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Strategy Development Process

4. Strategy Development Process

4.1 The Process

In November 2001, Regional Council adopted the broad parameters and elements of the process to develop an Economic Strategy for York Region.

The development of the Strategy is comprised of three phases:

- Phase One: Analysis
- Phase Two: Consultation
- Phase Three: Action Plan Development

4.1.1 Phase One: Analysis

Phase One involved the assembly and analysis of a broad range of information related to the Region's past and recent economic performance. This phase included the following elements:

- Analyzing economic data to assess York Region's competitive position in the investment marketplace.
- Evaluating the physical and social infrastructure within the Region that supports economic development.
- Assessing the economic development roles of the area municipalities, the business community, other economic partners and the senior levels of government.

A consultant study, *A Competitive Assessment of York Region*, was undertaken and completed in 2002. The study was initiated to assess York Region's competitive position in the investment marketplace relative to other comparable regional, national and international jurisdictions. As part of the study, company executives were also surveyed to identify key factors that will influence the Region's ability to sustain its competitive position.

In 2003 and 2004, meetings were held with various Regional departments to better understand the major initiatives that may have an impact on business and their ability to expand and provide jobs into the future. At the same time, area municipal economic development and corporate strategies were reviewed to assess their economic development goals and objectives. Interviews were also held with municipal economic development and other staff to obtain a detailed perspective of their roles and functions.

A literature review of relevant economic development strategies from other jurisdictions was undertaken to examine the approach and practices of various cities and regions.

A statistical study, *The Economy of York Region*, was completed in 2004 to evaluate the performance of the Region's economy and benchmark it against Ontario and the rest of Canada.



4.1.2 Phase Two: Consultation

The consultation phase took place from November 2003 to May 2004. A Discussion Paper was prepared and circulated to all stakeholders as the basis of discussion at consultation sessions.

Beginning in the fall of 2003, meetings were convened with representatives of the area municipalities, Chambers of Commerce/Board of Trade, provincial and federal ministry staff, education and other economic development partners such as the Greater Toronto Marketing Alliance.

A series of stakeholder workshops were held in January and February 2004 with business owners, managers and executives from the following industry and interest groups:

- Agriculture
- Retail
- Business Services
- Manufacturing
- Technology
- Multi-Cultural
- Tourism

The industry sessions were followed by a Council Workshop in April 2004 where the preliminary findings were presented and discussed.

The results of all consultations were compiled and a Workbook was developed for discussion at an Economic Strategy Forum held in May 2004.

4.1.3. Phase Three: Action Plan Development

The Analysis findings from Phase One and the results of the Consultations in Phase Two have formed the basis for arriving at the Strategic Directions and Objectives as well as the Priority Actions identified in this Draft Strategy. The Draft document will be presented to Regional Council and circulated to economic development stakeholders involved in the consultation process for their comments. Their feedback will be incorporated in a Final Economic Strategy for adoption by Regional Council in the spring of 2005.

4.2 Implementation

The next step will be the development of a detailed Implementation Plan with tactical action steps to address the Strategic Objectives of the overall plan. Many of these actions will require resources and time to implement. Some will show results over a short time span, while others will take longer to yield success. In addition to outlining the timeline and resources required, the Implementation Plan will also identify in more detail the area municipal partnerships, and the accountability and responsibility of the Region and its partners to undertake the proposed actions.

4.3 Summary of Consultations

The consultation sessions provided an opportunity for participants to engage in discussions on issues and identify some of the economic initiatives that need to be undertaken to enhance the business climate in the Region.

All participants agree that the economy of York Region is growing, diversified, and highly competitive. However, its economic success has also led to a number of issues which were identified at the consultation sessions. These issues cover a broad spectrum ranging from sign by-laws to the quality and responsiveness of the educational system. A recurring theme was the impact of growth as it relates to transportation, housing affordability, and the attraction and retention of a skilled workforce.

There were a number of parallel themes and issues that arose during the consultations and workshops sessions. While not all of these issues are squarely within the Region's mandate to address, there was broad consensus that the Regional Municipality of York can play a key role in bringing together stakeholders to deal with common issues. Here is a list of some of the most common themes and issues raised.

Information Issues

- There was consensus that in a growing complex environment, communication and sharing of information is increasingly important but at the same time more challenging.
- York Region's role as a co-ordinator was acknowledged as essential, and some participants have expressed the need for the Region to act as a central information source to provide access to resources such as employment and outsourcing opportunities, supply chains, available talent pool, and business support and immigrant services.

- It was suggested that the Region should assume a greater co-ordinating role to facilitate networking among businesses, and to communicate the evolving needs of business to other levels of government.
- The overall perception was that improving the electronic infrastructure will not only increase the Region's competitive advantage, it will also enhance small and home-based business, and facilitate telecommuting thereby reducing congestion on the roads.

Workforce Issues

- The quality of the labour force and the range of issues surrounding the supply, access and training of employees was a persistent theme in the consultations.
- The complex interplay of demographic changes, economic trends and changing business conditions is making it difficult to forecast supply and demand for workers.
- There is a growing concern over skills shortages and skills imbalance in the Region, and some participants have indicated that the skills and human resources needs of business should be identified and addressed.
- It was indicated that some regional businesses have turned to the immigrant labour supply and outsourcing as alternatives to address shortages within the labour market, and the attraction and accommodation of immigrants into the workforce have taken on increasing significance.
- The impact of live-work balance on employee attraction particularly for younger workers.
- The lack of affordable housing has hampered the ability of newly hired and young employees as well as new immigrants to move into the Region and live close to their place of work.

- The need to attract workers in certain occupational groups from outside York Region and the difficulty in retaining them due to long commute times was often raised.

Business Support

- There was general agreement that the need to encourage, retain and grow jobs and new business enterprise is a cornerstone of all economic development programs.
- Many of the participants in the consultation sessions believed that to remain competitive they must accelerate the integration of new technology. It was suggested that the Region should ensure that innovation is a focus of the Economic Strategy and facilitate opportunities for business to leverage technology to maintain their competitiveness.
- Some businesses have expressed the need for new collaboration and partnerships, and that the Region should encourage industry clusters to create new opportunities for business development.
- There were also indications that the Region should take advantage of its diverse economy, and encourage businesses to expand their reach to global markets.
- Some companies have identified a need for assistance in sourcing and accessing capital as another issue that is critical to their growth.

Promotion

- Promoting York Region's success and assets was another theme that was consistent in many of the consultation sessions.
- Many participants have suggested that the Region should develop a new identifiable brand, and assertively promote its image, its historical legacies and its uniqueness.

- The Region's quality of life should be aggressively promoted as an economic development focus, and tourism should be seen as an important component of its focus.
- Advocating and promoting a balanced quality of life will play a key role in employee attraction and retention.

Transportation Infrastructure

- Traffic congestion was one of the pre-eminent concerns among businesses, and transportation infrastructure was seen as critical to ensure the efficient movement of goods and people. A recurrent theme during the consultations, it was emphasized that traffic congestion is having a serious impact on productivity and the cost of doing business.
- At the same time, the geographic spread of employment opportunities throughout the Region has exacerbated the difficulties of attracting employees particularly from longer distance.
- There is the perception that the transit system is not currently meeting the needs of business to attract and retain employees, and the under-service in the transit system in parts of the Region is making it difficult for employees to get to their place of work.
- The consensus was that more efforts should be made at better co-ordinating and planning the development of road and transit infrastructure within the Region.

“...the industries we have here now are the same as they have in Toronto and we need people from Toronto to work for us. We need transit just like Toronto needs transit.”

Employers Opinion Survey 2004