



REPORT

REPORT TO: Mayor Bonnette and Members of Council

REPORT FROM: Tony Boutassis, Expeditor and Business Development Portfolio Manager

DATE: February 17, 2021

REPORT NO.: ADMIN-2021-0006

RE: Business Concierge Program – Status Update, Launch and Implementation

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report No. ADMIN-2021-0006, dated February 17, 2021, regarding the “Business Concierge Program – Status Update, Launch and Implementation”, be received;

AND FURTHER THAT Council endorse the formal launch and implementation of the Business Concierge Program, including the Project Eligibility Criteria, as outlined in this report;

AND FURTHER THAT Council authorize Town staff, through the Strategic Economic Development Team, to prioritize and, where feasible, expedite the development review of major non-residential investments that meet Business Concierge Project Eligibility Criteria;

AND FURTHER THAT Council authorize staff, through the Strategic Economic Development Team, to consider, review, evaluate and implement new steps and initiatives related to the Business Concierge Program on an ongoing basis;

AND FURTHER THAT Council authorize staff, through the Strategic Economic Development Team, to develop a Staff Resourcing Strategy that monitors staffing levels related to the Business Concierge Program throughout 2021 and beyond.

BACKGROUND:

To stay competitive, maintain an 'open for business' approach, grow non-residential assessment and attract local jobs, a comprehensive yet practical, Business Concierge program has been developed to streamline the review and delivery of key strategic economic development leads and projects. Cross-departmental collaboration has facilitated this program and will help ensure its success over the long-term. In today's competitive economic environment, the Business Concierge program will contribute to the Town's long-term financial health.

The Business Concierge initiative began in 2019 with direction to:

- (i) Create a program tailored for Halton Hills; and
- (ii) Formalize a program to replace the prior ad-hoc and reactive approach to facilitating major investments through the review process.

Through Memorandum MEM-ADMIN-2019-0015, dated October 30, 2019, an update was provided about the Business Concierge initiative. Business Concierge was positioned as a key tool in the Town's economic development tool box, complementing the Business Retention and Expansion initiative, Community Improvement Plan, Manufacturing Expansion Fund, and implementation of the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Strategy as well as the Economic Development and Tourism Strategy.

In late 2019, the Town hired an "Expeditior and Business Development Portfolio Manager" to lead the development and implementation of the Business Concierge Program.

While developing the formal program and building on past successes, Town staff began to informally implement various Concierge components to continue to elevate the attraction and review of major investments. This informal or pilot test period provided a valuable learning opportunity and allowed for key components to be put in place early on, setting the foundation for a streamlined launch of the formal Business Concierge, including:

- Alignment with the Town's new 5-year Economic Development and Tourism Strategy (approved by Council on February 1, 2021);
- Establishment of the Strategic Economic Development Team (SEDT) – see Section 6;
- Development of a Concierge Project Tracking Database;
- Connection with Halton Region's non-residential employment land concierge lead; and
- Engagement of key business and investors to create program awareness, collect input into the program, and streamline review of existing investments.

Extensive background research and internal and external consultation was undertaken. Useful information was collected. It helped shape the recommended Business Concierge program. Internal consultation focused mainly on discussions with the Strategic Economic Development Team, and staff from Planning and Development, and Transportation and Public Works. External consultation included Halton Region's

Economic Development, interviews of municipalities that have implemented or are developing similar programs, 1-on-1 interviews with industry professionals, and a real estate industry survey.

Work completed to date has resulted in the preparation of a *Business Concierge – Program Framework and Guidelines* document. This internal document will be used by Town staff to implement the program. Among other things, it:

- Outlines how the program will function;
- Program goals, objectives and benefits;
- Project eligibility criteria;
- Summary of internal and external consultation;
- Implementation mechanisms (e.g. roles and responsibilities, governance, project tracking tool; Development Review Committee integration);
- Communications, Marketing and Education Plan; and
- Future considerations and next steps (e.g. marketing, resourcing, potential fee structures).

COMMENTS:

1. Program Overview – Goals, Objectives, and Benefits

Halton Hills' Business Concierge program has been designed to expedite the review of key economic development proposals. The program's main goals are to:

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

Building on past successes, the program's main objectives are:

- Continue to expedite the Town's development review process;
- Collaborate with the external agencies in ensuring that key files are expedited;
- Provide an elevated customer service experience;
- Identify and implement innovative solutions to issues;
- Enhance the Town's 'Open for Business' approach and economic competitiveness;
- Grow and diversify the economy by attracting top-tier businesses;
- Continue to leverage and strengthen inter-departmental and inter-agency collaboration; and,
- Support and supplement implementation of related strategies, including the Economic Development and Tourism Strategy; and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Strategy.

Anticipated benefits are:

- Economic growth (local jobs, non-residential assessment, tax revenue, economic diversity, etc);
- More local employment opportunities (live-work balance, reduced commuting and associated emissions, quality of life);
- Assist businesses in navigating the regulatory process and lowered cost of doing business;
- Thorough understanding of business needs and challenges;
- Enhanced customer experience;
- More efficient, expedited and seamless approach to business attraction and development review;
- Enhanced inter-departmental collaboration;
- Improved collaboration between external stakeholders.

2. Prioritizing Non-Residential Investments

Non-residential assessment is key to the Town's financial health as it enables the Town to efficiently deliver services that residents and businesses rely on. It helps keep tax increases relatively low and predictable. Non-residential development delivers the highest tax revenue for each dollar assessed and puts less pressure on Town services. Approximately 12% of the Town's budget, or about \$6.7 million, is paid for with taxes collected from non-residential uses (industrial and commercial). The Town's Development Charge reserves and the associated Capital Program also rely on non-residential growth. A focus on attracting more non-residential assessment also has the benefit of improving the Town's residential to non-residential assessment ratio, putting the Town in a better economic and financial position.

3. Current Business Concierge Investment Pipeline

Economic Development continues to actively market Halton Hills as a prime investment location. Staff is currently servicing a number of major investment leads that are considering potentially developing, relocating and/or expanding into Halton Hills. Strong interest has continued to be observed for shovel-ready employment lands in the Premier Gateway. This includes interest from manufacturing, hospitality, outdoor recreation and sporting venues, and logistics uses. The Town's strategic location in the GTA and 'open for business' approach are important factors driving interest in business locating in Halton Hills.

There are currently about 24 current, upcoming and potential investment leads/projects in the Business Concierge Investment Pipeline. Their status and ability to move forward and actually materialize may be impacted by the overall economic challenges caused by COVID-19. Figure 1 summarizes the approximate size of the total investment potential, jobs and building area.

Figure 1: Business Concierge Investment Pipeline



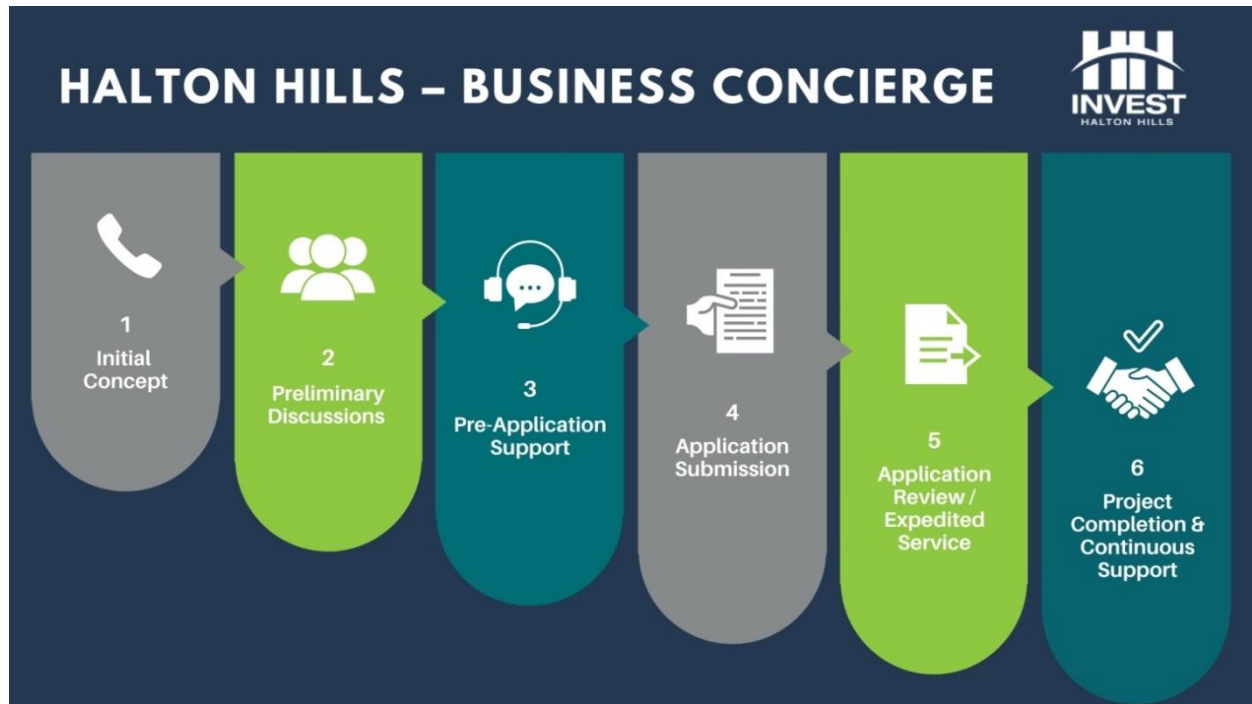
4. Expediting Major Investments

Eligible Business Concierge projects will be expedited as much as possible, while recognizing currently available resources. Expediting will entail prioritizing eligible projects over others, reviewing applications at an even quicker pace than typical, and providing ongoing and customized assistance through a dedicated resource – the Expeditor and Business Development Portfolio Manager.

At this time, given unknown variables (e.g. project volume, complexity, exact resource needs, competing priorities), a specific timeline for “expedited” projects is not defined. Once the Town has had experience with Business Concierge following its official launch, it is anticipated that the expedited timeline will be defined.

The Business Concierge program is recommended to be a complimentary service offered by the Town. It will assist projects along the full continuum of business attraction and retention. That is, from an initial business/investment concept and site selection, to project completion and beyond. A series of supports will be offered at all stages of the process (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Development Process Timeline of Support



5. Project Eligibility Criteria

Project eligibility criteria will be used to identify which projects fall within the Business Concierge stream. The program needs to be selective in what projects are chosen to ensure that the resources required for an expedited review are in place.

Based on a review of other municipal concierge programs, industry feedback and Town priorities, to qualify for Business Concierge, non-residential investments must meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Large development in the Premier Gateway, Georgetown Employment Area or Acton Employment Area;
- Minimum of 100,000 sq. ft. of gross floor area;
- High profile and complex proposal;
- Major employment (100+ jobs) and assessment generator, in terms of the total number of jobs and job density;
- Major office, commercial/retail use, mixed-use or tourism generator;
- Large monetary investment (i.e. 100s of millions of dollars);
- Key sector aligned with the Town's priority sectors (e.g. advanced manufacturing, clean technology, tourism, food and beverage, office); and
- Project facing urgent timelines.

Admission into the expedited stream will be at the discretion of the Expeditor and Business Development Portfolio Manager, in consultation with the Strategic Economic Development Team (SEDT). As needed, projects will be prioritized by the SEDT, taking into account available resources. If necessary, the eligibility criteria may be amended to

provide flexibility for unforeseen circumstances or projects, subject to confirmation with the SEDT.

6. Strategic Economic Development Team (SEDT)

The SEDT consists of:

- Acting Chief Administrative Officer;
- Expeditor and Business Development Portfolio Manager;
- Director of Economic Development, Innovation and Culture;
- Commissioner of Planning and Development;
- Commissioner of Transportation and Public Works;
- Director of Development Review;
- Director of Planning Policy;
- Director of Development Engineering; and
- Director of Strategic Initiatives.

The SEDT meets bi-monthly. Its main functions are to:

- Review and prioritize incoming and existing Concierge projects;
- Discuss project status and issue resolution;
- Monitor staff resource requirements;
- Allocate resources to best prioritize projects; and
- Participate in various tasks and initiatives designed to enhance the program.

7. Implementation and Governance

The Town will lead Business Concierge implementation. As is the case today, key participants will include Town departments, external agencies, Provincial ministries, and the applicant/client. As part of implementation, Town staff will collaborate with external agencies in ensuring that key files are expedited. Figure 3 shows the governance structure of the Business Concierge program.

Figure 3: Business Concierge Governance Structure



8. Successes To-Date

A number of key tools and process enhancements have already been implemented in advance of the official program launch, and to assist with streamlining and prioritizing Business Concierge files, including:

- **Business Concierge Project Tracker Tool:**
 - Updatable database that organizes projects by priority and development status. For each project, key economic development and financing parameters are tracked. Tracked projects are divided into three categories, depending on how advanced the file or inquiry is or how likely it is to materialize. Specifically, current projects, upcoming projects and potential investment leads. The tool will support priority setting, resource allocation, budget planning and marketing.
- **Development Review Committee (DRC) Integration:**
 - The Expeditor is now a member of the Town's Development Review Committee and will provide comments on potentially eligible Concierge projects. This integration takes advantage of Town and external agency staff already being at one table at regularly scheduled meetings.
- **Bi-weekly meetings with Regional Economic Development:**
 - Since July 2020, bi-weekly meetings have been taking place between the Expeditor and Halton Region's Employment Land Concierge lead. The purpose of these meetings is to discuss the status of key projects and to communicate any issues that require Regional involvement.
- **Electronic Application Submission:**
 - The Information Services team is currently working with staff from various departments (Planning and Development, Development Engineering and Building) to facilitate the electronic submission of applications. This tool will support Business Concierge by:
 - Shortening review timelines;
 - Lowering application processing times;
 - Reducing the amount of hard copy filing and space requirements by going paperless;
 - Reducing the cost of application submissions for proponents; and,
 - Providing a convenient way for proponents to submit applications.

9. Next Steps:

Rather than being a static and rigid program, Business Concierge will remain flexible and responsive to new needs, opportunities and any challenges. Updates and refinements will be made as needed and in consultation with the SEDT.

A crucial component of the program's success is the availability of appropriate staff resources. Staff resource needs will be monitored and a Resourcing Strategy developed to ensure that Business Concierge is delivered effectively. If deemed necessary, a resource request may be put forward to Council at a later date.

A comprehensive Communications, Marketing and Education Strategy will be launched to build awareness of the Town's Business Concierge program, inviting eligible projects to take part.

The Expeditor will continue to support Town initiatives that continue to streamline the development review of major non-residential investments. As part of the official launch of Business Concierge, the Expeditor's role will transition from program development to formally servicing Business Concierge files in a greater capacity.

Any key implementation steps, including any new initiatives will continue to be evaluated and approved by the SEDT.

RELATIONSHIP TO STRATEGIC PLAN:

The Business Concierge program relates to and advances numerous Strategic Plan priorities, focus areas and values, including:

- Shaping Growth;
- Climate Change and Environment;
- Fiscal and Corporate Management;
- Foster a Healthy Community;
- Foster a Prosperous Economy; and
- Provide Responsive, Effective Municipal Government.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

At this time, Business Concierge implementation will be accomplished with existing resources. If the need for additional resources is identified, a report will be brought to Council and/or Budget Committee for consideration with a Resourcing Strategy.

CONSULTATION:

Development of the Business Concierge program benefited from comprehensive internal and external consultation. Internal cross-departmental consultation focused mainly on discussions with the SEDT, and staff from Economic Development, Planning and Development, Transportation and Public Works, Corporate Communications and Information Services.

External consultation included numerous discussions with Halton Region's Economic Development staff, interviews of other municipalities, and industry consultation.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Key industry stakeholders were engaged in various ways, including via an online survey and 1-on-1 interviews.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS:

The Town is committed to implementing our Community Sustainability Strategy, Imagine Halton Hills. Doing so will lead to a higher quality of life.

The recommendation outlined in this report advances the Strategy's implementation.

This report supports all four pillars of Sustainability and in summary the alignment of this report with the Community Sustainability Strategy is excellent.

COMMUNICATIONS:

A comprehensive Communication, Marketing and Education Strategy has been prepared to amplify program awareness – both internally and externally. The Strategy outlines target audiences, key messaging and tactics, branding and marketing, timelines, budget and a training component for Town staff. With Council endorsement, the program will be widely communicated through multiple channels.

To maximize industry awareness and knowledge, the program will include a dedicated webpage on the Invest Halton Hills website (investhaltonhills.com). This will be the main hub for the program and will include a program overview, eligibility criteria, employment area information, available properties, testimonials, contact information and resources.

CONCLUSION:

To continue to elevate the Town's economic competitiveness, attract non-residential assessment, and amplify its open for business approach, a comprehensive and actionable Business Concierge program, tailored for Halton Hills, has been developed. The program is the result of cross-departmental collaboration and is based on a review of other municipal practices, and internal and external stakeholder consultation. Launching Business Concierge will advance Council's Strategic Plan priorities and recommendations of the Economic Development and Tourism Strategy.

Reviewed and Approved by,



Damian Szybalski, Director of Economic Development, Innovation & Culture



Chris Mills, Acting Chief Administrative Officer