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### **DRAFT ECONOMIC STRATEGY FEEDBACK FROM STAKEHOLDERS**

**The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, April 11, 2005, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:**

#### **1. RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that:

1. Staff report back to Regional Council in June with the Final Economic Strategy incorporating all the comments received.

#### **2. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to provide Regional Council with a summary of the feedback received from stakeholders on the Draft Economic Strategy.

#### **3. BACKGROUND**

The Draft Economic Strategy was presented to Regional Council in December 2004. It was recommended that the draft document be circulated to stakeholders for comments and feedback. Staff was also directed to meet with local Chambers of Commerce and Board of Trade in order to obtain feedback from local businesses.

#### **4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS**

##### **4.1 Circulation of Draft Economic Strategy**

In January 2005, over 450 copies of the draft document were circulated to the following groups who were involved in the development of the Draft Economic Strategy:

- Area municipal Economic Development Officers and contacts.
- Area municipal clerks.
- Federal and Provincial levels of government.
- Businesses, individuals and stakeholder groups who were consulted during the development process.
- Chambers of Commerce/Board of Trade.
- The Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group.
- Excellence in Manufacturing Consortium.
- Regional departments including Transportation and Works, York Region Transit, Rapid Transit, Health Services, and Community Services and Housing.

Meetings were held with seven Chambers of Commerce/Board of Trade and staff of Regional departments who have expressed interest in working together to implement some of the proposed actions. The Draft Economic Development Strategy was also posted on the Region's corporate website for public input.

Comments received between February and April are summarized in the following section.

## **4.2 Feedback and Comments**

### **4.2.1 General Feedback**

The feedback to the Region's Draft Economic Strategy is generally very positive. There is overall support for the five Strategic Directions proposed. The draft document is perceived as dynamic, insightful, and forward-looking, providing a broad and comprehensive framework to guide York Region's economy in the future. Stakeholders are appreciative of the consideration for their input during the consultation process. The concurrence among the local municipalities is that the Draft Economic Strategy is generally consistent with their economic development programs and strategies.

Some of the proposed actions are seen to mirror similar initiatives that are already being undertaken by local municipalities. However, it should be noted that the focus of the Draft Economic Strategy is at a regional or "higher order" scale, with the Region acting as a champion for all of its municipalities. The draft document is built upon a framework that recognizes and complements the efforts of the area municipalities. Regional staff will continue to work in partnership with their local counterparts on an economy of scale to yield better results in various pursuits. The ultimate goal is to evolve the Region's role to identify new opportunities and support the area municipalities in order to compete successfully in the global marketplace.

Chambers of Commerce from several of the Region's northern rural municipalities have indicated that they have challenges different from the urban municipalities. It is believed that there needs to be a dedicated and knowledgeable staff within the existing Regional Economic Development framework with a mandate to support rural interests. While it is recognized that the rural municipalities have different issues and needs, staff believe that their concerns can be addressed through a forum such as the former York North Economic Development Partnership. It may be useful to examine the re-initiation the York North Partnership to provide an opportunity for representatives from the rural municipalities and Chambers of Commerce to discuss their common challenges and find common solutions to address their concerns.

A number of other comments and suggestions on specific parts of the Draft Economic Strategy were also received.

#### **4.2.2 Specific Comments on Strategic Directions**

##### **Create an Environment to Share Information and Ideas**

- Open and strong communication between local municipalities and the Region has been identified as a way to achieve common success.
- It is suggested that the Region should work with the local municipalities to expedite key industrial/commercial developments through the Regional approval process.

##### **Sustain A High Quality Workforce**

- There is a suggestion that the Region should act as an advocate for business with the school boards and senior levels of government for necessary programs, education funding, communication and institutional expansion. This will be included in the mandate of the proposed Regional Industry Education Council.

##### **Strengthen Entrepreneurship and Industry Clusters**

- Some stakeholders feel that insufficient attention is given in the Draft Strategy to agriculture and the agri-food sector. Although agriculture is generally recognized as a component of the Region's economy, and support for the industry is broadly included under the Strategic Objective, "Strengthen the Region's industry cluster", staff agree that this should be more defined and the focus expanded to give proper recognition to agriculture as the backbone of rural York Region.
- There is a comment that reference has not been made in the Draft Economic Strategy to specific employment areas such as the Vaughan Enterprise Zone. It should be noted that the objective of the Draft Strategy is to ensure that there is an adequate supply of employment lands across the Region. This objective is consistent with the intent of the Provincial *Places to Grow* document of ensuring a competitive land supply and a sound policy framework for strong communities in the Greater Toronto Area and Hamilton. It is not the Region's role to promote or champion one employment area over another.
- In expanding the Region's global network, there is a suggestion that the Region should leverage the existing partnerships of the local municipalities, and match their strengths and resources when hosting incoming delegation.
- It is suggested that the Draft Strategy should ensure that a contingency plan is in place to deal with economic crises resulting from epidemic outbreaks or economic downturns.

##### **Promote York Region**

- A number of stakeholders have indicated that the Region's current logo and brand, "Ontario's Rising Star", is still relatively new and is still "fresh" in the marketplace. Instead of replacing it with a new brand, it is felt that additional effort and resources should be directed towards creating awareness to enhance the Region's image.
- It is suggested that the Region should focus more on enhancing its "quality of place" to attract investment and skills. Efforts should be made to develop its attributes such

as the natural resources, arts and culture, diversity, etc. The title of the Strategic Direction, “Promote York Region”, should be changed to reflect this thrust.

- Comments have been made that the Region’s tourism efforts should be undertaken in greater partnership with the area municipalities and senior levels of government.

#### **Encourage the Efficient Movement of Goods and People**

- It is indicated that there should be a clear statement in support of increased public transit funding for capital infrastructure and sustained operating subsidies.
- There is a recommendation that a review of the long-term viability of the CN intermodal yard should be included as an action under this Strategic Direction.

#### **Accountability and Performance Measures**

- There are suggestions that the Region should encourage its partners to take ownership and be accountable of some of the proposed actions.
- It is recommended that performance measurements should distinguish between those measures that pertain to the economy as a whole versus those that are measures of the Region’s economic development programs and activities.
- There is a suggestion that the Draft Economic Strategy should include outcome-based performance measures, and that benchmarks should be established to measure the level of success attained.

#### **4.3 Next Steps**

Staff will review and consider all the comments received. Where appropriate, changes will be made to the text of the Draft Economic Strategy to reflect the relevant comments. A Final Strategy and Technical Appendix will be presented to Regional Council for adoption in June.

#### **4.4 Relationship to Vision 2026**

Implementation of the Economic Development Strategy will support the Vibrant Economy Goal of *Vision 2026*.

### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Implementation of the proposed actions in the Economic Strategy will be subject to approval of the annual Economic Development Budgets.

### **6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT**

The Draft Economic Strategy was circulated to all the local municipalities for their comments. The feedback received has been positive. Area municipal partners acknowledge that the proposed Strategic Directions support their economic development objectives and programs. The Region will continue to focus on developing broader based

and globally focused regional economic development strategies to complement the local municipal initiatives.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

The Region's Draft Economic Strategy has been well-received by its stakeholders. Implementation of the proposed actions will depend on support and co-operation from all the partners. The allocation of appropriate resources will be critical to achieve success. It is recommended that this report be received. The comments will be incorporated into a Final Economic Strategy for adoption by Regional Council in June.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.