

YORK REGION ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN 2020 2023

BUSINESS | INNOVATION | TALENT




York Region

YORK REGIONAL COUNCIL | 2018 - 2021



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City of Markham



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City of Markham



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City of Vaughan



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Iain Lovatt
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A MESSAGE FROM YORK REGION CHAIRMAN AND CEO AND MEMBERS OF REGIONAL COUNCIL

Fostering an environment that attracts business, grows employment opportunities and draws talent is a key priority for York Regional Council.

As a top destination for investment in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), The Regional Municipality of York is home to the second largest tech cluster in all of Canada and the third largest business community in Ontario. Our diverse and thriving economy makes York Region the place for talent, innovation and opportunity to intersect.

Currently home to more than 636,000 local jobs, York Region's labour force is expected to reach 900,000 by 2041. To support this growth, York Regional Council remains committed to delivering programs and services that attract a variety of businesses and high-quality jobs to our communities.

The updated 2020 to 2023 Economic Action Plan builds on the successes of previous plans and outlines initiatives that will ensure residents have the opportunity to work and thrive where they live.

Business and job growth are fundamental to the economic prosperity and quality of life in York Region. Through the collective actions of this plan, Regional Council will continue to work towards building an even stronger economy for residents and our communities.

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#YRTECH EXPERIENCE PAVILION AT COLLISION CONFERENCE 2019 IN TORONTO

Collision is North America's fastest growing technology conference, attracting over 25,000 attendees annually.

Recognizing York Region's position as a leading tech hub, the City of Toronto invited York Region to join the Collision Conference 2019 organizing host committee alongside other government organizations and key innovation and trade stakeholders.

York Region was front and centre at Collision Conference's inaugural debut with an 1100-square-foot space, aptly named the #YRtech Experience Pavilion.

The pavilion showcased York Region as the place where talent and opportunity intersect, and further positioned the region as an information and communications technology (ICT) powerhouse.

This is the "Action Plan in Action" incorporating the primary areas of focus from the 2016-2019 Economic Development Action Plan – Research, Marketing and Innovation and Entrepreneur Development.

York Region's Economic Development team partnered with local tech scale-ups, startups, innovation support organizations, and a few of our local municipalities – Markham, Richmond Hill, and Vaughan – to create a space for Collision attendees to "play" and "interact" with cutting edge technology.

2019 COLLISION CONFERENCE #YRTECH SOCIAL MEDIA REACH:

- 5,000,000+ impressions
- 745,000+ people reached across Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn
- 5,800+ engagements
(link clicks, likes, shares, comments)
- 78,000+ video views

(Stats are from original and third-party content that used #YRtech and #CollisionConf from 01/03/2019 - 30/06/2019 on social media.)



YORK REGION: AN ECONOMIC POWERHOUSE

Located in the heart of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), York Region is the third most populous municipality and third largest business centre in Ontario. It is home to 1.2 million residents, 52,000 business establishments (employers) and 640,000 jobs.

As the fastest growing among Ontario's largest municipal jurisdictions, York Region is an economic powerhouse and a top destination for business, talent, and investment. The Region is home to the:



And York Region is home to Canada's largest automotive parts and electronics manufacturing cluster and two of Greater Toronto Area's three "employment mega zones."

York Region has the third most educated population between the ages of 25-64 amongst Canada's largest municipal jurisdictions and the highest concentration of labour force in technology occupations in the Toronto-Waterloo corridor, relative to population size.



York Region's nine cities and towns are some of the most sought-after communities in the GTA and Canada, attracting up to 20,000 new residents annually on average. With support from other levels of government the Region is making unprecedented investments in transit, infrastructure, and services to accommodate forecasted growth to 1.8 million residents and 900,000 jobs over the next 20 years.

A significant share of development is taking place in York Region's provincially-designated urban growth centres and connecting transit corridors, anchoring its evolution into a world-class complete community that offers residents a full spectrum of live/work opportunities.

1.2 MILLION
RESIDENTS

636,600
LOCAL JOBS

1,500
NEW BUSINESSES
ANNUAL AVERAGE (10 YEARS)

13 FORTUNE 100
COMPANIES
HAVE OPERATIONS IN TORONTO AREA'S YORK REGION

6 OF GREATER TORONTO AREA'S
TOP 10 ICT
CORPORATE R&D SPENDERS

3 RD HIGHEST
POPULATION WITH
POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION
AMONGST CANADA'S LARGEST MUNICIPALITIES
(70%)

\$19
BILLION IN ANNUAL EXPORTS
2,400 EXPORTERS

18 PUBLIC COLLEGES AND
UNIVERSITIES
WITHIN COMMUTING DISTANCE

3 RD LARGEST
BUSINESS HUB IN
ONTARIO
52,000+ EMPLOYER ESTABLISHMENTS

2 ND LARGEST
FINANCIAL AND INSURANCE
SERVICES SECTOR IN
ONTARIO WITH 3,100 FIRMS

6 TH LARGEST
MUNICIPALITY IN
CANADA

2 ND LARGEST
INFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS
TECHNOLOGY SECTOR IN CANADA
WITH 4,300+ COMPANIES

14,700
NEW JOB GROWTH
ANNUAL AVERAGE | 2001 - 2018

20%
OF GREATER TORONTO'S STEM AND BUSINESS
GRADUTES RESIDE IN YORK REGION

3 RD LARGEST
POPULATION IN
ONTARIO

230 DISTINCT ETHNIC
ORIGINS AND OVER
120 LANGUAGES SPOKEN

\$2.7B
AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD SECTOR GDP

\$4.7B
10-YEAR INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

\$3.3 BILLION
CONSTRUCTION VALUE (2018)

YORK REGION LOCAL GDP
\$56
BILLION [est.]



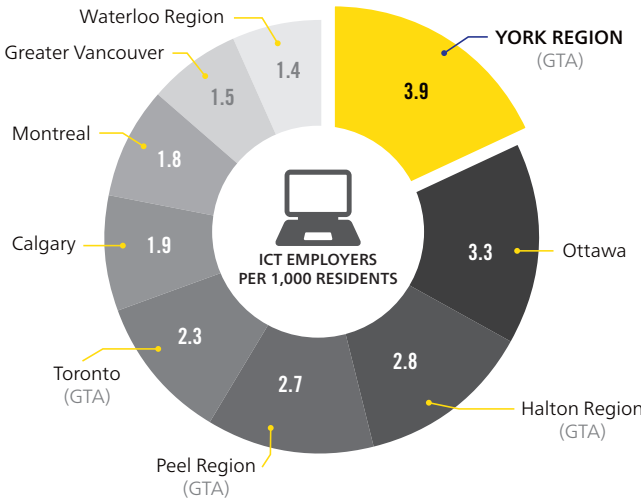
A SOUGHT-AFTER DESTINATION TO LIVE AND WORK

YORK REGION: THE THIRD LARGEST BUSINESS CENTRE IN ONTARIO

RANK	MUNICIPALITY	TOTAL # OF BUSINESS ESTABLISHMENTS (EMPLOYERS)
1	City of Toronto	105,706
2	Peel Region	57,200
3	YORK REGION	52,690
4	City of Ottawa	28,832
5	Halton Region	20,719
6	Waterloo Region	16,433
7	City of Hamilton	15,390
8	Durham Region	15,379

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Business Counts | 2018

YORK REGION: THE HIGHEST CONCENTRATION OF ICT BUSINESSES IN CANADA



Source: Statistics Canada Canadian Business Counts Dec-18; Population Census | 2016

YORK REGION: ONE OF THE TOP TOTAL CONSTRUCTION VALUES IN CANADA

RANK	MUNICIPALITY	TOTAL VALUE
1	Greater Vancouver Regional District	\$12,371,140
2	City of Toronto	\$10,553,944
3	City of Calgary	\$7,687,889
4	City of Montreal	\$6,724,414
5	City of Edmonton	\$6,254,372
6	YORK REGION	\$3,309,726
7	Peel Region	\$3,022,460
8	City of Ottawa	\$2,968,816
9	Durham Region	\$2,063,914
10	Halton Region	\$1,779,228

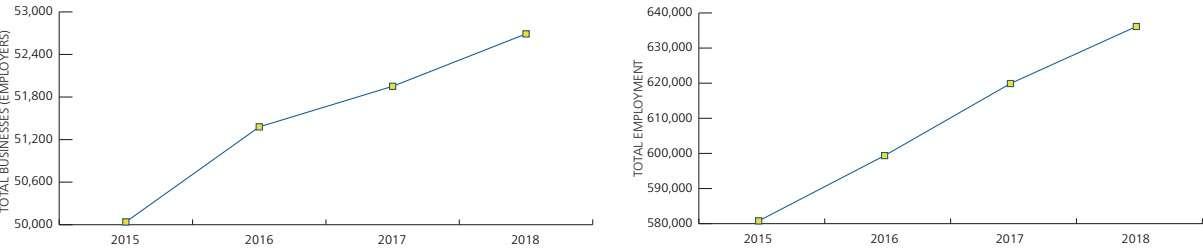
Source: Local Municipal Building Permit Reports; Statistics Canada Building Permit Reports and Table 32.2 (unpublished). Note List includes Cities, Regions, and Regional Districts as defined locally | 2018

A VIBRANT, DIVERSE, AND GROWING ECONOMY

KEY CLUSTERS

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY Canada's second largest tech cluster with 4,300 ICT companies and the highest concentration of ICT companies relative to population	FINANCIAL & PROFESSIONAL SERVICES Ontario's second largest cluster with 6,000 business establishments and supports over 40,000 related jobs within York Region; including over 3,000 in financial, insurance, and accounting services
AUTOMOTIVE TECHNOLOGY, PARTS & ELECTRONICS Canada's largest auto parts and electronics manufacturing cluster with over 100 companies and 15,000 jobs	LIFE SCIENCES & HEALTHCARE TECHNOLOGY Over 300 life sciences and healthcare technology companies including four world-class hospitals in York Region
BUILDING, CONSTRUCTION & REAL ESTATE Ontario's second largest building, construction, and real estate industry cluster with over 13,000 business establishments	RETAIL TRADE Represents the largest share (11%) of York Region's services sector employment
WAREHOUSING, DISTRIBUTION & LOGISTICS A key logistics hub in GTA with over 2,000 business establishments including two intermodal freight rail terminals and major corporate distribution centres	AGRICULTURE & AGRI-FOOD Over 700 farm-based businesses, over 270 food and beverage manufacturers with a value chain supporting over 57,000 jobs

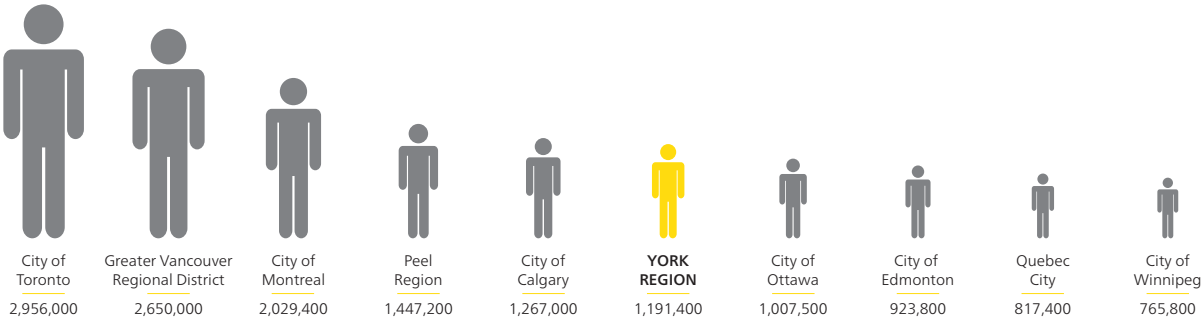
YORK REGION CONTINUES TO EXPERIENCE BUSINESS AND JOB GROWTH | 2015 - 2018



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Business Counts | 2018

Source: York Region Employment Survey | 2018

YORK REGION IS ONE OF THE LARGEST MUNICIPALITIES IN CANADA



Source: York Region Long Range Planning; Various Municipalities; Populations are estimated | 2018

REGIONAL BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICES LEVERAGE ECONOMIES OF SCALE TO AUGMENT LOCAL CORPORATE CALL PROGRAMS

With 52,000 businesses across nine local municipalities, York Region is collectively the 3rd largest business centre in Ontario and a leading jurisdiction in key industry clusters such as information & communications technology, financial & professional services, automotive products and food processing.

Regional business retention, expansion and attraction services are delivered to the business community in collaboration with local municipalities and service delivery stakeholders. Services targeting established companies are delivered region-wide through the Investment & Marketing Program and focus primarily on knowledge-based industry clusters. These services leverage regional economies of scale to complement and extend the scope of local-municipal corporate call programs.

Key examples include:

- Business community marketing and promotion via robust York Link social media channels, collaborative presence at industry events, media placement, for example
- Cross-municipal business-to-business introductions and partnerships
- Talent attraction support including via York Region's Global Skills Program designated referral partner agreement with the Canadian government
- Client-specific business attraction servicing support for local municipalities leading to such investments as General Motors Canadian Technical Centre in Markham and Celestica in Newmarket
- Regional business cluster development initiatives in partnership with industry organizations and other government levels where applicable



PROGRESS ON THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN | 2016 - 2019

York Region's economy continued to have strong business and job growth during the period of 2016 to 2019. This section highlights key achievements from the previous Economic Development Action Plan in relation to business attraction and retention, innovation development, post-secondary attraction, the Agriculture and Agri-food Strategy, and more.



Notable success stories include the attraction of General Motors Canadian Technical Centre (below), CleNET Technologies Canadian Technology and Development Centre (above left), and a Celestica International manufacturing plant (above right).



GENERAL MOTORS

1,671,284 followers
January 2019



People and their partnerships make York Region the second-largest tech hub in the Toronto-Waterloo Corridor. That's why we chose York Region for our newest Canadian Technical Centre in Markham. Learn more here: <http://bit.ly/2LYbZeV>



PROGRESS ON THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN | 2016 - 2019

BUSINESS ADVISORY SERVICES

York Region business advisory services are delivered in collaboration with local municipalities and service delivery partners:

- 800 business engagements annually, facilitating business retention, expansion and attraction; with one-third of those being in-depth business advisory consultations
- 2,500 new and expansion jobs facilitated by York Region business advisory programs

ECONOMIC RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

- Comprehensive benchmarking study and analysis of York Region's information and communications technology sector. The resulting data was referenced in media sources and a GTA tech sector topical report published by commercial real estate firm Avison Young
- In-depth resident live/work occupational analysis, demographic and business counts data analysis to inform sector focused of business attraction marketing and economic development initiatives

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

In 2016, York Region Economic Strategy launched the award winning 'York Link' marketing campaign and communications strategy that promotes York Region as the place "Where Talent and Opportunity Intersect."

York Link is focused on building awareness of York Region and its municipalities as a destination of choice for knowledge-based employers and professional talent, particularly in office locations in and around the Region's four urban growth centres and related corridors.

The campaign has and continues to reinforce York Region's business advisory services, alongside a robust 'placemaking' communication strategy using a variety of digital media. The campaign utilizes regional-scale marketing initiatives, original and third-party content, and value propositions developed through ongoing economic research. Within a short period of time York Link has resulted in significant exposure for the Region and has had quantifiable on-the-ground impact:

- Significant social media exposure with direct impact on business decision makers, economic development amplifiers, and government partners:

22,700+

FOLLOWERS ON YORK LINK
SOCIAL MEDIA BY LATE 2019;
320% GROWTH SINCE 2016
(TWITTER, FACEBOOK, LINKEDIN, YOUTUBE)

12,000,000

CONTENT VIEWS (IMPRESSIONS),
OVER 73,000 ENGAGEMENTS AND
144,000 VIDEO VIEWS ACROSS
YORK LINK SOCIAL CHANNELS

35,000

WEBSITE VISITORS PER YEAR
ON AVERAGE TO YORKLINK.CA,
YORK REGION'S ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT WEBSITE

- 5 provincial, national, and international economic development and design awards for York Link:
2017 IEDC Silver Excellence in Economic Development Award, 2017 EDAC Online Community Outreach Award, 2018 EDCO Award of Excellence, 2016 Good Design™ Award - The Chicago Athenaeum, and a 2016 American Graphic Design Award - Graphic Design USA
- Facilitating media coverage of the region's business community, tech sector and urban growth in such sources as Financial Post, IT World Canada, and MaRS magazine
- Delivered the high-impact #YRtech Experience Pavilion at the Collision Conference in Toronto

BROADBAND / YORKNET

- Delivered four 'York Region Broadband & Innovation Summits' to raise the profile of York Region as a leading jurisdiction in the broadband economy
- York Telecom Network (YTN) Business Review and resulting launch of YorkNet as a Region-owned corporation providing dark fibre solutions
- Participated in the Intelligent Communities Forum Community Accelerator Program, including all local municipalities in the Region
- Various recognitions for York Region by the Intelligent Communities Forum (ICF):
 - 2018 ICF Smart 21 Intelligent Community of the Year
 - 2018 ICF Top 10 Intelligent Community of the Year by Population (1 million +)
 - 2019 ICF Top 30 ranking for Broadband (#9), Innovation (#29), Knowledge Workforce (#27)
- Formed the 'York Region Smart City Working Group'

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

- Developed York Region's Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy with the Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee
- Consultations and review of Provincial Agriculture Systems Policies through the Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) of the Regional Official Plan
- Supported the development of the agriculture and agri-food asset map with industry partners, helped revitalize York Farm Fresh and supported the development of an economic impact study of the Holland Marsh
- Piloted a Food Accelerator Program with York University accelerator, YSpace



YORK SMALL BUSINESS ENTERPRISE CENTRE

- Between 2016 and 2019, the York Small Business Enterprise Centre (YSBEC) provided over 1,600 consultations to small businesses and prospective entrepreneurs within the York Region municipalities of Aurora, East Gwillimbury, Georgina, King, Newmarket, and Whitchurch-Stouffville
- YSBEC provided training, mentorship, and funding opportunities through the provincially funded Starter Company, Starter Company Plus, and Summer Company programs to small businesses within York Region's northern six communities
- Delivered the Digital Main Street program in partnership with Digital Main Street, OBIAA, and OMAFRA supporting small businesses in business improvement areas and main street areas with digital transformation
- YSBEC administers and supports key entrepreneur grant programs with the following results:



INNOVATION

- Supported ventureLAB in developing an innovation portal with an updated innovation asset map
- Delivered two York Region FinTech Summits
- Launched the Entrepreneurship and Innovation fund and the Innovation Investment fund



POST-SECONDARY

- Supported York University in developing a sector cluster network engagement process for connecting with businesses across York Region to aid in program development for the York University Markham Campus, providing experiential learning opportunities for students, and addressing the talent gap for businesses
- Supported the growth of the innovation programming at Seneca College through Seneca HELIX

TOURISM

- Worked with Central Counties Tourism and the York Region Arts Council to deliver four industry symposiums and assist in developing training programs for entrepreneurs in the creative sector
- Supported Golf Canada in the delivery of the LPGA Canadian Pacific Women's Open in 2019; with an economic impact of approximately \$18-million and a global television audience of nearly 500-million

ECONOMIC PROSPERITY IS A 2019 TO 2023 STRATEGIC PLAN PRIORITY

The 2019 to 2023 Strategic Plan: From Vision to Results sets the Region’s priorities over the current term of York Regional Council.

Economic vitality is critical component of the Region's plan and is a one of four Community Result Areas.

The primary goal is to increase economic prosperity in York Region by fostering an environment that attracts businesses, grows employment opportunities, and attracts talent through key activities, including:

- Undertaking a marketing campaign to showcase York Region as a place for business
- Undertaking business consulting and talent matching to support business retention and targeted sector growth
- Develop partnerships with stakeholders to leverage resources and extend the program reach
- Continue to complete employment survey to inform efforts to maintain and improve employment opportunities

The 2020 to 2023 Economic Development Action Plan sets out how the Region will achieve this goal through the list of actions and areas of focus.

THE 2019 YORK REGION MUNICIPAL COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

The development of the new Economic Development Action Plan was timed to coordinate with background work being undertaken through the Municipal Comprehensive Review to update the Regional Official Plan.

Specifically, the Action Plan considered economic research on employment trends to ensure alignment of economic development actions and planning policies related to business and employment growth and city building efforts.



DEVELOPING A NEW ACTION PLAN FOR 2020 TO 2023

The Economic Development Action Plan 2020 to 2023 builds on the successes of previous action plans and recognizes shifts in the external environment. The process for developing the new action plan involved:

- Assessment of the performance on actions in the 2016-2019 Action Plan
- Review of regional strategic documents
- Review of federal and provincial programs
- Review of the local municipal economic development plans
- Research into plans and programs of comparable municipalities outside the Region
- Two stakeholder consultation sessions
- A survey of the business community

Background research and input received through consultation was analysed to generate areas of focus for the Region to consider. Key focus areas of **business, innovation and talent** emerged as priorities to develop the Action Plan around as illustrated below. Many of the areas of interest raised are the focus of other departments in the Region, as well as external partners.

BUSINESS
PARTNERSHIPS ACCELERATORS **HOUSING**
INFRASTRUCTURE REAL ESTATE **GROWTH**
INNOVATION
INCUBATORS BROADBAND **CONNECTIVITY**
TRANSIT **PLACE-MAKING** EDUCATED
DEVELOPMENT **SMALL BUSINESS**
DOWNTOWN SPACES **EMPLOYMENT**
TALENT **TECHNOLOGY**
MANUFACTURING



Photo credit: York University

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN | 2020 TO 2023

The actions set out in the plan are not necessarily discreet and separate activities. There are significant connections between many of the initiatives, as illustrated below:

- Talent matching activities such as referring companies to the federal Global Skills Program support both talent attraction and business growth
- Providing leveraged funding through two new innovation funds approved by council in the 2019 budget will help build the innovation networks creating business growth opportunities for entrepreneurs in the Region
- Engaging in further post-secondary attraction efforts will help increase talent in the Region, creating new opportunities for research and innovation and supporting business growth



York Region's focus on three key themes in the **Economic Development Action Plan | 2020 - 2023** are driven by the central idea of marketing and awareness building. Over the previous four years, the York Region brand – driven by the York Link campaign – as a place for business and talent to invest and thrive has proved successful.

Continuing to build off that momentum and recognizing the role that local municipalities have in business attraction and retention, York Region economic strategy is prioritizing marketing and awareness building. This allows us to support local economic development initiatives without duplication of efforts; while increasing the overall global exposure through a significant web and social media presence.

ATTRACTING INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENTS

Foreign direct investment (FDI) is an important component of the Region’s economy. There are over 500 foreign-owned companies in York Region and they are the host of nearly 1-out-of-10 jobs in the Region. United States-based companies account for over 60% of foreign investment here.

Attracting new foreign investment is a challenging task, with strong competition for new companies and business mandates globally and in the Greater Toronto Area.

York Region benefits from being located in the Toronto Region – Ontario and Canada’s largest and most attractive business hub. York Region has its own unique story within the Toronto Region context, and continues to be an attractive location for FDI.

The recent location of the globally recognized General Motors automotive software development lab in Markham, facilitated by the City of Markham and York Region, is an example of the type and scale of foreign investments York Region can and will continue to attract.

York Region partners with other GTA municipalities and the federal and provincial governments through Toronto Global Toronto Region’s separate international investment attraction agency to draw investment to the broader region.

To date that partnership has delivered limited direct investments and jobs for York Region. Other municipalities within the partnership are increasingly engaging in their own independent foreign investment attraction programs. Leaving this important job creation activity up to one independent agency is no longer an option for York Region to remain relevant and competitive in the global investment context.

Over the next four years, in addition to participating in Toronto Global, York Region will enhance awareness of its York Link brand on a global scale in select markets for key growth sectors. The Region will also continue to take advantage of activations at internationally recognized business and industry events held in the GTA, as well as, in key select foreign markets to raise awareness of our strengths as a place to invest and attract talent; augmenting local municipal FDI programs.



THE ACTIONS: BUSINESS, INNOVATION, AND TALENT

York Region remains committed to supporting business and job growth across our nine cities and towns. This section highlights key actions and performance indicators that will drive economic strategy's initiatives over the next four years. These are outlined under the three key themes of business, innovation, and talent.

DRIVING THE 'YORK LINK' MESSAGE

Promoting York Region as a place for business growth and talent is a top priority of Regional Council.

The award winning York Link campaign with its distinctive logo and targeted message around York Region as a tech hub and a growing urban live-work destination, continues to gain recognition and drive international awareness.

The campaign leverages various online and social media channels, supported by highly visual print materials; positioning the Region as a leading destination where businesses and talent can succeed. Attracting and retaining talent is the most important factor in achieving business success today.

Through the Action Plan review process, we repeatedly heard that the Region needs to 'keep it up' and enhance the campaign, with calls for "York Link on steroids"! The awareness of much smaller tech hubs like Waterloo, in part driven by their successful and on-going marketing efforts, is an example York Region can learn from – find the right message and keep driving it home!

Over the next four years, we will step up the York Link campaign messaging that is resonating with business-focused audiences.

A York Link Instagram account will be added to the suite of social media channels, highlighting the benefits of York Region to knowledge-based professional talent and business leaders.

The campaign targets audiences locally and in markets outside Ontario, supporting our international investment attraction efforts, particularly in the USA.

The Region will continue to take a leadership position within the Toronto Region as a leading tech hub through activities like the #YRtech Experience Pavilion at Collision Conference in 2020.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN | SUPPORTING BUSINESS

York Region's Economic Strategy division is highly engaged with the local business community. Support services range from direct-to-business advisory, economic research, innovation initiatives and business placemaking and attraction marketing. Regional Business Retention, Expansion and Attraction (BRE&A) advisory services delivered to established companies are focused primarily on knowledge-based sectors and are customized to client needs.

These services augment and extend the reach of corporate call programs undertaken at the local-municipal level by leveraging regional economies of scale, robust social media marketing channels and an extensive network of service delivery partners.

Regional staff are also responsible for the delivery of small business and entrepreneurship advisory services in the Region's northern six municipalities via the York Small Business Enterprise Centre. In York Region, small businesses with less than 100 employees represent 97 per cent of the business community, 13 per cent with 20 – 99 employees, and 84 per cent with less than 20 employees. Servicing small business is important to growing the business community.

Since 2010, regional business advisory services delivered in collaboration with local municipalities and other partners facilitated the creation of approximately 4,000 new and expansion private sector jobs across York Region. These services also helped with the retention of thousands of local jobs, as companies continue to assess business location options for operational and talent attraction reasons.

ACTIONS

- 1 | Continue to deliver **direct-to-business consultation services** to companies across the Region to support business growth and sector/cluster development in the following areas:
 - High growth knowledge-based companies
 - Small business start-up and growth services in the Northern Six communities of the Region through the **York Small Business Enterprise Centre**.
- 2 | Undertake an enhanced **York Link marketing campaign** to promote high value business growth and placemaking, focused in York Region's urban growth centres and corridors and priority employment lands
- 3 | Undertake targeted **marketing of office development opportunities** in Centres and Corridors with a focus on financial incentives
- 4 | Undertake a broader marketing focused **foreign direct investment program**, enhancing collaborative efforts of Toronto Region municipalities with York Region digital marketing and targeted selective awareness building activities, domestic and internationally (eg. Web Summit/ Collision Conference)
- 5 | Examine opportunities for broadening York Region's economic base through **new cluster analysis and development**(eg. environmental/green technology, health technology, automation, hardware, and artificial intelligence)
- 6 | Delivery of the actions in the **Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy** and support the administration of the **Agriculture and Agri-Food Advisory Committee (AAAC)** of Council
- 7 | Work with other industry service providers and stakeholders to examine the role of the Region in the delivery of tourism services through a **tourism marketing review**

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Minimum number of business engagements (800)
- Percentage of BRE&A consultations of total business engagements
- Minimum % increase in York Link social media followers across channels

SUPPORTING INNOVATION THROUGH FUNDING

Innovation is fundamental to business growth and success. York Region recognizes the need to invest in innovation-supportive infrastructure and initiatives to transform the economy and the community.

Council's significant financial support of the building of the York University Markham Campus and ongoing funding of ventureLAB, our Regional Innovation Centre, are prime examples of York Region's commitment to this direction. These investments lead directly to business and job growth and an improved quality of life for all constituents.

In recognition of the importance of investing in the future, Council included two new funding programs in the 2019-2022 Budget: the **Entrepreneurship and Innovation Fund** (below) and **Innovation Investment Fund** (p.26).

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION FUND

The Entrepreneurship and Innovation Fund is a \$100,000 annual contribution from the Economic Strategy budget to ventureLAB to provide support to innovative companies, technology hubs, incubators, and accelerators.

The Region will work with ventureLAB as the program administrator to see these funds distributed each year through three mechanisms: community partners, small business and entrepreneurs, and a pitch competition. The intent is to seek other partners to grow the fund.

SMART CITY: A FUTURE FOCUS

The progress that has been made through the York Region Broadband Strategy has set the stage for York Region's adoption of Smart City technologies, policies and practices that support efficient service delivery to constituents.

The transition to Smart City involves optimizing information technology to better understand the interplay between Regional infrastructure and services and the behaviours of people. This understanding enables the ability to make informed decisions that meet the needs of citizens, institutions and businesses with a view to community and sustainable development.



Photo credit: ventureLAB

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN | SUPPORTING INNOVATION

Support for innovation continues to be a key element in the economic prosperity of the Region. Innovation is also recognized by the Federal and Provincial Governments as a key driver of economic development with each having a strong innovation agenda. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) identifies innovation as a broad concept, encompassing a wide range of activities and processes including markets, entrepreneurship, networks and competition as well as skills and organizations, creativity and knowledge transfers.

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) in its 2019 report titled "The Great Mosaic: Reviving Ontario's Regional Economies" states, "building regional capacity for innovation is fundamental to productivity and growth. This means improving commercialization and technology adoption, strengthening regional innovation centres, expanding broadband internet access and facilitating cluster development."

York Region has played an active role in enabling innovation, evidenced by the support for an increased post-secondary presence, convening stakeholder meetings, investments in the Regional Innovation Centre (ventureLAB) and in infrastructure such as the York Telecom Network (YorkNet).

Over the next four years the Region will continue to act as an enabler and funder of innovation. In its role as enabler, York Region spurs innovation by being a catalyst for bringing stakeholders within the network together to explore new concepts and try to maximize the innovation potential within the Region and the business community.

In its role as funder, York Region has created two funds to directly facilitate innovation initiatives:

- The Entrepreneurship and Innovation Fund will drive innovation and entrepreneurship throughout York Region by supporting promising early stage start-ups, accelerators, incubators, and community partners. This is the catalyst for other funding partners to build towards a Made in York Region fund. The Regional Innovation Centre (ventureLAB) will administer the funds
- The Innovation Investment Fund will mobilize transformational projects of regional, provincial or national significance

ACTIONS

- 1 | Administer and promote the **Innovation Investment Fund** to attract and support major transformational investments and drive innovation in the community
- 2 | Administer, in conjunction with ventureLAB, the **Entrepreneurship and Innovation Fund** to develop the regional innovation network by supporting companies, initiatives, incubators and accelerators
- 3 | Establish a **Regional Smart City Working Group** to guide and evaluate Intelligent Community efforts, including engaging with local partners and private sector entities, and to seek senior government funding program opportunities
- 4 | Support business development opportunities with **YorkNet**, the Region-owned dark fibre service provider, to build economic and innovation capacity in all parts of the Region
- 5 | Support businesses and innovation network partners with the delivery of an annual **signature technology event/summit** within the Greater Toronto Area
- 6 | Support the delivery of an **innovation portal** with network partners to tell the story of innovation in the Region and drive community engagement

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Investments and funds leveraged by the innovation funds
- Level of engagement and partner participation in the innovation portal

INNOVATION INVESTMENT FUND

The Innovation Investment Fund is an annual contribution Council will make to a reserve fund to support future significant innovation infrastructure investments. The initial contribution in 2019 was \$1,000,000. Council will determine in the annual budget process how much to add to the fund.

This fund will build over time to allow Council to support regionally significant projects, such as other new post-secondary training and research facilities, research institutes, or transformative infrastructure projects directly related to innovation and utilization of new technologies. It is anticipated that projects could be brought forward by external parties or initiated internally, and evaluated using certain criteria including:

- Regional impact, both economically (e.g. amount invested, businesses supported, jobs created) and socially (e.g. supporting local learning and employment, improve life in the community and environment)
- Significant leveraging of additional investment (e.g. require at a minimum matching investment from York Region's contribution, with minimum project value thresholds)
- Partnership development within the Region (eg, engaging existing Regional partners and attracting new investors to partner here; inclusion of both public and private partners)
- Support for and involvement of key economic clusters in the Region (e.g. information and communications technology, healthcare, finance and business services, environmental technology, agri-food)

Project proposals will be reviewed by an internal staff panel with outside support where external expertise is required.

Qualified proposals would be brought forward to Regional Council for their consideration. Council at its discretion can allocate all, some or none of the funds to proposals, and could also allocate future contributions to the fund; as was the case with the York University campus. Given the significant nature of the type of projects anticipated, proposals could be accepted for review at any time.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN | TALENT

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce in "The Great Mosaic: Reviving Ontario's Regional Economies" provides seventeen recommendations for consideration by all levels of governments in Canada. A number of these align closely with the feedback received from the stakeholder consultations and survey responses during the development of the Economic Development Action Plan.

Recommendation number eleven states "Cultivate a dynamic and inclusive ecosystem for workforce and talent development". Talent attraction, development and retention continue to be a major concern for business leaders from small- and medium-sized enterprises to multinational corporations across all sectors.

Through the work of multiple departments, the Region supports all sectors of the economy. The Economic Development Action plan will focus on providing support for knowledge based industry clusters.

ACTIONS

- 1 | Undertake **post-secondary/business connection activities** to strengthen the connections between institutions and the business community to address talent development, acquisition and retention
- 2 | Explore new **post-secondary investment opportunities** to expand the Region's capacity to generate talent and skills that meet business growth needs
- 3 | Undertake **talent attraction placemaking marketing** to facilitate growth in the local technology sector by showcasing the Region as a location that attracts and retains top professionals through social media campaigns leveraging York Link and local and global industry event activations
- 4 | Support a **tech job board** with industry partners on the innovation portal to help technology companies identify and secure talent
- 5 | Act as a Designated Referral Partner for the Federal **Global Skills Program** to assist companies with accessing highly-skilled international talent in occupations for which there are demonstrable shortages
- 6 | Examine **live-work** in the Region in the context of talent retention and business access to appropriate labour
- 7 | Undertake targeted **marketing of financial incentives for purpose built rental affordable housing** to support talent retention and attraction

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Support post-secondary partners with development of business community engagement strategies and vice-versa
- Jobs posted on the portal



A REGIONAL APPROACH TO PLACEMAKING THROUGH TOURISM, ARTS AND CULTURE

Tourism is an important component of the Region's economy. Significant attractions like Canada's Wonderland, Lake Simcoe, and the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, along with a host of trails, local festivals, golf courses, restaurants, and arts and cultural activities all contribute to York Region as a desirable place to live, work and invest.

Based on the 2016 census, collectively, the tourism, arts and cultural sectors account for over 81,000 jobs in the Region. With the restructuring of tourism services and creation of the Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs) by the Province in 2009, York Region's role in tourism shifted a decade ago away from being the major Destination Marketing Organization (DMO). Central Counties Tourism is York Region's RTO and acts as the external marketing agency for York Region, Durham Region and the Headwater Area. The York Region Arts Council provides some tourism services like the Experience York website and Visitors Guide with the direct support of York Region, and is the recognized regional DMO at the Central Counties Tourism Board of Directors table.

Traditional DMO roles have also been assumed by numerous local municipal and business groups to help fill the gap left by the restructuring. Recently local municipalities have started to take advantage of the availability of the new hotel tax by starting their own tourism agencies.

Based on a study done by the York Region Arts Council called "The creative state of York Region", stakeholders in the cultural sector see a need to strengthen York Region's brand as a hub for arts and culture. They also expressed interest in more networking, skills development and a framework for collaboration at a regional level with municipal involvement.

Further, through the Action Plan stakeholder input sessions, the need to examine the delivery of tourism services from a regional perspective was also raised.

Over the next four years, York Region will work with tourism delivery partners to examine its role in this space. In addition, the need to attract tourism and business supportive infrastructure like conference/convention centres, hotels, and stadium facilities will also be examined.

MUNICIPALITIES AND GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS



INNOVATION, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND TALENT



BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS



LEVERAGING PARTNERSHIPS FOR RESULTS

Driving economic impact into the York Region community is a collaborative effort involving both internal and external partners. Some internal activities are not led by Economic Strategy including:

- Planning initiatives around business surveying, city building, protecting employment lands
- YorkNet, which enables improved connectivity across the Region
- Community and Health Services working to better understand the needs around housing affordability and the new immigrant workforce
- York Region Transit supporting talent mobility needs.

Economic Strategy will continue to provide input on these and other initiatives, helping bring the business context to the table.

Externally, these partnerships relate to collaborations with the private sector as well as local municipalities, senior levels of government and the broader public sector. This covers everything from workforce development to business retention, expansion and attraction as well as collaboration with local Chambers of Commerce and Boards of Trade and innovation related activities. Some partnerships include Regional funding and these funded partners will provide update on activities and results for inclusion in the annual updates to Regional Council.



Photo credit: ventureLAB



AURORA

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GEORGINA

KING

MARKHAM

NEWMARKET

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