49,000 (including applicable taxes) to be partially funded from the Invest Halton Hills Economic Development Website project (1100-10-2101) in the amount of \$25,000, including hosting and maintenance costs until April 2022;

AND FURTHER THAT that the project budget for the Invest Halton Hills Economic Development Website (1100-10-2101) be increased by \$24,000, from \$25,000 to \$49,000 and that the additional funding be financed from the Economic Investment Attraction Fund (1100-10-1803) as set out in report ADMIN-2021-0034;

AND FURTHER THAT the Senior Manager of Purchasing and Risk Management be authorized to issue a purchase order to eSolutions Group, Ltd., 455 Phillip Street, Waterloo ON N2L 3X2, in the amount of \$49,000 (including applicable taxes);

AND FURTHER THAT Council approve the award of the website hosting and licensing contract for the Invest Halton Hills Economic Development website to eSolutions Group, Ltd., 455 Phillip Street, Waterloo ON N2L 3X2, in the amount of \$4,890 (excluding HST) per year beginning in April 2022 for a period of one (1) year, with the option to renew annually thereafter, subject to satisfactory performance and price negotiations;

AND FURTHER THAT the Mayor and Clerk be authorized to execute all necessary and ancillary documents with eSolutions Group, Ltd.

KEY POINTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- A modern, impactful and user-friendly economic development website is key to positioning Halton Hills as a prime investment destination, attracting non-residential assessment and local jobs.
- The Town of Halton Hills' Economic Development and Tourism Strategy identifies establishing the Invest Halton Hills (InvestHaltonHills.com) website as the primary source of all Town economic investment attraction activities, economic data, information and resources.
- The Strategy also includes six other action items that will be directly supported by a robust and innovative economic website.
- The existing Economic Development website, InvestHaltonHills.com, does not allow for updates/changes to current site features, nor does it allow for new features to be added, including changes needed to comply with the Accessible for Ontarians for Disabilities Act (AODA).
- The existing website, hosted by Drupal Inc., does not include technical support.
- A new economic development website is required to continue to position Halton Hills as a prime investment destination, and to enhance business attraction, foreign direct investment, and business retention and expansion.
- Based on the development and hosting of the Town (HaltonHills.ca), Library (hhpl.on.ca) and Tourism (VisitHaltonHills.ca) websites with eSolutions, it is recommended that a single-source contract be awarded to eSolutions for the new InvestHaltonHills.com website.
- The migration of all Town websites to the eSolutions platform will ensure strong internal technical support as well as coordination between the various websites, thus enhancing the user experience.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:

In February 2021, Council approved a new five-year Economic Development and Tourism Strategy. The Strategy consists of five closely linked sub-strategies that will maintain and enhance the Town's economic competitiveness, strengthen an "open for business" approach, and support local job growth and economic diversification, among other key benefits.

The Strategy's recommended actions include establishing the Invest Halton Hills website as the primary source for economic development data, information and resources. There are six other action items that will directly benefit (while many other action items will be supported) from the renewal of InvestHaltonHills.com.

Action items that will benefit directly from the website renewal include:

- Compile an inventory of available industrial land and buildings including zoning, permitted uses and servicing information;
- Create an online directory of funding programs by sector;
- Ensure contact information for Economic Development, Innovation and Culture division staff is easily accessible;
- Develop and post information guides about each of the Town's Brownfield redevelopment programs with the corresponding application;
- Invest in regular website upgrades for surveying, demographics tracking and product/experience development; and
- Expand the content and sub-brand messaging including all critical economic data on the website.

The Town's existing Economic Development website, InvestHaltonHills.com, was initially created in February 2018. It was designed to raise the profile of economic development activities in Halton Hills, enhance communication with the business community, foster the retention and expansion of existing businesses, and facilitate the flow of new investment into the community - with a focus on the attraction of foreign direct investment.

Ensuring that the website remains current and impactful requires consistent upgrades and maintenance to stay current and competitive within local and global markets, and to adapt to technological changes. To date, the existing site has served as a useful landing pad for potential investors and an information sharing tool for local businesses. However, the existing platform on which the website is hosted no longer allows for updates to existing features. In addition, it is no longer possible to add new features and there is no technical support available to respond to technical issues. Additionally, the existing site does not allow for required changes to be made to adhere to and/or maintain Accessible for Ontarians for Disabilities Act (AODA) compliance.

Building on the solid foundation provided by the existing website and in response to the recommendations of the Economic Development and Tourism Strategy, it is recommended that a new website be developed to provide improved functionality, accessibility and features allowing for an enhanced user experience for the local and global audience.

Relatively recently, three of the Town's websites have been developed and/or redeveloped and are now hosted by the eSolutions Group. These sites include: the Halton Hills Public Library's website (2018), the Town's corporate website (HaltonHills.ca) and the Town's Visit Halton Hills tourism website (VisitHaltonHills.ca) in 2020.

Since its launch, the Halton Hills Public Library website has received two awards: a Platinum Hermes Creative Award and an APEX Award for Publication Excellence. In addition, overall visits to the library's website have increased by 69%. The Visit Halton

Halton Hills site has seen similar success since its launch about one year ago, with an increase from 2,000 annual visitors to over 14,000 visits. Importantly, this traffic increase has occurred despite the severe impacts of COVID-19, and a pause in widespread promotion of the website – which will take place once further COVID-19 restrictions are lifted and the tourism sector can start to recover.

Leveraging the successful launches of the other eSolutions-developed websites, staff is seeking Council authorization to award a single-source contract to eSolutions Group to upgrade and host a new InvestHaltonHills.com website. This approach will help ensure consistency across all Town and Library websites, as well as a consistent approach to website accessibility, technical support, streamlined process for licenses, hosting, and renewing contracts for all four websites.

By moving InvestHaltonHills.com to the eSolutions Group platform, the Town will be leveraging the benefits associated with the other websites, including:

- Cloud-based software solution which will allow website stability, ensuring 99.99% uptime and availability.
- 24/7 technical support.
- The assurance that the websites will be available to the public in times of power outages, etc.
- An easy-to-use Content Management System that allows for multiple levels of staff to input content, along with an efficient editing and approval process to ensure that content meets the Town's communication standards.
- Reviewed website content that meets or exceeds current AODA communication guidelines.
- Responsive designs that adjust to all screen types and sizes, including desktop computers, tablets and smartphones.
- A robust search engine for website content.
- Comprehensive website analytics.

The renewed InvestHaltonHills.com will provide the ability to add/update the following features:

- An image-rich design that reflects Halton Hills' unique quality of life and rural-urban mix;
- Dynamic video to welcome and introduce visitors to Halton Hills' economic development and investment opportunities;
- Highlights of the target sectors for business attraction;
- Real Estate listings of available industrial land and buildings;
- Dedicated webpage for the updated Community Improvement Plan (CIP);
- Improved 'calls to action' through contact forms and e-newsletter registration;
- Dedicated news section to highlight business news; and
- Visual community profile to highlight key economic development statistics/performance indicators; and other pertinent information.

If approved, the new InvestHaltonHills.com will be developed over Q3 and into Q4, with a tentative launch planned for late 2021.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report aligns to the Town's Strategic plan recognizing the value to foster a prosperous economy, maintain and enhance the economic vitality of the town through the provision of a wide range of opportunities for economic development. In addition, the report also aims to provide responsive, effective municipal government and strong leadership in the effective and efficient delivery of municipal services.

This report also identifies shaping growth as one of the Town's Strategic priorities.

RELATIONSHIP TO CLIMATE CHANGE:

This report is administrative in nature and does not directly impact or address climate change and the Town's Net Zero target.

While this report is administrative in nature, as the Town's main communication channel for economic development and investment attraction, in alignment with the Town's Economic Development and Tourism Strategy as well as the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Strategy, the new website will help attract investors in the Clean Technology sector. Doing so will contribute to advancing the Town's climate change objectives.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Public Engagement was not needed as this report is administrative in nature.

INTERNAL CONSULTATION:

Town staff from Purchasing, Finance, and Information Technology Services were consulted in the preparation of this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

This report will be funded through an existing approved budget source.

The total cost to complete the website renewal is \$49,000 (including applicable taxes). The Invest Halton Hills Economic Development Website project (1100-10-2101) currently has \$25,000, resulting in a funding shortfall of \$24,000. The additional funding required will be funded from the Strategic Planning reserve, which will be replenished by a transfer from the Economic Investment Attraction Fund project (1100-10-1803). As part of the on-going capital project status review, it has been determined that the project budget for the Economic Investment Attraction Fund (1100-10-1803) can be reduced by \$24,000 based on the estimated demand for funds in 2021. This project can be utilized to finance the additional funding requirement of the \$24,000 shortfall for the website renewal work. Therefore, the project budget for the Economic Investment Attraction

Fund will be reduced as part of the Capital Status reporting process and the resulting excess funds will be transferred to the Strategic Planning reserve.

Reviewed and approved by,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Damian Szybalski". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name and last name clearly legible.

Damian Szybalski, Director of Economic Development, Innovation & Culture

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "C. Mills". The signature is more stylized and compact than the one above, with a prominent horizontal stroke across the top.

Chris Mills, Acting Chief Administrative Officer