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Date October 25, 2023 **Report No.** 2023-578

To Chair and Members
Economic Development, Tourism and Cultural Initiatives Advisory
Committee

From Sara Munroe
Director of Economic Development, Tourism and Cultural Initiatives

1.0 Type of Report

Consent Item
Item For Consideration

2.0 Topic **Draft Economic Development Strategy Goals and Actions [Financial Impact: Unknown]**

3.0 Recommendation

- A. THAT Report 2023-578, entitled “Draft Economic Development Strategy Goals and Actions” BE RECEIVED; and
- B. THAT feedback on the Draft Economic Development Strategy Goals and Actions BE PROVIDED to McSweeney & Associates.

4.0 Background

The Economic Development Strategy update commenced in January 2023 in partnership with McSweeney & Associates. The updated strategy will reflect both the current state and future direction of the City's economic development efforts based upon a comprehensive review of existing corporate policies and plans in concert with a current competitive analysis and community consultation process. The resulting strategy will provide clear strategic directions and the

associated resources required to implement the initiatives outlined for the entirety of the strategies life cycle.

To date, the following components of the project have been completed:

- Data compilation and literature review.
- Community Consultation:
 - Brantford Municipal Airport Visioning Session with the Brantford Airport Board (February 2023).
 - Direct email to 120 key Airport stakeholders to complete Airport-specific survey.
 - Direct emails to over 500 stakeholders to complete Economic Development Strategy survey.
 - Public, online “Let’s Talk Brantford” engagement campaign (920 aware, 598 informed and 141 engaged).
 - Onsite engagement with in-person surveying at the Brantford Farmers’ Market (June 2023).
 - 35 one-on-one interviews (January-April 2023).
 - 53 focus group attendees (May 2023).
 - Strategic Working Session at the Rope Factory Event Hall with 79 attendees (June 2023).
- Situational Analysis and Retail Analysis (reviewed by the EDT&CI Advisory Committee in May 2023 via report 2023-355).
- Draft vision, mission, goals and actions for the Brantford Municipal Airport (reviewed by the City’s Senior Leadership Team and presented to the Brantford Airport Board via report 2023-522).
- Draft vision, mission, goals and actions for the Brantford Farmers’ Market (presented the Farmers’ Market Vendors Association in September 2023).
- SWOT Analysis.

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- Draft Economic Development Strategy Goals and Actions (reviewed by the City’s Senior Leadership Team in October 2023).

The following project components are underway:

- Updated Community Profile based on historical, current and future demographic and socio-economic trends (submitted to Communications and Community Engagement Division for graphic design in September 2023).
- Competitive analysis of sectoral/industrial trends in the City of Brantford.
- Identifying performance metrics/key performance indicators and developing current benchmarks.
- Confirming key industry focus areas.
- Implementation plan (including resources, timelines, roles and responsibilities) (internal document).

5.0 Analysis

The City of Brantford is home to a population of just over 110,000 residents. It is a community with a rich history shaped by its location on the Grand River, a Canadian Heritage River, as well as its proximity to the major consumer and industrial markets throughout North America. Strategically located in southwestern Ontario along Provincial Highway 403, Brantford was acknowledged as one of Canada’s “Best Locations” in 2022 according to Site Selection Magazine.

Brantford is in a period of rapid growth, rising from just over 93,500 residents in 2011 to its current rate of over 110,000. Having been designated as one of 25 Urban Growth Centres in the province’s “Places to Grow – Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe” report the community is poised for growth, yet conscious of the imminent challenges and opportunities that exist for the local economy within a global marketplace.

In early 2023, the City of Brantford embarked on the development of a seven-year Economic Development Strategy, led by the City’s Economic Development, Tourism and Cultural Initiatives Department. In doing so, the City of Brantford aims to continue building on its existing assets to ultimately become a fully integrated community of choice for business investment.

The process for the Economic Development Strategy began with a quantitative analysis through a document review and data analysis of the City of Brantford, presenting a thorough introductory understanding of the economic and social situation in Brantford. Deliverables associated with this assessment included a Community Profile, Situational Analysis, and Retail Market Analysis. Following this initial assessment, additional qualitative context was gathered through community consultations, which provided valuable local insight into the strengths, challenges, opportunities and aspirations that residents and stakeholders in Brantford see and feel exist within their community.

Following this consultation and discovery process, building the plan commenced through the establishing of key themes that emerged from this initial work. Once those themes were identified, stakeholders were again consulted to develop actions related to those themes that were realistic, doable, and supported by the community. The final stage of the process involves presenting the seven (7) goals with 64 actions to the City of Brantford's Council.

Staff received the draft Economic Development Strategy Goals and Actions in August 2023, and reviewed the recommended goals and actions with the consulting team from McSweeney and Associates.

The overall strategy goals and actions were reviewed by the City's SLT on October 17, 2023.

5.1 Recommended (Draft) Goals and Actions

There are seven (7) main Goals:

1. Transform downtown into a "destination" that residents are proud of.
2. Be investment ready and business friendly by creating a business-first climate.
3. Integrate business development (including small business) , real estate and tourism with critical City initiatives, including transit and active transportation planning.
4. Recognize the Creative Industries sector as a significant pillar for the economy.
5. Work with the local post-secondary institutions to provide more employment opportunities to support local business.

6. Improve partnerships to build a more cohesive business community.
7. Build tourism for the people of Brantford first.

Explanations for why each of the goals is important is included in Appendix A to this report. Appendix A also outlines the individual actions attributed to each of these draft goals.

5.2 Next Steps

For all goals and actions, a implementation plan, including resources and timelines will be prepared. This will be completed once the vision, mission, goals and actions are finalized and will be incorporated into corporate work plans in order to achieve positive and measurable results.

Pending the completion of the Implementation Plan and review by City staff, the Airport Vision, Mission, Goals and Actions will be presented separately from, and earlier than, the overall Economic Development Strategy (late Q1 2023) in order to accelerate implementation timelines. The overall Economic Development Strategy is scheduled to be presented to City Council by the end of Q1 2023.

6.0 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications at this time. Implementation of these goals and actions will have financial implications that will be outlined in the Implementation Plan for the Economic Development Strategy.

7.0 Climate and Environmental Implications

The Economic Development Strategy goals and actions will not have a direct climate and environmental impact. However, since these draft recommendations will identify ways to increase access and use to the municipality, as well as facilities such as the Airport and Farmers' Market, this may lead to an increase in community emissions.

Per Report 2022-571 titled, "City of Brantford Net-Zero Building Strategy," that was approved by Council in October 2022, all new Corporate buildings are to be built net-zero or net-zero ready. Net-zero buildings produce as much energy as they consume and will therefore not increase Corporate energy consumption or greenhouse gas emissions.

Any new construction on the Farmers' Market, Airport, or other lands that may be required to implement these goals and actions, will have climate and environmental implications as they will lead to more energy consumption and thus more GHG emissions. Increased capacity or use of the facility will also increase energy consumption and GHG emissions.

Should additional buildings or pavement be added to any City-owned properties, this will increase the impermeable surface of the area which may contribute to an increase risk of flooding in the area.

Hosting any new events will lead to an increase in waste generation, energy consumption, and consequently, GHG emissions.

8.0 Conclusion

The Economic Development Strategy is a key corporate document that guides the City's aim to continue building on its existing assets to ultimately become a fully integrated community of choice for business investment. The draft goals and actions for the seven (7) year economic development strategy, with implementation projected to commence in Q2 2023, focuses on the significance of downtown Brantford; being investment ready, business-friendly and creating a business-first climate; integrating business development with major City initiatives; and recognizing the value of the creative industries sector as a significant pillar for the economy. City staff request the Economic Development, Tourism and Cultural Initiatives Advisory Committee's professional review and feedback of the to continue to provide leadership in the development of this strategy.



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Director of Economic Development, Tourism & Cultural Initiatives

Attachments:

Appendix A: Draft Economic Development Strategy (Goals and Actions)

In adopting this report, is a by-law or agreement required? If so, it should be referenced in the recommendation section.

By-law required

yes no

Agreement(s) or other documents to be signed by Mayor and/or City Clerk yes no

Is the necessary by-law or agreement being sent concurrently to Council? yes no

Appendix A – Draft Economic Development Strategy (Goals and Actions)

1.0 Priority Actions

Brantford has had significant successes attracting new businesses, particularly international organizations, into the community in recent years. However, geographic (a lack of available land) and labour (a lack of available workforce) limitations suggest that a transformation in economic development pursuits is needed. To that end, the goals and actions identified through this process have led to a more community-first/inward-focused exercise, transitioning away from pursuing larger-scale anchor tenants and moving more towards improving or improving Brantford's downtown, local business engagement, regulatory processes, resident engagement and pride of place opportunities.

1.1 Goal 1: Transform downtown into a “destination” that residents are proud of.

Why is this important?

Downtowns play a vital role in economic development. Downtowns encapsulate the essence of the community. A vibrant and outstanding downtown validates the success of the community and projects its image. Historically, Brantford's downtown projected a proud city; it has had a tumultuous history over the last several decades, but there has been steady improvement over the last few years, including the ongoing implementation of the *Downtown Brantford Priority Plan (2022)*.

Significant efforts have been made the City, in collaboration with downtown stakeholders (i.e. Downtown Action Committee, Economic Recovery Task Force), to improve the safety and security, inclusion and support, and growth and vibrancy of the downtown. Continuing these efforts while adding additional support through an economic development lens can lead to greater economic benefit for downtown residents and businesses.

Currently, residents and business owners feel that vacant storefronts and safety concerns present impediments to fully realizing the downtown Brantford's full potential. Injecting additional energy into the downtown area through economic development initiatives will help revitalize Brantford's core and reinstate its role as an economic driver and a benefit to local quality of life.

Priority Actions:

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1. With co-leadership between the Corporation and the DBBIA Board of Directors, undertake proactive to assist the organization in examining its mandate and role with the clear objective to act more cooperatively and avoid duplication with City-led efforts to optimize support of the downtown.
 - a. Assist the DBBIA to undertake, if interested and in partnership with the City of Brantford, a branding exercise to develop a new downtown brand that reflects its new image.
 - b. Create an memorandum of understanding between The Corporation of the City of Brantford and the Downtown Brantford Business Improvement Area.
 - c. Create a coordinated Downtown Marketing Strategy to improve the marketability of the downtown to residents, visitors and potential investors.
 2. Explore the feasibility of an Economic Development Officer position to take ownership of downtown economic development activation and placemaking initiatives at a time that is appropriate in the context of the downtown revitalization project.
 3. Improve the image of downtown Brantford by:
 - a. Continuing to work with local agencies to support people experiencing homelessness and identify ways to offer enhanced social services in various areas throughout the City.
 - b. Working with local organizations to improve the image of the downtown through beautification, activation, clean up and placemaking initiatives while integrating these initiatives into the downtown revitalization project.
 - c. Partnering with downtown property owners to explore the feasibility of filling vacant store fronts through non-traditional avenues (for example, pop-up retail opportunities, co-working spaces, and “win this space” competitions) to bring more activity to the downtown.
 - d. When the significant capital construction is complete (i.e. traffic, transportation, servicing, capacity), undertake a Market Gap Analysis for the downtown.
 4. Strategically prioritize new development approvals, permitting, etc., in the downtown core with the goal of having residential development as a priority.
 5. Create a downtown investment toolkit to use as a marketing and promotional tool for new investment opportunities.

6. Promote downtown tenants (for example, Brantford-Brant Business Resource Enterprise Centre, Conestoga College, Wilfrid Laurier University and Laurier Launchpad) to create a focal point for innovation and entrepreneurialism in the downtown.

1.2 Goal 2: Be investment ready and business friendly by creating a business-first climate.

Why is this important?

Businesses are important lifeblood for the City, providing local employment, strengthening the tax base and providing community support. The local government should be seen as a partner that works closely with and supports the business community. “Business-first” means understanding your local business community, streamlined development processes, ease of permitting, and timely and excellent customer service that will enhance the experience to show that Brantford is ‘open for business’.

Priority Actions:

1. Improve the corporate culture around what it means to be business friendly by building trust and communicating the message of “Brantford is a great place to do business” with messaging from the top down through all departments and outward to the community.
 - a. Create a ‘green light’ approach to help businesses better navigate through the municipal regulatory approval processes.
 - i. Establish a formalized concierge program to help expedite strategic developments that align with council priorities and the Economic Development Strategy.
 - b. Revisit the Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) Program and revise into a new formalized Business Visitation Program to better understand how to support existing businesses within the community and to build relationships with the business community in a structured, strategic way.
 - c. Track the types of investment opportunities that are coming into Brantford to be better prepared for future workforce and industry needs.
 - i. Once monitoring is in place, realign Department portfolios, work plans and the Economic Development Strategy and associated implementation plan accordingly.

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- 2.** In collaboration with the Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie and Brantford Immigration Partnership, undertake a detailed Labour Force Analysis to determine non-traditional sectors worth pursuing in line with Brantford's current labour market strengths and geographic realities.
 - 3.** Review and determine the viability of the Advantage Brantford 'brand' and consider rebranding to a 'business' brand rather than an 'economic development' brand, incorporating the Brantford-Brant Business Resource Centre and Real Estate Services into the brand to reflect recent restructuring and build efficiencies and referrals.
 - a.** Update, find synergies and create new, if needed, departmental marketing pieces (for example, sector profiles, website).
 - b.** Create one website for business investment with microsites for facets of the economic development responsibilities (Advantage Brantford, BRC. Real Estate Services, et cetera).
 - 4.** Continually educate City Council and staff on the economic impact of business (including tourism, arts and culture) on the community and provide Council with positive messaging around growth and expansion of existing business.
 - 5.** Continued investment by the City of Brantford in industrial land development is a key strategy component.
 - a.** Attract private sector investment in developing shovel-ready industrial land.
 - b.** Continue with the positioning statements for the targeted industrial sectors.
 - c.** Maintain up-to-date and ensure accessible online databases for shovel ready/marketable industrial and commercial land as well as the available City infrastructure.
 - d.** Maintain inventories of the Municipality's physical and social assets to be used as part of the City's infrastructure planning and marketing efforts.
 - 6.** Build out Brantford's investment attraction story to include sector-specific value propositions that showcase Brantford and its unique advantages.
 - 7.** Continue with the City's existing investment attraction program including current marketing efforts.

8. Through the utilization of local retirees with business expertise, increase mentorship opportunities available to existing companies, especially the smaller firms, to increase their ability to survive and prosper.

1.3 Goal 3: Integrate economic development (including small business), real estate and tourism with critical City initiatives, including transit and active transportation planning.

Why is this important?

While current transportation (traditional and active) master planning guides actions related to transportation and details implementation plans for the municipality, the need for enhanced routes (vehicular, public transportation, and trail routes), signage, and linkages throughout the city was repeatedly mentioned during the Strategic Planning process. In order to drive economic growth and prosperity, Economic Development, Tourism and Cultural Initiatives staff can serve as the formal link between other municipal departments and the business community for initiatives that impact workforce development/employment and economic growth in the community.

Priority Actions:

1. Ensure that the City engages the business community (including major employers, accommodations and tourism-oriented businesses) as a key player in future discussions in transportation, including active transportation planning.
2. Connect local assets for both local and visitor users for mutually beneficial wayfinding (for example, Downtown and waterfront connections, signage and connections to the Farmers' Market, et cetera).

1.4 Goal 4: Recognize the Creative Industries sector as a significant pillar for the economy.

Why is this important?

Brantford has a burgeoning "Creative Industries" community, on the verge of significant growth. Moreover, as dynamics around work and life balances shift post-pandemic, "quality of life" is becoming an ever more important factor for businesses interested in moving to a new location. Growing the local arts and culture sector and elevating the value of this sector will have a positive impact on the City's quality of life, enhancing its economic development opportunities. Focus should be placed on smaller scale, community-based arts and culture initiatives within the city to help build a grassroots community that can support larger events more consistently.

Brantford is seeing an increase in filming due to its proximity to Toronto as well as its unique film locations that cannot be found elsewhere. There is even more opportunity to become a sought-after film location.

Priority Actions:

1. Update the Municipal Cultural Plan and implement recommendations to increase the creative capacity of the city and to further develop the arts and culture sector.
2. Continue to tell the Brantford story by connecting significant cultural and historical events (i.e. celebration of industry), people and local assets and promote and communicate to residents.
3. Develop capacity building training programs geared toward non-profits, event organizers and creative industries (marketing, succession planning, audience development, bookkeeping, et cetera) and deliver the training programs in partnership with the BRC and other community partners (for example Chamber of Commerce, DBBIA, Brantford Public Library, Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie, et cetera).
4. Identify and address barriers that are limiting the capabilities of local arts and culture organizations to hold events and streamline processes, with the goal of encouraging new and enhanced special events that are both City and community-led.
5. Review and streamline existing policies and permitting impacting public art where appropriate.
6. Encourage continued growth of the local cultural sector by integrating economic development strategies with municipal cultural planning.
7. Continue to be a leader by doing what Brantford is already doing to increase opportunities to attract film, television, and digital media to Brantford by:
 - a. Having the support services in place that the film industry needs.
 - b. Celebrating the film, television and digital media that has taken place in Brantford.

1.5 Goal 5: Work with the local post-secondary institutions to provide more employment opportunities to support local business.

Why is this important?

Brantford's workforce needs have shifted drastically over the previous three to four decades, with a greater need for skilled labour and technically proficient employees. Within the City, three post-secondary institutions (Conestoga College, Wilfrid Laurier University, and Six Nations Polytechnic) operate campuses. However, there is disconnect between the needs of local businesses and the skills of those graduating into the workforce. Acting as bridge to this divide would allow the City to help provide more employment opportunities for new graduates and support business growth within Brantford.

Priority Actions:

1. Examine opportunities to operate as an intermediary between post-secondary institutions, local businesses, and various community groups (for example, host events such as networking evenings, social and youth entrepreneurships, Accelerator Hub, job fairs, et cetera).
2. Conduct a survey of local businesses and post-secondary institutions to identify gaps in local skills training and workforce development.
3. Implement strategies targeted at connecting business needs and post-secondary institutions to fill gaps identified in Action 2.
4. Establish a business start-up support network with Wilfrid Laurier University, Conestoga College, and Six Nations Polytechnic to ensure youth entrepreneurship programs are identified and cross promoted.

1.6 Goal 6: Improve partnerships to build a more cohesive business community.

Why is this important?

The Corporation of the City of Brantford does not exist within a silo. Geographically, it is adjacent to the County of Brant and the Six Nations of the Grand River as well as having direct relationships with other communities within close proximity to Brantford, such as Cambridge and Hamilton. Strong community stakeholder and intergovernmental relationships will build capacity for the City and its many potential partnerships, and effective collaboration results in significant opportunity. Undertaking the necessary work to build a comprehensive, ongoing relationship built on trust and consistent engagement will provide more sustainable long-term opportunities for collaboration.

Priority Actions:

1. Undertake a thorough long-term review towards breaking down barriers, fostering positive engagement, and building sustainable relationships with Indigenous communities.
2. Identify projects that have cross-boundary benefits where the City and other municipal partners can collaborate (for example, investment attraction, tourism, transportation, major events, Joint Services Committee).
3. Strengthen the relationship with the Brantford-Brant Chamber of Commerce by working with them to:
 - a. Co-host a new annual Mayor's State of the City Business Development event.
 - b. Eliminate the Industrial Awards program and fund a Chamber of Commerce award for the Chamber of Commerce annual awards ceremony.
4. Open the continued lines of communication between educators, trainers and labour force development support agencies to better coordinate efforts focused on education, skills training and labour development that are Brantford specific.

1.7 Goal 7: Build tourism for the people of Brantford first.

Why is this important?

Tourism Brantford, a Destination Marketing and Management Organization (DMMO) operates under the Tourism Division of the City of Brantford's Economic Development, Tourism and Cultural Initiatives Department. Tourism Brantford has just completed crafting a Five-year Tourism Strategy that addresses tourism for the next five years. Tourism Brantford is responsible for destination marketing, destination management, the provision of visitor information services and management of particular cultural and sport tourism facilities.

Tourism is considered a local driver, and the Economic Development, Tourism and Cultural Initiatives Department has a role to play in acting as a bridge between the tourism plan and local businesses. By focusing on attracting residents of Brantford to local tourism assets (i.e. trails, Grand River, national historic sites, OLG Casino) and events and getting them excited about what Brantford has to offer will boost their pride in Brantford. This also supports the Visiting Friends and Family market that is the primary tourism market in Brantford, and is strongly supported through Brantford's status as the Tournament Capital of Ontario.

The Sanderson Centre for the Performing Arts, located in downtown Brantford since 1919, is a destination for performing arts and event space. It is the City of Brantford's most significant theatre asset supporting local, national, and international talent. As a key asset for the City of Brantford there is an opportunity to elevate the Sanderson Centre to Brantford residents and visitors.

Priority Actions:

1. Implement the five-year Tourism Strategy.
2. Continue implementing the Sport Tourism Strategy.
3. As tourism and cultural assets are marketed externally, similarly ensure that residents are equally aware of what is available to go to in their own backyard.
4. Survey local businesses to identify potential opportunities to align their marketing efforts with tourism events and assets.
5. Implement the new Municipal Accommodations Tax to fund additional tourism development with a focus on provincial and wider audience tourism (versus municipal division focus on local area tourism).
6. Increase the attendance numbers for the Sanderson Centre for the Performing Arts by:
 - a. Determining new and different ways to attract newcomers and residents to the programs at the theatre.
 - b. Improving and streamlining the parking situation when there is a theatre event taking place to better accommodate the theatregoers.
 - c. Working with the DBBIA and accommodations partners to develop packages to provide multiple offerings in the downtown when attending the theatre or attracting theatre goers back into the downtown.
7. Build on the activities and future tourism-related opportunities of the area's trails and waterways.
8. Carry out niche tourism market research and segmentation in order to better focus product development and marketing initiatives.