



2021

INVEST HALTON HILLS ANNUAL REPORT



TOWN OF HALTON HILLS
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
INNOVATION & CULTURE

A MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR



Last year at this time I wrote about the many actions that the Town had taken in response to the pandemic to support local businesses, which began with establishing the Economic Support and Recovery Task Force to coordinate our local COVID-19 response.

Throughout 2021 this support continued, as the Town's Economic Development, Innovation and Culture team worked tirelessly – along with our partners at the Chamber of Commerce and BIAs – to develop and deliver more plans and programs. One such example is the Town's Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan that details short-term actions to support immediate recovery efforts, as well as longer term actions designed to support business resiliency over time.

The Town's response to the pandemic is by no means over.

Though some prescriptive protocols may remain in place, we are bouncing back. The municipality continues to build on the successful initiatives that were first launched in 2020, implement new support programs and further leverage our partnerships.

Despite the challenges of the current environment experienced world-wide, Halton Hills remains a prime investment destination. As new investments are realized, non-residential assessment growth will enable the Town to continue to efficiently deliver services that residents and businesses rely on. Looking forward, we will continue to focus on making Halton Hills a top-of-mind community to live, work, play, create and, very importantly, invest.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rick Bonnette". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

CONTENTS

2021 INVEST HALTON HILLS ANNUAL REPORT

Economic Development, Innovation & Culture Overview	1
Economic Development & Tourism Strategy	3
Economic Recovery & Resiliency Plan (ERRP)	5
Shop Local Campaign	6
Small Business Initiatives	7
Digital Main Street	8
Business Retention & Expansion (BR&E)	10
Community Improvement Plan (CIP)	11
Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Strategy	12
Business Concierge	14
Tourism	15
Affordable Housing	17
Cultural Services	19
Conclusion	20

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, INNOVATION & CULTURE OVERVIEW

Halton Hills' Economic Development, Innovation and Culture division provides a full suite of high-quality services and supports to the business community that in turn foster a prosperous economy and enhance 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**
- **Supporting and advancing affordable housing projects and initiatives**
- **Amplifying tourism's economic benefits**
- **Leveraging and supporting the arts and culture sector**

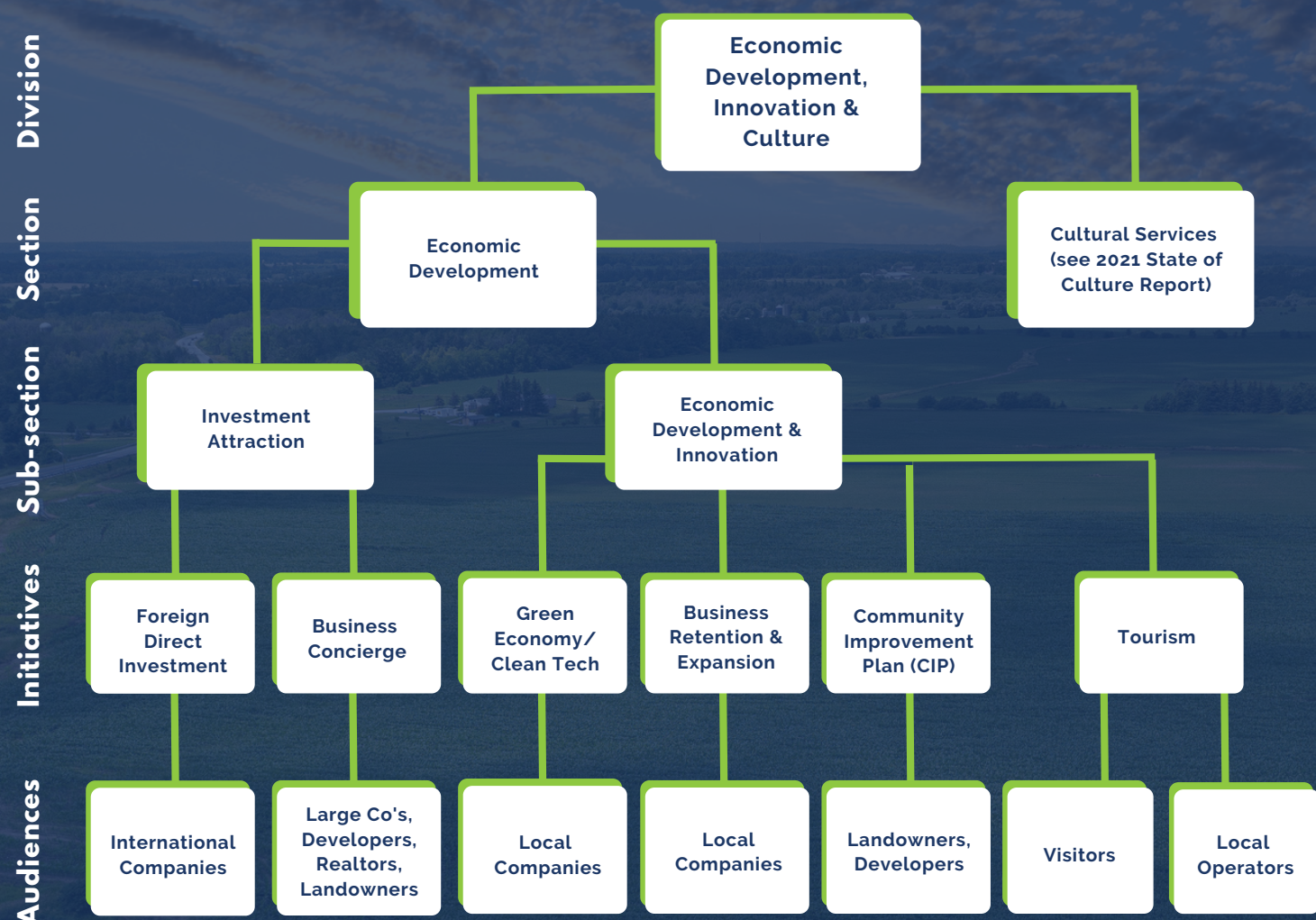
Halton Hills strives to be an economic development leader, actively attracting and supporting local and international business opportunities. The Town offers existing and potential businesses a strategic platform for success, proximity to world-class markets, a distinct community with an ideal balance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

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, INNOVATION & CULTURE OVERVIEW

Over the past four years, the Town's approach to economic development and job creation has continued to shift. It has become 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.

A number of key strategies and programs have been put in place to support existing businesses, attract new investment and market Halton Hills as a prime investment destination. These include the Economic Development and Tourism Strategy (2021-2026), Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Attraction Strategy (2020), Business Concierge Program (2021) and the Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) Program (2020).

The graphic below provides an overview of the Economic Development, Innovation & Culture Division sections and sub-sections, along with corresponding initiatives and target audiences.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM STRATEGY (2021-2026)

A new five-year Economic Development and Tourism Strategy (2021-2026) was approved by Council on February 1, 2021. Following approval of the Strategy, an actionable and practical Implementation Plan was developed with outcome measurements and associated Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) corresponding to each of the Strategy's goals, objectives and actions. The Implementation Plan also includes associated budgets and timelines for implementing the Strategy's 137 actions.

The Implementation Plan leverages linkages with affordable housing, arts and culture, quality of life and climate change, where applicable. With its focus on increasing non-residential assessment growth, it is a key initiative to support the sustainability of the Town's Long Range Financial Plan. It also connects to and/or helps advance multiple Town strategies and initiatives, including:

- Council's Strategic Plan;
- Regional Official Plan Update;
- Employment Lands Needs Study;
- Premier Gateway Phase 2B Secondary Plan;
- Community Improvement Plan (CIP);
- Affordable Housing Initiatives;
- Cultural Master Plan;
- Public Art Master Plan;
- Transit Service Strategy;
- Low-Carbon Transition Strategy; and,
- Climate Change Resiliency Strategy.

The Implementation Plan is not intended to be static. Instead, it is flexible and will respond to changing business needs, priorities, continued COVID-19 impacts, ongoing affordability and any future economic disruptions. As needed, adjustments will be made on an ongoing basis so that the Town can best respond to changing conditions. Thus far, 7% of the Strategy's actions have been completed, with an additional 40% underway.

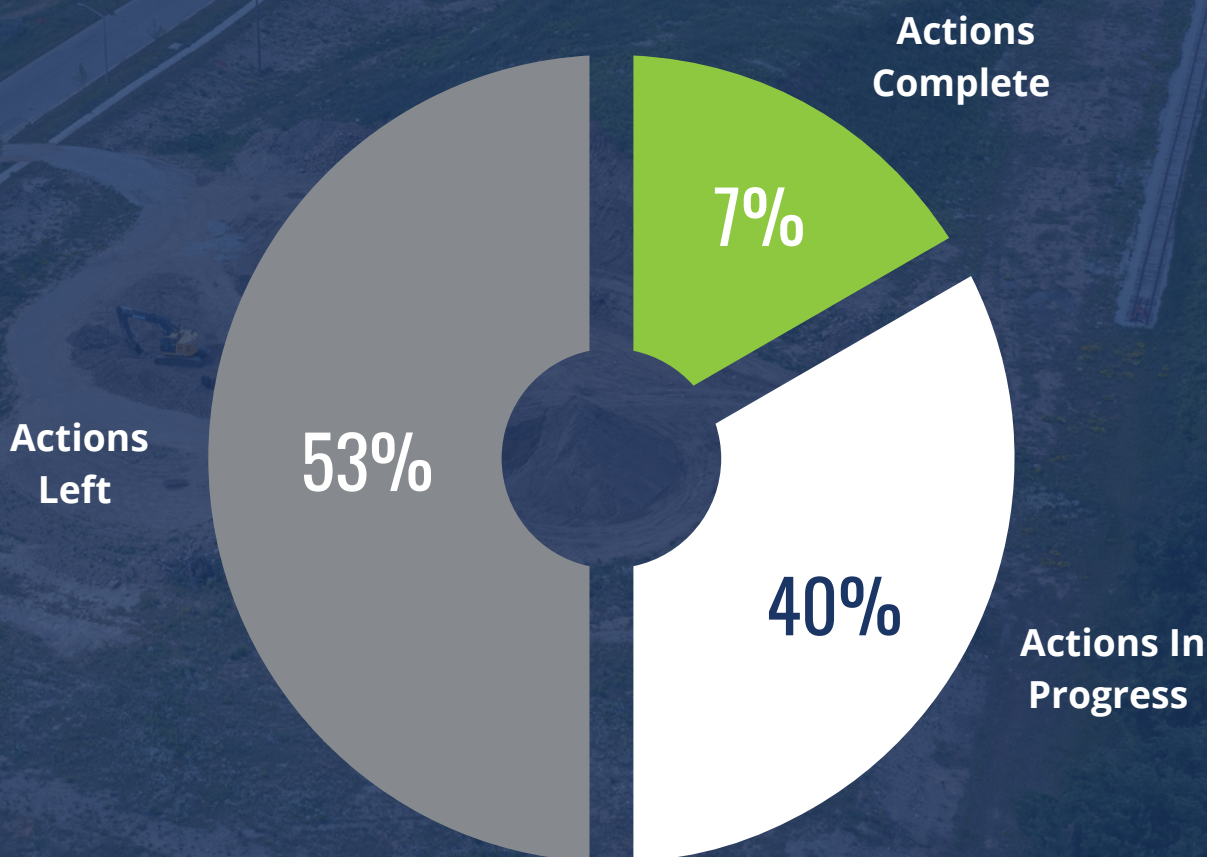


STRATEGY PROGRESS BY THE NUMBERS

TOTAL STRATEGIC ACTIONS

137

PROGRESS IN 2021



ECONOMIC RECOVERY & RESILIENCY PLAN (ERRP)

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 2021, the pandemic impacted both the global and local economies in unprecedented ways. In response, the Economic Development, Innovation and Culture division's workplan was adjusted to include several COVID-specific business supports.

Following Council's approval of the Town's five-year Economic Development Strategy in February 2021, work began on the development of the Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan (ERRP). The ERRP was developed to address business needs and supports required as a result of the pandemic, including reopening safely and staying in business, as well as increasing business resiliency over the longer term. The ERRP complements the Economic Development and Tourism Strategy, Foreign Direct Investment Attraction Strategy, and the general objectives of the Business Concierge, and Business Retention and Expansion programs.

Building on actions taken to date, the ERRP provides a practical, responsive and effective framework for current and future business supports – many of which are highlighted throughout this Annual Report.

The ERRP was organized around three pillars:



**Information,
Awareness &
Engagement**



**Business
Resilience &
Growth**



**Continued
Advocacy on
Key Issues**

SHOP LOCAL



In Fall 2021, the Town launched a new and expanded 'Shop Local' campaign in partnership with the Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Georgetown Business Improvement Area and the Downtown Acton Business Improvement Area (BIA).

The initiative was a key part of the Town's Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan to support the local business community with managing the impacts of COVID-19.

The 'Shop Local' campaign was comprised of several initiatives designed to help raise awareness about the importance of shopping local and increase spending at local businesses, including:

- 'Shop the Hills' Contest – a weekly scavenger hunt throughout the Town to find gift certificates placed in unique locations.
- Print and Digital Ad Campaign – showcasing local businesses.
- Reusable 'Shop Local' Tote Bags and New Window Decals – to raise awareness about the importance of shopping local.
- Al Fresco in the Hills Patio Program – to continue to promote establishments with patios throughout Halton Hills.
- Social Media Campaign – to engage business owners and residents about their favourite local businesses.



SMALL BUSINESS INITIATIVES

PICTURE PERFECT PRODUCTS:

Picture Perfect Products was one of two initiatives launched during Small Business Week (October 17- 23), and was delivered in partnership with the Halton Hills Public Library. Many local small businesses – including start-ups, home-based businesses and entrepreneurs – booked free studio space and equipment at the Halton Hills Public Library for DIY product photography sessions.

'SHOP THE HILLS' CONTEST:

The 'Shop the Hills' Contest also launched during Small Business Week, sending local shoppers on a scavenger hunt for a chance to win one of ten hidden \$100 Chamber of Commerce gift cards throughout October and November 2021. Clues to the locations of the hidden gift card tins were posted on the Town's social media channels twice weekly. The contest reached over 9,000 people through the Visit Halton Hills tourism website and Town social media channels. \$1,000 in prizes were awarded to encourage shopping local and promote consumer confidence.

AL FRESCO IN THE HILLS:

The Town continued to offer the Al Fresco in the Hills temporary outdoor patio program throughout 2021, in order to support local restaurants, bars and other food and drink establishments. There were 16 temporary patios approved in 2021, providing local food and drink establishments with additional dining space to help reduce revenue losses caused by necessary compliance with COVID-19 regulations.



DIGITAL MAIN STREET PROGRAM



DIGITAL CONSULTATIONS

Digital main street staff worked with small businesses to help grow their digital presence through 200+ virtual consultations from 2020-2022.



\$2,500 DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION GRANT

In partnership with the provincial and federal government, the Ontario BIA Association offered a \$2,500 grant to support small storefront businesses located in Halton Hills.



SHOPHERE

Provided small business owners and artists with a quick, easy and low-cost way to start selling online.

DIGITAL
MAIN ST.™

"I am very happy and appreciative that I was accepted into the program. It has helped me to understand how to reposition my brand. The videos were extremely informative and the team members really care and are very helpful."

"My experience was extremely positive... I hope the program continues and helps businesses in the community thrive. [The DMS Team] was incredible and very personable, as well as extremely helpful with helping me get set up and referred to other businesses in the community."



DIGITAL MAIN STREET PROGRAM

PROGRAM PARTICIPATION 2021

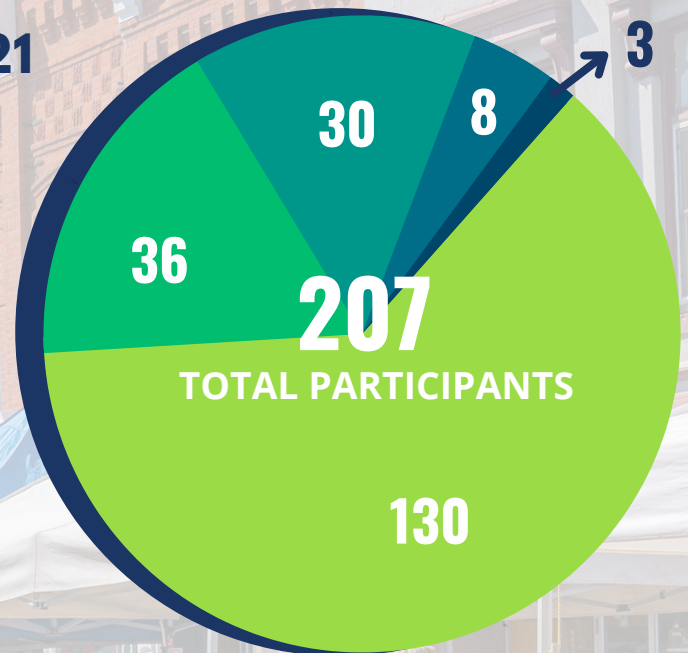
CONSULTATIONS

RECIPIENT OF GRANT

SHOPHERE

360° PHOTOS

VENDOR DIRECTORY



GRANT APPLICATIONS: 2020-2021 & 2021-2022

 **72**
Applications
Submitted

 **60**
Grant
Recipients

 **6**
Tentative
Recipients



\$150,000

in Funding for Halton Hills Businesses

BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION

CORPORATE CALLING PROGRAM:

As part of a comprehensive Business Retention and Expansion Program launched in 2020, a Corporate Calling Program was defined to proactively connect with existing business in an effort to continue to build positive relationships, create synergies, connections and solutions, and assist in local business success and growth.

Halton Hills Corporate Calling Program launched in 2020, with the goal to contact 486 local businesses and achieve the following objectives:

- **Improve local business climate through a formalized visitation program**
- **Proactively support expansion and avert closures**
- **Recommend and connect businesses with existing resources and support programs**
- **Increase business community champions for the Town**
- **Collect data for policy, plans and program reviews, as well as reduce barriers to growth**

Since the launch of the Halton Hills' Corporate Calling Program, and throughout the pandemic, it has become imperative to connect with businesses, especially those hardest hit by COVID restrictions. In the first full year of the program the Town engaged a pool of local businesses, strategically selected by size, industry and economic effects:



COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Town of Halton Hills' Community Improvement Plan (CIP) offers financial incentives to stimulate private sector investment and revitalization. To date, Halton Hills' CIP has processed over 30 applications and provided approximately \$350,000 in grants/loans. Since 2017, the CIP has resulted in over \$1,000,000 of combined public-private sector investment.

A CIP update project was launched in Fall 2020 and is expected to be complete by Summer 2022. The Town is currently in Phase 3 of the 4-phased CIP update project. The CIP update aims to create a new CIP that builds upon the existing CIP's strengths and successes, while also exploring additional tools and incentives to stimulate broader community improvement.

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 inclusion of new CIP programs including those focused on affordable housing and climate change.



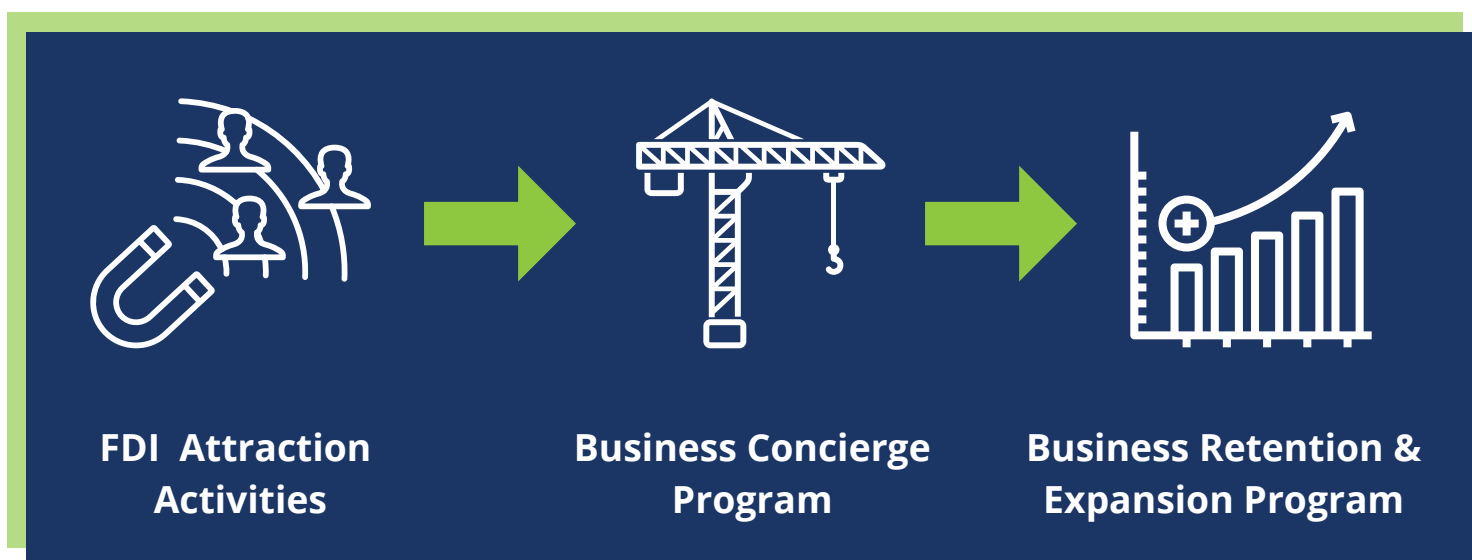
HALTON HILLS
COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN



FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT STRATEGY

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is a key part of the Town's comprehensive economic development efforts and part of the Town's broader Economic Development and Tourism Strategy. FDI can benefit local businesses, help attract high quality local jobs and increase non-residential assessment. The core objective of the Town's FDI Attraction Strategy is to generate net new investment and jobs in Halton Hills by enhancing the Town's presence and competitiveness in the global marketplace, increasing the amount of investment leads in target sectors, and developing relationships with key in-market stakeholders.

Over the past two years, the Town's capacity to attract and retain FDI has improved significantly. In 2021, this included establishing an 'Investment Attraction' sub-section within the Economic Development, Innovation and Culture division. This organizational change helped to better align FDI activities with the Business Concierge Program, providing a clear path for companies investing in Halton Hills - from initial engagement, through to aftercare and servicing:



Advancing implementation of the Town's FDI Attraction Strategy will help elevate Halton Hills' economic competitiveness and help attract new investment and jobs. FDI forms an important part of the Town's business continuity and investment attraction activities – the importance of which has been amplified by the pandemic.

The Town's FDI activities also align with, and complement, the ongoing preparation of the Premier Gateway Phase 2B Secondary Plan. A steady supply of investment-ready lands is needed to attract and accommodate new non-residential investments and the associated local jobs.

FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

In 2021, there was a continued focus on FDI lead generation and pre-qualification, attending virtual tradeshow, developing Halton Hills' investment value proposition, and building relationships that will strengthen future in-market activities. COVID-19 again impacted the Town's ability to execute an in-market trade mission. However, throughout 2021, the Town continued to build a solid foundation from which to execute a successful trade mission in 2022, including:

Outreach to company lead pipeline

Engaged with a pipeline of approximately 60 companies to gain insight into expansion plans and timelines. About one third of firms were interested in learning more about Halton Hills' investment opportunities. The Town's use of digital lead generation software also led to the generation of new investment leads.



Meetings with investment influencers

Staff engaged directly with Trade Commissioner staff from both the Berlin (Germany) and The Hague (Netherlands) offices. Doing so yielded valuable information about how to better frame and refine Halton Hills' FDI Value Proposition. These connections also led to further meetings with additional investment intermediaries.



Outreach to local developers and realtors

The vast majority of Halton Hills' future employment growth will be concentrated in the Premier Gateway employment area. Accordingly, the Investment Attraction team met with over a dozen developers and realtors currently active in the area in order to better understand future development plans and identify potential connections with the Town's current Investment Business Cases.



BUSINESS CONCIERGE

To stay competitive, maintain an 'open for business' approach, grow non-residential assessment and attract local jobs, Halton Hills launched a formal Business Concierge program to expedite the realization of key economic development projects and investments.

The Business Concierge Program assists projects along the full continuum of business attraction and retention – from an initial business/investment concept and site selection, to project completion and beyond. Council approved the launch of the program in March 2021.

26 Business
Concierge
Projects

9 Current
Projects

11 Upcoming
Projects

6 Potential
Investment
Leads

Investment



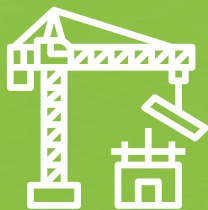
Over \$1 billion in
investment*

Employment



1,000s of direct and
indirect jobs*

Development



Over 9 million sq. ft.
of built/leasable
space*

*All figures reflect potential results,
pending realization of current
Business Concierge projects.

TOURISM



Throughout 2021, as a result of ongoing challenges related to COVID-19, there was a focus on business engagement and support for the local tourism sector through the provision of online digital resources and marketing promotion.

The Visit Halton Hills tourism program also formed strategic partnerships and developed content for specific target markets to promote the Town as a culinary tourism destination. Halton Hills' Tourism Advisory Committee continued to meet throughout the year to support the Economic Development and Tourism Strategy goals and objectives.

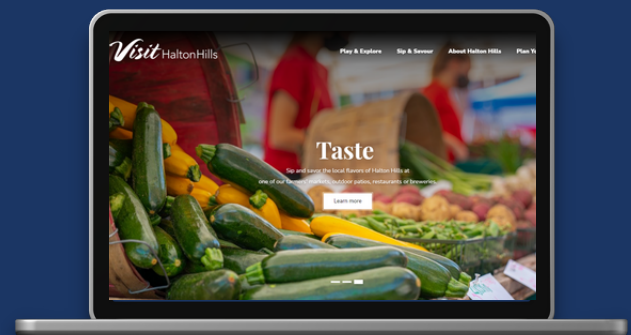
VISIT HALTON HILLS WEBSITE

The Visit Halton Hills tourism website continues to be the main source of visitor information and provides the Town with insights into local tourism audiences and behaviours. The website is regularly updated with local business offerings and public events, and attracts a large and diverse range of visitors:

- 22,000+ unique users
- 44,000+ page views
- Directed 1,000+ clicks to local business websites
- 6,000 visits from the USA; 300 from European countries
- 800+ followers on Visit Halton Hills Instagram account

Top performing pages:

- Restaurants & Pubs
- Shopping
- Trails & Conservation Areas
- Farm Experiences



TOURISM

DIGITAL TOOL KITS

Online digital tool kits were developed in 2021 to support local business engagement, show what resources are available through the Visit Halton Hills tourism program, profile the local tourism target markets, and outline partnership opportunities. Three digital toolkits were created and are available on the new Invest Halton Hills website:

- Get Involved
- Visitor Ready
- Promote



ONTARIO CULINARY TOURISM ALLIANCE

Halton Hills joined the Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance (CTA) in 2021, which allows local food and farm businesses to participate in culinary tourism programs and training, as well as leverage targeted marketing opportunities.

The Town also conducted outreach to local culinary businesses and then developed online content around local restaurants and farm attractions that was used to promote Halton Hills' tourism offerings to the CTA's 20,000+ online audience. This content included:

- Halton Hills' Great Taste of Ontario Passport, including 15 local restaurants and farm attractions.
- Four Local Tourism Itineraries: Pedals & Pubs, Explore the Glen, Festive Georgetown and Evening Picnic in Acton. Over 3,000 people engaged with the itineraries.
- CTA staff visited Halton Hills in November 2021 and promoted their experiences to their 22,200 Instagram followers.



AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The availability of affordable housing in Halton Hills is one of Council's Strategic Plan priorities. Expanding local affordable housing options for current and future residents is 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. Recognizing the shortage of affordable options, throughout 2021, the Town continued to actively work to ensure that housing is accessible to all residents at any age or stage of life.

To date, the Town has taken the following actions to support the provision of affordable housing:

- **Council approval to undertake the Affordable Housing Action Plan**
- **Waiving and deferring Town fees and charges for the development of affordable housing**
- **Forming an Affordable Housing Working Group to develop and recommend actions that address the Town's affordable housing needs**
- **Building relationships with public, private and non-profit sector partners to identify and partner on affordable housing opportunities**
- **Assessing and advancing Town-owned properties to facilitate the provision of additional affordable housing**
- **Incorporating affordable housing as a focus area in the update of the Town's Community Improvement Plan**
- **Launching the Affordable Housing Engagement and Awareness Strategy which has included public consultation through Let's Talk and a virtual Open House**

AFFORDABLE HOUSING OPEN HOUSE

In March 2021, the Town of Halton Hills hosted an Affordable Housing Virtual Open House to engage the community on local housing issues and to receive feedback on housing challenges, priorities and potential solutions.



60+ Attendees



33 Resident Testimonials



4 High school class presentations

WHAT WE HEARD:

HALTON HILLS HAS A SHORTAGE OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING.



91% of participants thought that there was a shortage of affordable housing in Halton Hills.



SENIORS ARE IN CRITICAL NEED OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING.

79% of participants thought that seniors are in most need of affordable housing in Town, followed by young adults and single-income households.

AFFORDABLE RENTAL HOUSING IS NEEDED MOST.

When asked what type of housing is needed most in Halton Hills, **90%** of participants said affordable rental housing.

CULTURAL SERVICES

The arts and culture sector in Halton Hills continues to play an important role in building communities, enhancing quality of life, and contributing to economic development by attracting investment, cultural tourism, and supporting COVID-19 recovery.

The Town's commitment to cultural vibrancy is demonstrated through the continuous delivery of programs and initiatives that support a thriving cultural sector, which was especially hard hit by the pandemic.

In 2021, Cultural Services continued to offer recovery and support programs, including a return to in-person activities, virtual program offerings, professional development opportunities and funding support.

A new public art project raised the profile of local artists and the local arts sector. The Helson Collection was certified as Canadian Cultural Property affirming the outstanding importance of its aesthetic qualities and value in the study of art history. The Helson Gallery also reached new audiences by offering live virtual school programs and afforded local artists opportunities to show and sell their work. These and other initiatives ensured residents' continuous access to arts and culture within the community.

Cultural Services also leads the Town's Truth and Reconciliation, and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion initiatives. Important progress was made to advance these initiatives in 2021 and provides a solid foundation for future work.

More details on Cultural Services initiatives and accomplishments will be highlighted in the forthcoming 2021 State of Culture report.



CONCLUSION

Over the past four years, Halton Hills' approach to economic development and job creation has shifted substantially. With Council's approval of a new five-year Economic Development and Tourism Strategy in March 2021, the division's activities have become even more focused, impactful and proactive. As a result, Halton Hills now offers a sophisticated and comprehensive suite of Economic Development services, programs and supports. This support positions Halton Hills as a prime location for existing businesses to grow and succeed, while also attracting new investments and expanding local job opportunities.

Halton Hills' Economic Development and Tourism approach has – and will continue to – involve consultation, collaboration and the engagement of community partners. By collaborating directly with individual businesses, Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce, Georgetown and Acton Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), Halton Region and other key stakeholders, the Town will continue to deliver a comprehensive work plan that responds to immediate local business community needs, while also advancing strategies and initiatives that will continue to position Halton Hills as a prime investment destination and enhance economic resiliency and diversification.

Working together, significant additional economic potential can be realized – for the benefit of the local and regional economy and community.

As the world continues to emerge from under the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic, the Town will continue to support existing businesses, while showcasing Halton Hills as a prime investment destination.





TOWN OF HALTON HILLS
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
INNOVATION & CULTURE DIVISION

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