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2010 SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES FOR YORK REGION BUSINESSES

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated December 22, 2009, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be circulated by the Economic Development Branch to the local municipalities, the local Chambers of Commerce and Board of Trade for information and engagement.

2. PURPOSE

The Economic Development Marketing and Communications Strategy identified the need to assist the development of sustainability strategies for York Region businesses. This report outlines further initiatives to be implemented in 2010.

3. BACKGROUND

The sustainability initiatives for York Region businesses stem from the Economic Development Marketing and Communications Strategy approved by Regional Council on February 21, 2008. This strategy was created in response to the *2005 Economic Strategy* and the *2007 Sustainability Strategy*.

The Economic Strategy encourages the development of networks, industry clusters and a highly efficient workforce

Consultations with the community during the preparation of the *2005 Economic Strategy* identified five strategic directions:

- Create an environment to share information and ideas
- Sustain a high quality workforce
- Strengthen entrepreneurship and industry clusters
- Enhance the quality of place
- Encourage the efficient movement of goods and people

The Sustainability Strategy outlines an action plan for achieving sustainable economic vitality

The policies and initiatives of the *2007 Sustainability Strategy* have been categorized to include a sustainable corporate culture, healthy communities, economic vitality, sustainable natural environment, education, and implementation.

Achieving Economic Vitality through sustainability identified a number of actions, two of which are addressed in this report:

- Address industry requirements and availability in sustainability
- Establish a Sustainable Business Directory of companies that sell sustainable products, purchase environmentally-friendly products, and exercise corporate social responsibility.

The Economic Development Marketing and Communications Strategy is focused on sustainability

The Economic Development Marketing and Communications Strategy identifies three priorities:

- Persuade foreign corporations that embrace environmental sustainability to locate in York Region
- Encourage York Region businesses to adopt environmentally sustainable business practices
- Develop programs to expand the Region's environmental technology sector

This report focuses on the second priority of encouraging local businesses to implement sustainability initiatives, and provides detailed recommendations on the implementation plan.

Consultations during the development of the Marketing and Communications Strategy implemented in 2009 revealed that many companies are interested in adopting green business practices, but do not know where to start. The sustainability initiatives answer this issue by continuing to develop resources and learning opportunities in sustainability.

Three Sustainable Business Workshops for Businesses and The Guide to Greening Your Business were approved initiatives by the Planning and Economic Development Committee November 5, 2008.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

In 2009 the Economic Development staff in partnership with local municipalities ran three Sustainable Business Workshops for businesses:

1. Solar Applications for Businesses, hosted by The Town of East Gwillimbury on June 17th
2. Green IT, hosted by The Town of Richmond Hill on October 1st
3. Creating an Eco-Friendly Office Environment, hosted by The Town of Markham on November 17th

The 2009 Sustainable Business Workshops were lead by industry experts and provided participants with hands-on business solutions, ideal for any company looking for practical applications in greening their business. In addition, as part of the workshop, a mini tradeshow was hosted where attendees were able to network and meet face to face with York Region Green vendors.

Industry leaders such as Baudry Cybernomics, Philips Canada and STAPLES Canada and others presented at the workshops throughout the year on topics ranging from Virtualization and E-Waste to Sustainable Lighting Solutions and Sustainable Landscaping for businesses.

Registrations for the 2009 Sustainable business workshops exceeded expectations

Each workshop garnered approximately ninety registrations from local York Region Businesses which exceeded original estimates. Economic Development staff was very pleased with the overwhelming turnout and the positive feedback from attendees. Participants included individuals from businesses such as Adidas Canada Ltd., Sanyo Canada Inc., Levi Strauss & Co., Mars Chocolate North America, Timex Group Canada, Smucker Foods of Canada, Fellowes Canada Ltd. and Scholastic Canada Ltd.

The Guide to Greening Your Business was well received by local businesses

The Guide to Greening Your Business was developed to assist York Region businesses to implement or improve upon sustainable business practices, as it provides the framework and the resources necessary to take such actions. Over 150 environmental programs, resources and partners are listed with contact information and a description of their services. Federal, Provincial and Regional government programs are included, as well as local, national and international networks and partnerships.

The Guide to Greening Your Business provides contact information for environmental companies operating in York Region, promotes York Region's sustainability initiatives and implementation plans, and recognizes the green initiatives of each local municipality.

Printed copies of The Guide to Greening Your Business were mailed to 2,000 medium and large York Region businesses and were retrieved electronically from the website.

Expanded sustainability business initiatives for 2010

To build upon the successes and lessons learned in 2009, the program for 2010 will include:

- Update The Guide to Greening Your Business and mail to 2,000 small and medium York Region enterprises.
- Increase the number of sustainable business workshops to one per quarter.
- Enhance interest by conducting a survey on workshop topics from participants
- Film workshop presentations for broadcast on website at a later date.

York Region Economic Development proposes to continue to update The Guide to Greening Your Business and host sustainability workshops to provide detailed and interactive learning forums for targeted groups of business leaders. Each workshop will invite 70-100 York Region businesses to learn about a specific sustainability topic and will feature guest presenters, case studies, and directives for implementation. Staff will work with local Economic Development Officers to promote the workshops and provide local hosting support.

Relationship to Vision 2026

The sustainability initiatives presented in this report support the following *Vision 2026* goals:

- “Achieve managed and balanced growth” by taking a leadership role in environmental economic development.
- “Achieve a vibrant economy”, by following the recommended action plans set out in the *2005 Economic Strategy: Create an Environment to Share Information and Ideas and Enhance the Quality of Place*. The initiatives in this report respond to these objectives by facilitating the creation of new networks and partnerships that will share information and ideas pertaining to sustainability.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The development and implementation of these sustainability initiatives for York Region businesses will be funded from the approved 2010 budget.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The Guide to Greening Your Business will continue to be an information resource for the municipalities and their Economic Development Officers who assist local businesses with sustainable economic development. The Guide to Greening Your Business profiles the green initiatives of each local municipality's Environmental Advisory Committee, and includes the contact information for each local municipality's Economic Development Office.

The sustainability business workshops will strengthen the development and growth of the environmental sector in each local municipality.

7. CONCLUSION

The sustainability initiatives outlined in this report support York Region's commitment to building a vibrant and sustainable economy. The initiatives will assist local businesses to adopt sustainability and will provide the opportunity for sharing information and ideas, and forming new linkages and networks within the business community. These linkages will be essential to sustainable procurement, and will foster conditions where environmental innovation can thrive.

For more information on this report, please contact Patrick Draper, Director Economic Strategy and Tourism at Ext. 1503.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.