



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor Bonnette and Members of Council

FROM: Graham Lowe, Senior Economic Development Officer

DATE: March 30, 2022

MEMO NO.: ADMIN-2022-0015

SUBJECT: 2021 Invest Halton Hills Annual Report - Economic Development, Innovation and Culture

PURPOSE OF THE MEMORANDUM:

The purpose of this Memorandum is to provide Council with an update and summary overview of the many Economic Development, Innovation and Culture division activities implemented in 2021 – both in response to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as other workplan initiatives. These initiatives are highlighted via the appended “2021 Invest Halton Hills Annual Report”.

BACKGROUND:

Throughout 2021, the pandemic continued to impact global and local economies in unprecedented ways. The Town continued to respond to the pandemic with several new supports for the local business community, while advancing many pre-existing initiatives and strategies. The Economic Development, Innovation and Culture divisional workplan is continuously monitored and adjusted, as needed, to best align with current business needs and economic conditions.

A new five-year Economic Development and Tourism Strategy was approved by Council in February 2021. Work then began on the development of the Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan (ERRP) to provide additional supports to the local business community in response to the pandemic. The ERRP complemented the Economic Development and Tourism Strategy, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Attraction Strategy, and the objectives of the Business Concierge, and Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) programs.

The appended 2021 Invest Halton Hills Annual Report provides a snapshot of the wide range of business supports and related initiatives implemented by the Town in 2021. It is the second such Annual Report, with the first ([2020 Annual Report](#)) published in April 2021.

COMMENTS:

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

Halton Hills' Economic Development, Innovation and Culture provides a full suite of high-quality services and supports to the business community that in turn foster a prosperous economy and enhance local quality of life. These include:

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

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

Over the past four years, the Town's approach to economic development and job creation has shifted substantially. It has become more strategic, focused, impactful and proactive. In 2021, this included establishing an 'Investment Attraction' sub-section within the Economic Development, Innovation and Culture division. Doing so helped to align the Town's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) activities with the Business Concierge Program, providing a clear servicing path for companies planning to invest in Halton Hills. As companies in the FDI pipeline progress through the pre-qualification process, they naturally feed into the Business Concierge Program once an investment decision is made. When the development is complete, companies then feed into the Town's Business Retention & Expansion (BR&E) Program for aftercare, ongoing servicing and business supports.

By implementing a robust work plan, the division's focus continues to centre around supporting existing businesses, attracting new investment, and marketing Halton Hills as a prime investment destination. There is also continued focus on strengthening

collaboration with key external stakeholders, including the Acton and Georgetown Business Improvement Areas, Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce and Halton Region. A number of key strategies and programs have been put in place to support these goals, including the [Economic Development and Tourism Strategy \(2021-2026\)](#), [FDI Attraction Strategy \(2020\)](#), [Business Concierge Program \(2021\)](#), [Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan \(2021\)](#) and the Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) Program (2020).

2. 2021 Invest Halton Hills Annual Report

The 2021 Invest Halton Hills Annual Report highlights various Town initiatives and accomplishments, with a focus on business supports led 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, Transportation and Public Works, Halton Hills Public Library), stakeholder engagement, advocacy and sustained effort were key enablers to successfully implement the Town's economic development initiatives and advance Council's strategic priorities.

A supplementary 'State of Culture' report will be presented to Council in the near future to showcase the many initiatives and supports led by Cultural Services.

Some key successes highlighted in the 2021 Invest Halton Hills Annual Report include:

- Already completing 7% of the 137 actions of the five-year Economic Development and Tourism Strategy, with another 40% of the actions currently underway/in progress;
- Administering the Digital Main Street program which provided \$150,000 in grant funding to 60 local businesses;
- Contacting over 550 local businesses through the Corporate Calling Program;
- Developing a pipeline of over 60 investment leads through implementation of the FDI Attraction Strategy;
- Managing 26 Business Concierge projects, potentially representing over 9 million square feet of development, over \$1 billion in investment, and thousands of direct and indirect jobs;
- Relaunching an expanded Shop Local campaign to help increase spending at local businesses;
- Attracting over 22,000 unique visitors to the Visit Halton Hills website; and
- Developing and distributing three Digital Tool Kits for local tourism businesses.

The 2021 Invest Halton Hills Annual Report is organized into the following 13 sections:

1. Economic Development, Innovation and Culture Overview
 - Provides a summary of the division's key services, supports, strategies and audiences.

2. Economic Development and Tourism Strategy
 - Summarizes progress made on the 137 actions outlined in the Town's Economic Development and Tourism Strategy (2021-2026).
3. Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan
 - Addresses business needs and supports required as a result of the pandemic, including reopening safely and staying in business while increasing business resiliency over the longer term.
4. Shop Local Campaign
 - Provides an overview of several initiatives designed to help raise awareness about the importance of shopping local and increase spending at local businesses.
5. Small Business Initiatives
 - Highlights three initiatives ('Picture Perfect Products', 'Shop the Hills' contest and 'Al Fresco in the Hills') which supported local small businesses in 2021.
6. Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E)
 - Highlights the objectives and actions of the BR&E program, including the Corporate Calling Program that proactively engages and continues to build positive relationships with local businesses.
7. Community Improvement Plan (CIP)
 - Outlines progress made towards the CIP's update, which builds on the existing program's strengths and successes. The CIP Update is currently underway and expected to launch in Summer 2022.
8. Digital Main Street
 - Summarizes the successes of Halton Hills' third Digital Main Street program that ran from September 2021 to February 2022 and supported over 200 local businesses.
9. 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 investment attraction initiatives.
10. Business Concierge
 - Outlines the goals, objectives and progress made on the Town's Business Concierge program that was developed to assist with the realization of key economic development leads and investments.
11. Tourism
 - Summarizes the key highlights of the Town's tourism efforts in 2021, which focused on strengthening business resiliency and preparing for economic recovery.

12. Affordable Housing

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

13. Cultural Services

- Outlines Cultural Services' role in economic development programming that supports the arts and culture sector. A more comprehensive 'State of Culture' report will be presented to Council at a later date.

CONCLUSION:

The 2021 Invest Halton Hills Annual Report provides an annual summary of the comprehensive suite of Economic Development services, program and supports offered by the Town. These initiatives are key to Halton Hills' economic prosperity and quality of life.

As the pandemic continues to evolve, so too will the Town's response. As the world begins to emerge from the challenges of the pandemic in 2022, the Town's Economic Development, Innovation and Culture division will continue to support existing businesses to remain resilient and competitive, while showcasing Halton Hills as a prime investment destination.

Staff will continue to assess the most current economic data and take proactive and coordinated action. The 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.

Reviewed and approved by,

Damian Szybalski, Director of Economic Development, Innovation and Culture

Chris Mills, Chief Administrative Officer