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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGY CONSULTATION RESULTS

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated December 19, 2007, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Council approve the Region's Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy.
2. Staff be directed to report back to Council on an Economic Development Marketing and Communication Implementation Plan for 2008 – 2010.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to present the feedback on the Region's Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy received from participants at the consultation sessions held in the third and fourth quarters of 2007.

3. BACKGROUND

During consultations to create the Region's Economic Strategy, stakeholder groups and the business community identified the need to promote a balanced approach to economic development that enhances quality of life, environmental sustainability and economic vitality. A key action plan, identified in the Economic Strategy 2005, is the development of a marketing and communication plan to promote York Region and its natural and cultural attributes.

The creation of an Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy will support investment attraction to the Region. It is important for the Region to communicate its strengths, acknowledge its thriving economy and promote its quality of life through an established regional brand. The brand will convey key benefits offered by York Region to the business and investment community worldwide.

3.1 Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy

York Region is seen as offering a superior quality of life by virtue of its ability to offer the best in both urban and rural. Currently 69% of York Region lands are protected in the

Oak Ridges Moraine, the Greenbelt and the Regional Forests. By leveraging the Region's natural features and environmental stewardship, the Region's Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy establishes a unique value proposition for investment attraction. The Strategy focuses on attracting new companies in "green" business sectors and firms that desire to be located in a community with a reputation for environmental stewardship. The Region's Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy will also enhance the competitiveness of existing York Region business clusters through advocacy of environmentally sound business practices that will enhance their global competitiveness.

Environmental products and services are a high growth market with global sales of \$628B and Canadian sales of \$18.4B and include companies in technology, transportation, consulting, construction and energy which are highly complimentary to existing York Region industry clusters. York Region currently has over 250 companies that are primarily involved in the environmental sector.

The complete document of the York Region Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy presented to Regional Council on June 21st, 2007 is attached to this report as *Attachment 2*.

3.1.1 Pillars for Success

Three key pillars are the foundation for successful implementation of the Region's Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy:

1. The application of the Region's commitment to environmental stewardship as outlined in the York Region Sustainability Strategy,
2. The attraction of high-quality new investments from sustainable firms and the support of York Region's businesses to leverage "green" business practices,
3. The promotion of a dynamic "green" industry sector that will create new, high-quality jobs.

3.1.2 Strategy Process

The process to develop the Region's Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy include in-depth research of York Region, establishment of the brand position and target markets, the development of creative design and collateral materials, the creation of communication materials and the delivery of key messages.

In June 2007 Council endorsed the Region's Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy. Economic Development Branch staff was directed to consult with the Region's economic development partners, stakeholders and the business community to review the proposed brand messaging and design elements and to report back to Regional Council.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Climate Change is at the forefront of the global stage. Many countries have realized that environmental conservation is good for the economy. Sweden, Germany, the U.K., Denmark, and the Netherlands are strategically using public policies such as ecological fiscal reform to spur innovation, investment, technological progress and behavioural change. Municipalities across Canada are strengthening the health of their communities and creating jobs while reducing greenhouse gas emissions through a wide range of projects. These cities include Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Regina, Sudbury, Toronto, Halifax and St. John's.

Here at home, York Region has already undertaken many comprehensive initiatives to improve the quality of life of its residents and businesses and protect natural heritage and the Oak Ridges Moraine through the:

The York Region Sustainability Strategy

The York Region Greening Strategy

The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (2002) and Greenbelt Plan (2005)

Energy and the Environment Management System (EEMS)

The York Region Transportation Master Plan Update

York Region Rapid Transit – VIVA

The York Region Pedestrian and Cycling Master Plan Study

York Region Water for Tomorrow Program

The York Region Groundwater Monitoring Program

4.1 Opportunities and Benefits

Economic opportunities can be found among the solutions to climate change. Many businesses realize the sound economics of environmentally beneficial solutions and are embracing innovation. New “green” business opportunities can be created through the process to improve environmental standards. The ensuing benefits result in:

- Increasing employment and the efficiency of energy use while maintaining or improving lifestyle.
- Stimulating the high-tech manufacturing sector.
- Improving public transit and reducing pollution and greenhouse gas emissions,
- Using sustainable urban design and effective building retrofits to increase energy efficiency.
- Creating cost-effective ways to reduce waste and enhance long-term profits.

4.2 Consultation Feedback

Stakeholder feedback on the Region's Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy is summarized in four key themes that emerged: inclusivity, relevance, reinforcement and creative messaging preferences.

Inclusivity

Stakeholders agreed that the proposed York Region Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy was highly inclusive of all the nine area municipalities and of existing industry clusters. The view was that each constituency could easily find a way to participate in and leverage the benefits of the environmentally focused York Region Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy.

Relevance

Within the business community the Region's Economic Development Marketing and Communications Strategy has credibility, is relevant and is timely in the context of global climate change. As outlined earlier in this report, it offers benefits and opportunities for businesses that embrace a "greening" process.

Reinforcement

The Region's Economic Development Marketing and Communications Strategy is consistent with the Region's values and supportive of existing Municipal and Regional initiatives and programs. It will strengthen the competitiveness of existing industry clusters in York Region.

Creative Messaging Preferences

During the consultations, four creative concepts and five advertising copy lines were presented as examples of how the Region's Economic Development Marketing and Communications Strategy might appear in a magazine advertisement.

Stakeholders tended to favour creative concepts that highlighted the Region's natural attributes such as the depiction of a forest outside a boardroom window. For the advertising copy lines, there were preferences for approaches with a more personal style such as "Where Life Meets Business, Naturally."

4.2.1 Municipal Economic Development – Feedback

Representatives from municipal economic development attended a presentation of the Region's Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy on June 8th. Feedback was received via an email survey. Seven of the eight representatives who attended the meeting responded with an affirmative "yes" to the following questions.

- Would the York Region Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy be value-added to your investment attraction efforts?
- Is it relevant to your existing business community?

Other comments included:

- “We are in a good position to leverage green environment themes. Plans are developing in this direction.”
- “Consider using testimonials from York Region companies in marketing messages.”
- “Consider using a range of images and different scenarios to convey the message.”

4.2.2 Economic Development Committees and Municipal Councils - Feedback

Feedback received from the municipal Economic Development Committees, Committees of the Whole and Municipal Councils was also very positive. Comments indicated that the Region is viewed as taking a leadership role in marketing its benefits and attributes. Some municipalities are interested in incorporating the Region’s Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy, which integrates with their own economic development strategies, while others see it merging well within their own specific community projects. Overall the Region’s Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy was perceived to be a good fit. It was recommended that local agriculture be included in the final consultation process. (The York Federation of Agriculture participated at the December 7th focus group.)

Further feedback indicated that there is an opportunity to promote green messaging to existing York Region firms while attracting new businesses. By focusing on green business practices and environmental stewardship and not targeting one industry or sector, York Region can become a more attractive place to do business. Benchmarking and measurement were cited as being of importance to the overall success of the Region’s Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy.

4.2.3 Business Community – Feedback

Twenty-seven York Region business executives attended a lively, focus session at a presentation of the Region’s Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy on November 15th and identified that:

- There is a role for the Region to act as a guide in identifying the requirements and benefits of going green.
- The business community must get involved in the greening process but many do not know how to embrace green.
- Businesses need to educate and inform their customers and clients.
- Access to information is very limited in some communities – there is no on-stop shop.
- A dedicated York Region website, highlighting best practices, would be of great value and would showcase the Region’s businesses that are thriving by going green.

4.2.4 Non-Profit Environmental Focus Groups – Feedback

On December 7th, representatives from the York Environmental Alliance, the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority, Earth Rangers/ Kortright, the Rouge Park Alliance, Concerned Citizens of King Township, York Environmental Stewardship, Toronto & Region Conservation Authority and the York Federation of Agriculture provided feedback at a focus session on the Region’s Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy. The highlights of the discussion and feedback received

centered on the Region's environmental assets, the future planning of small, local communities and support for small business and immigrants. Highlights of the feedback included the following comments:

- "We cannot have a functioning economy without a functioning ecology."
- Aim for relationship-building at all levels.
- Communities need to have a 'sense of place' policy that generates their business model. Strive for a live-work environment.
- Focus on science and research. Continue to lobby for a university in the Region.
- Assist existing businesses to go green.
- Social awareness and engagement are needed. The York Region Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy must have cross-cultural inclusivity and immigrant participation.
- Support local, small business enterprise, the centre-piece of the economy.
- Facilitate a highly visible, online information exchange tool that is cost-effective and wherein businesses can participate and assist one another.
- Create a Green Award for York Region companies, both large and small, that have a success story of significant contribution to the environment.

In summary, the feedback received on the Region's Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy throughout the consultation process was very positive and indicates that focusing on York Region's environmental stewardship and the "greening" of business will benefit the Region and all its municipalities.

4.3 Relationship to Vision 2026

The Region's Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy is a direct response to the Economic Strategy 2005 to promote York Region and its natural and cultural attributes and increase its visibility as a unique and desirable location for business investment.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The fee for the total contract to develop the Region's Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy, services and key deliverables by Larter Advertising is not to exceed \$140,000. An application for a grant from the Community Investment Support Program (CISP) was submitted in 2006 and the Region has been officially awarded \$40,000 for the project.

An implementation plan for the Region's Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy for 2008 to 2010 will be developed by the Economic Development Branch. In 2008 the implementation plan will utilize existing base funding as approved in the 2008 Economic Development Budget. Any additional funding requirements will be incorporated in the 2009 Economic Development Budget approval process.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The goal of the Region's Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy is to increase the number of investment leads for each municipality. By focusing the brand positioning on green business, benefits will result that are pertinent to all key industry clusters in the Region.

The nine area municipalities were consulted in the process to create the Region's Economic Development Marketing and Communication Strategy and offered invaluable feedback. They see the Region as taking a lead role in this initiative and are looking forward to the results.

7. CONCLUSION

Based on approval of this Report by Council, it is recommended that Economic Development staff be directed to report on a marketing and communication implementation plan for 2008 - 2010.

For further information about this report, please contact Patrick Draper, Director Economic Strategy and Tourism at (905) 830-4444 ext. 1503 or patrick.draper@york.ca.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The two attachments referred to in this clause are attached to this report.)