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2009 SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES FOR YORK REGION BUSINESSES

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated September 17, 2008, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The sustainability initiatives for York Region businesses as outlined in this report be adopted.
2. The Regional Chair and Regional Clerk be authorized to sign the necessary agreement (s) with Seneca College and the Human Resources and Social Development Canada Workplace Skills Initiative, subject to review by Legal Services, to support one of the initiatives.
3. 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 encourage and enable the development of sustainability strategies for York Region businesses. This report outlines further initiatives to be implemented in 2009.

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 skills availability in sustainability, and
- 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.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Corporate learning and training are necessary for effective business development

Developing human capital for the Canadian workplace involves identifying, training and

professionally developing employees, and providing relevant knowledge and skills that will enable them to be successful. Education and training in corporate environments help to alleviate these challenges and offer businesses a competitive advantage in terms of recruitment, retention and business results.

Funding from the federal and provincial governments is available to develop training and learning skills. A few examples:

- The Federal Government's Workplace Skills Initiative (WSI) funds demonstration projects which respond to a range of skills-related challenges in Canadian workplaces, in order to improve productivity and position Canada to effectively compete in the global knowledge-based economy.
- The Ontario Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities Labour Market Partnerships (LMP) is an employment program that provides funding to organizations to encourage, support and facilitate labour force adjustments and human resource planning activities which are in the public interest.
- The Ontario Government's Next Generation Jobs Fund is a five-year, \$1.15 billion strategy to create the next generation of jobs and improve environmental sustainability in key sectors in Ontario.

Sustainable business strategies are becoming essential

In 2007, J.D. Smith of Concord was recognized for winning the first annual Green Supply Chain Award by Supply Chain and Logistics Association Canada (SCL). The award acknowledged the company for having set and exceeded high standards for environmental friendliness in the handling and shipment of their products to customers.

Earlier this year, Philips held its second annual Sustainability Fair at the Canadian head quarters in Markham, inviting employees, customers and partners to participate in seminars and interactive demonstrations. Seeing environmental improvement as an opportunity for innovation, Philips works continuously to minimize the environmental impact of products, processes and services, and has committed to increase its operational efficiency by 25%, and to double investment in green innovations by 2012.

While these examples show that some companies in York Region have already made great strides in sustainability, it is still an unexploited opportunity for most businesses. Consultations during the development of the Marketing and Communications Strategy revealed that many companies are interested in adopting green business practices, but do not know where to start. The three sustainability initiatives proposed in this report answer this issue by developing resources and learning opportunities in sustainability:

1. The Guide to Greening Your Business
2. Sustainability workshops for York Region businesses
3. The Workplace Skills Initiative with Seneca College

The Guide to Greening Your Business will assist local businesses in adopting sustainability

The Guide to Greening Your Business has been 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.

A draft of The Guide to Greening Your Business will be distributed to key stakeholders for review and comment prior to production and distribution of the final version to Regional businesses in early 2009.

Sustainability workshops will teach targeted business leaders about environmental topics

York Region Economic Development will launch sustainability workshops to provide detailed and interactive learning forums for targeted groups of business leaders. Each workshop will invite 50 York Region businesses to learn about a specific sustainability topic and will feature guest presenters, case studies, and directives for implementation.

Three workshops will be offered in 2009, and will cover topics such as energy conservation, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) building, product life cycle design and minimizing waste. Local businesses will receive information regarding the workshops when they receive their Guide to Greening Your Business.

The Workplace Skills Initiative with Seneca College will teach companies to manage corporate sustainability

York Region Economic Development is partnering with Seneca College on an application to the Federal Workplace Skills Initiative (WSI), to develop a training program for Regional businesses called *Productivity Through Sustainability*. The partnership of York Region and Seneca College is appropriate since Seneca College has a reputation of delivering quality education, training, employment and businesses services, and is recognized as a Canadian leader in energy management and environmental remediation.

Pending approval from WSI, Seneca College will engage in consultations with Regional businesses to discover best practices, opportunities and challenges in the implementation of sustainability. Based on these consultations, Seneca College will develop the curriculum, and implement the training to a pilot group of 25 Regional businesses. York Region Economic Development will assist in the overall design of the program and will source local businesses to participate in the pilot.

The sustainability training program will teach Regional companies to implement sustainability in their corporate activities, and will assist participating employers to gain knowledge about translating sustainability theory into practice. Seneca College will communicate initial findings at a national symposium and through a dedicated website, and may roll out the program based on its success.

If Seneca College is successful in obtaining funding from Human Resources and Development Canada Workplace Skills Initiative (WSI), the sustainability training initiative will receive funding estimated at \$500,000 toward the program's development, execution and dissemination of results. The proposed program implementation time frame is January 2009 to December 2010.

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 2008 budget and the proposed 2009 base budget, subject to Regional Council approval. An allocation of \$25,000 is included in the proposed 2009 base budget to support the Seneca *Productivity Through Sustainability* project.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The Guide to Greening Your Business will 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 workshops and the proposed training initiative with Seneca College 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 Sarah Melnyk, Economic Development Marketing Specialist at (905) 830-4444 Ext. 1562, or, Patrick Draper, Director Economic Strategy and Tourism at Ext. 1503.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause was included with the November 5, 2008 agenda.)