



To: **Economic Development Sub-Committee**

Agenda Section: Matters for Consideration
Division: Engineering, Planning and Environment
Department:

Item Number: EDS - 2021-029

Meeting Date: February 9, 2021

Subject: County of Simcoe's Economic Development Strategy 2021-2025

Recommendation

That Item EDS 2021-029 dated February 9, 2020, regarding the County of Simcoe's Economic Development Strategy Update, be received; and

That the Economic Development Strategy 2021-2025, be implemented; and

That staff provide a yearly update on the implementation status and performance measures of the Strategy through the annual Economic Development Workplan.

Executive Summary

On November 12, 2019, the Economic Development Sub-Committee (EDS) approved the Economic Development Office (EDO) to undertake an update to the Economic Development Strategy as the last update occurred in 2011 (EDS-2019-362). The updated Strategy was to be presented to EDS in the second quarter 2020, however EDS supported postponing this update while staff focused resources on supporting the local business community through COVID-19, and until objectives and actions could be incorporated into the Strategy to help with Economic Recovery (EDS-2020-137). The EDO with the support of municipal and regional partners have now completed the 5-year Economic Development Strategy.

Background/Analysis/Options

In 2011, the County of Simcoe approved the 10-year Economic Development and Tourism Strategy that built upon the vision of the County's Strategic Plan "to be a community acting for the greater good of all." In 2015, staff provided an update on the Strategy showing that 50 percent of the recommended 38 actions had been completed, 25 percent were in

progress and 25 percent were outside of the jurisdiction of the County or no longer feasible (EDS 2015-247). In 2015, the EDO transitioned to an annual work plan as the EDO had outpaced the Strategy. As most of the Strategy was completed, the EDO recommended on November 12, 2019 for the Economic Development Strategy to be updated and the related recommendation was approved by EDS.

While the EDO was in the process of reviewing the Draft Economic Development Strategy in mid-March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic came to Canada. On April 23, 2020, EDO requested postponing the presentation of the Strategy while staff focused resources on supporting the local business community through COVID-19 and until objectives and actions could be incorporated into the Strategy to help with Economic Recovery (EDS-2020-137).

Since March 2020, the Economic Development Strategy has evolved to include a COVID-19 Recovery Plan.

Execution of the Economic Development Strategic Plan Update

The Economic Development Strategy Update was undertaken in-house using staff resources and the assistance of the local Agriculture and Rural Economic Development Advisor from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). EDO staff undertook an Economic Base Analysis that looked at the past, current and future trends in the local economy. Staff and the local OMAFRA Advisor also conducted a literature review to determine trends affecting the economy and sector opportunities and challenges. The local OMAFRA Advisor also conducted 56 one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders from local/regional municipalities, Georgian College, Lakehead University, key business associations, and business support agencies. Additionally, an online business survey was conducted between November 26, 2019 and February 10, 2020. The information obtained from stakeholders and research were used to inform and develop the Strategy. The Business Survey Summary is attached as Schedule 3.

In September and October 2020, 15 sector focus groups were conducted across four sectors to gain additional input to develop a COVID-19 Recovery Plan (EDS 2021-030).

Summary of the Economic Development Strategy

The County of Simcoe has a diverse employment base, with employment data showing that there is a high concentration of people employed in manufacturing and the arts, entertainment, and recreation sectors. Several sectors such as accommodation/food service, health care/social assistance, construction, education, and professional, scientific, and technical services have seen high growth in employment.

Through a review of the labour market data and feedback from regional stakeholders, the Strategy is recommending that the EDO focus on several key sectors to support regionally, including manufacturing, tourism, agriculture, and professional, scientific, and technical services.

Through stakeholder interviews and business surveys, a number of critical issues and opportunities facing economic development were identified, the most prominent being:

- **Talent:** A lack of access to skilled labour was identified as a significant barrier to economic development. Stakeholders saw a key opportunity for the EDO to be involved in the attraction of talent to the region, the development of employer resources on hiring a diverse workforce and promotion of regional career opportunities.
- **Housing:** A lack of attainable, diverse and available housing was identified as a critical barrier in attracting talent to the region.
- **Transportation:** The County LINX program has been well received, but gaps remain in the first/last mile solution for employees to get from LINX drop-offs to their place of employment.
- **Investment Attraction:** Most stakeholders saw a critical role for the EDO to support regional investment attraction initiatives, as the County is ideally positioned to capitalize on investment opportunities and work with provincial and federal agencies to promote the region.
- **Business Development:** The County is well placed to support regional business growth and coordinate business development partners to work together.
- **Entrepreneurship and Innovation:** A key target for several partner municipalities, stakeholders saw a role for the EDO in promoting existing resources, focusing on entrepreneurship as a sector of interest, and helping the business community understand the value of innovation and automation in remaining competitive.
- **Regional Economic Development Leadership:** The EDO is well positioned to play a regional leadership role related to economic development, including providing stakeholders with support, education and information sharing.

The Strategy highlights a number of global and regional trends impacting the regional economy. Key factors include: workforce, technology, global trade, climate change, and COVID-19.

The Economic Development Strategy merges the literature review, economic base analysis, business surveys and one-on-one stakeholder interviews into a 5-year path forward for the EDO to follow. The overall goals of the plan are:

1. Simcoe County will be recognized as a premier destination for investment in Ontario.
2. Through an excellent quality of life, education and careers, Simcoe County attracts and retains talent to support the needs of its thriving business community.
3. Businesses stay and grow in the region, supported by a strong and innovative business development environment.
4. The County of Simcoe's Economic Development Office is a leader in facilitating and building effective and collaborative relationships that create a strong ecosystem for regional economic development.
5. Advocate for and support the delivery of infrastructure to meet the needs of a competitive business community.

Detailed information on the objectives and actions are attached in Schedule 1 and 2 – County of Simcoe’s Economic Development Strategy 2021-2025.

Performance Metrics and Report Back

The EDO has developed performance metrics for each of the objectives within the Strategy. The performance metrics will use available data to help determine if goals and objectives are being met and overall success.

On a yearly basis the EDO will provide an update on the implementation status of the Strategy and the previous year’s performance measures when the Economic Development Workplan is submitted to EDS for review and approval.

Financial and Resource Implications

Funds for this project were allocated in the 2020 Operating Budget. Any on-going and short-term activities related to the implementation of the Strategy have been incorporated into the 2021 Economic Development Operating Budget.

Relationship to Corporate Strategic Plan

This Item supports the vision established in the County of Simcoe’s 2015-2025 Strategic Plan (Strategic Direction: Economic and Destination Development).

Reference Documents

- EDS – 2019 – 362 (November 12, 2019) Economic Development Strategy for the County of Simcoe
- EDS – 2020 – 137 (April 23, 2020) Economic Development Strategy for County of Simcoe Update
- EDS – 15 – 247 (August 11, 2015) Economic Development and Tourism – Work Plan and Resources
- EDS – 2021 – 030 (February 9, 2021) Economic Development/Tourism COVID-19 Recovery Plan

Attachments

Schedule 1 – County of Simcoe’s Economic Development Strategy 2021-2025
Schedule 2 – County of Simcoe’s Economic Development Strategy 2021-2025 Chart
Schedule 3 – Economic Development Strategy Update: Business Survey Summary 2020

Prepared By Becky Breedon, Economic Development Officer
 Nancy Huether, Economic Development Manager

Approvals

David Parks, Director of Planning, Economic Development
and Transit

Date

January 28, 2021

Debbie Korolnek, General Manager, Engineering, Planning and Environment	January 28, 2021
Trevor Wilcox, General Manager, Corporate Performance	February 2, 2021
Mark Aitken, Chief Administrative Officer	February 2, 2021