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YORK REGION ONLINE BUSINESS DIRECTORY PUBLIC LAUNCH

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the following:

- 1. The presentation by Anthony Ierullo, Economic Planner, be received; and**
- 2. The recommendation contained in the following report, October 11, 2005, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services, be adopted:**

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. The public awareness campaign to promote the York Region Business Directory to both local businesses and the general public, as outlined in this report, move forward as scheduled.

2. PURPOSE

The York Region Online Business Directory public launch is a public awareness campaign designed to promote the York Region Business Directory. The campaign includes a series of promotional initiatives that will increase the visibility of the directory and inform the public of the features and functions of the website. The campaign will focus on informing the public of the capabilities of the directory and encouraging local businesses to maintain up-to-date business information through self-initiated updates. It is expected that the results will include an increase in the website profile, improved data quality and a long term reduction of door-to-door surveying requirements.

3. BACKGROUND

In October of 2004, the Region entered into a partnership with the Breken Group of Companies Inc. to collaborate on an improved online business directory. Since then, several strides have been made to coordinate the implementation of these improvements. The newly revamped website now offers expanded search capabilities that allow the public to search by company name, product/service, city or town, street address, postal code, industry sector and employee range. These variables can be searched either individually or in combination to make for a more dynamic search. Moreover, the site also allows businesses to update their business information online via the website. The

benefits of this partnership are currently visible on the directory website found at www.ylm.ca/york or through the Regional website at www.york.ca.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Public Launch Campaign Details

4.1.1 Campaign Goal

The campaign goal is to promote and support the launch of the York Region Online Business Directory to both the public and area businesses. The campaign will showcase the expanded search capability of the site, in addition to highlighting the newly developed interactive tools. It will also focus on encouraging businesses to update their information online and highlight the various advertisement packages provided by the Breken Group of Companies Inc.

The campaign will focus on two target audiences:

- **The Business Community:** The campaign will focus on promoting the business directory as an effective business tool in attracting additional business.
- **The General Public:** The campaign will promote the directory as a convenient method of locating York Region businesses. The expanded search capabilities and access to the most up-to-date business information will also be a key area of focus.

The campaign will encourage businesses to self update their data and increase public use of the website. The overall result is an increase in data accuracy and a potential reduction of extensive door-to-door surveying, which is consistent with the above mentioned campaign goal.

4.1.2 Strategy

The strategy for the upcoming York Region Online Business Directory launch is outlined in the components described below:

1. **Mail Correspondence:** All businesses in the York Region Business Directory are to be sent a letter introducing them to *Your Local Marketplace*.
2. **Media Advisory:** Members of the media will be advised of the upcoming launch. Regional staff will be made available to the local media for interviews regarding the York Region Business Directory launch.
3. **Brochures/Business Cards:** Promotional brochures and business cards will be distributed to encourage businesses to update their information or add their business to the directory. The materials will outline the benefits of updating business data and the physical steps needed to update data.

4. **Local Media Announcement:** The local municipalities will be approached regarding the coordination of an announcement in the local newspaper informing area residents of the upcoming launch.
5. **Acknowledgement/Thank You:** The York Region Online Business Directory will feature a banner thanking local businesses and visitors for using the system. A short Regional promotional piece will be attached to further highlight the system.
6. **Letter Targeted to Business Organizations:** A letter will be sent on behalf of York Region, the area municipality and the Breken Group of Companies Inc. to the various business organizations (such as B.I.A's, and Chambers of Commerce) to further explain the benefits of the system.

4.1.3 Pilot Launch

The Region has recently completed a pilot launch in the Town of Aurora and the Town of East Gwillimbury. This pilot launch was developed to ensure that unforeseen technical issues were identified prior to the widespread use of the website.

4.2 Next Steps

Regional staff expects the York Region Online Business Directory launch to commence in November of 2005. Specific strategy components have been initiated and are expected to be completed prior to the campaign.

4.3 Area Municipal Participation

The York Region Business Directory is a partnership between the Region of York and the area municipalities. As a result of this partnership, area municipalities have provided both expertise and financial assistance in support of the directory. In addition, the Region has taken a leadership role in introducing *Your local Marketplace* to our area municipal partners. As a result, several area municipalities have decided to develop a business directory on the *Your Local Marketplace* website. It is expected that the ongoing relationship with the area municipalities will continue in the York Region Online Business Directory public launch.

4.4 2005 Survey

The 2005 York Region Employment Survey commenced in May 2005, and was completed in September 2005. The survey is the primary source of business and employment information in York Region informing the York Region Employment Database. It is the intent of staff to continue to survey and update this database each year in order to monitor local business and employment trends. The information gathered through online business updates will serve to enhance this database.

4.5 Relationship to Vision 2026

The Employment Database supports the Vision 2026 goal of creating a vibrant economy by providing key business and employment information to help monitor the Regional economy. The database provides key information to both Regional and local municipal

staff to attract and support businesses. The information gathered in the directory also helps to identify workforce and educational needs, which is a key in encouraging continual learning in support of the creating a vibrant economy.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

In promoting the York Region Online Business Directory, it is expected that York Region businesses will opt for updating their own business information online resulting in a more up-to-date directory. The launch is provided for in the Planning and Development Services Department 2005 budget with financial contributions from the 9 area municipalities.

Moreover, Database products including electronic directories, printed directories and custom queries offer an additional revenue source for the Region that can be used to maintain the database, based on a cost-recovery basis. The York Region Business Directory 2005 is currently priced at \$175 for the CD-ROM version and \$50 for the print version. The 2005 and 2006 employment survey is also provided for in the Planning and Development Services Department 2005 and proposed 2006 budgets.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Employment data derived from the York Region Employment Database is the primary data source for various reports analyzing growth at the Regional and area municipal level. Additionally, source data from the database is shared with all 9 area municipalities to assist in their planning and economic development efforts. This public launch will enhance the both quality and accuracy of the data in the York Region Employment Database.

In addition, several area municipalities have followed York Region in developing online business directories in cooperation with the Breken Group of Companies Inc. Municipalities that have developed directories include the Town of Markham, the Town of Aurora, and most recently the Town of East Gwillimbury.

7. CONCLUSION

Regional staff recommends a public launch to promote the York Region Business Directory in November of this year. The campaign will increase the visibility of the directory and inform the public of the features and functions of the website. The campaign will focus on the distribution of a promotional letter to all Regional businesses and will be augmented by various media activities and promotional materials. The promotion of the directory will encourage York Region businesses to update their information online, which will reduce the need for door-to-door surveying activities.

This will enhance the quality and accuracy of the database and could lead to reduced costs associated with managing the York Region Employment Database.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.